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FOR DECEMBER

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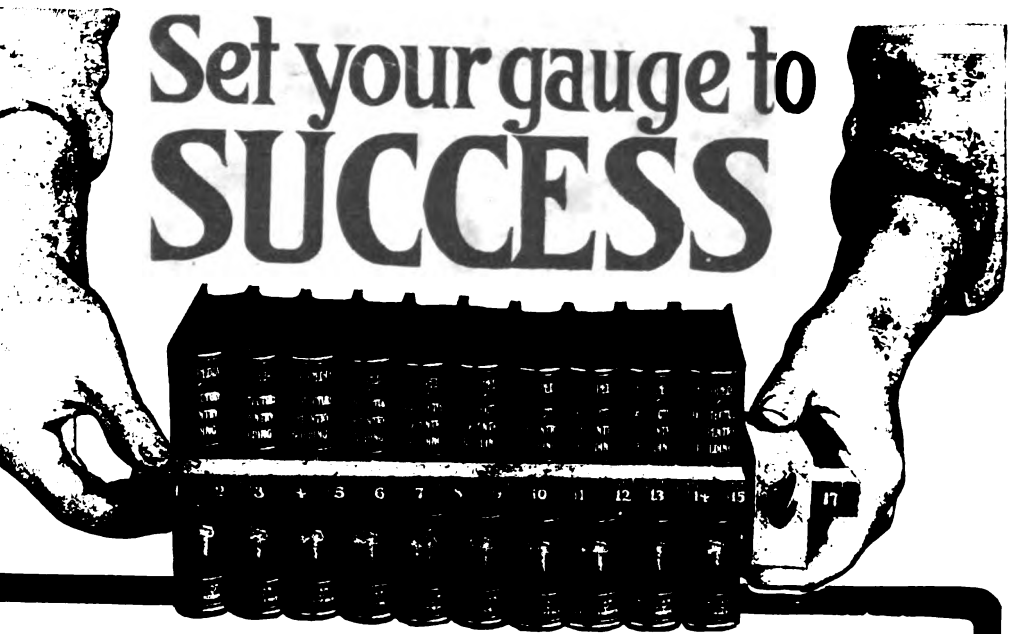

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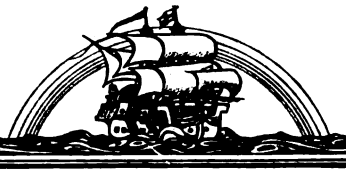

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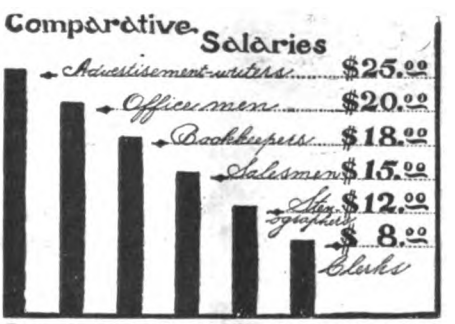

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THE ARGOSY

Vol. LVI DECEMBER, 1907. No. 1

THE SCORE AGAINST HIM.

By ELIZABETH YORK MILLER,

Author of "Larry's Luck," "Morton's Money," "His Automobile or Theirs?" etc.

How one man turned traitor and the long trail another followed to the goal of revenge.

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.)

CHAPTER I.

THE VOICE IN THE CAÑON.

THE baying of a hound suddenly broke the stillness of the cañon.

Two men, who had followed the half-obliterated trail for an eternity of weary days, halted at the sound.

They had been walking Indian-wise, each leading his pony. On the backs of the horses were strapped their mining outfits and a scanty stock of provisions.

Despair—pathetic and hopeless—had marked the men for its own. The settled droop of their shoulders and the listless, dogged air with which they pushed forward, when to go deeper into that almost impenetrable wilderness meant probable disappointment and possible death, told a heart-breaking story.

Neither man was over thirty. About the face and figure of the younger clung a certain boyishness that all the hardships of the trail were powerless to destroy. At the sound of the hound's baying he first listened with a strained attention that was almost pitiful, then he burst into eager speech.

"At last we have struck something!" he exclaimed in awed surprise. "What will it be, do you think?"

On his tongue was just a touch of the brogue of his mother country.

The other listened a moment before replying. There was a half-scowl on his face. Then he said slowly, as though grudging the admission:

"Some miner's cabin, probably. Likely he's staked out anything worth staking in these parts. You and I—we've come on a nice fool's errand!"

There was a tinge of disgust in his voice. Yet it might be remarked that he, too, listened eagerly for a repetition of the sound.

"I'm thinkin' there's room enough out here for all," replied the Irish boy, with new-born cheerfulness. "An' what good will gold do you if you're star-vin'? Eh, Johnny, me boy? Answer me that. My stomach's fairly itchin' for the taste of vittles."

He tried to laugh and make a joke of it, but the deep hollows in his cheeks testified to the truth of his remark.

The other smiled ruefully. "That's true—the grub's getting low and no mistake. If it wasn't for that we might cut around—but there's nothing we can do but follow the trail until we get out of this black alley, anyway."

The little cavalcade started forward again, but this time a shade more briskly. Even the horses seemed to catch the spirit of renewed hope, and quickened their pace.

Far above, the wonderful snow-crowned peaks of the Sierras were bathed in dazzling light. The cañon, however, through which the faint trail led, was gloomy. A narrow stream tinkled musically, with wide-swept spaces on either side, rock-strewn and brush-littered, telling of spring freshets.

As the men proceeded toward the mouth of the cañon, the sound of the hound's baying grew more distinct.

He was sending forth a wail to high heaven in deep, mournful tones. It came with painful regularity and precision.

There was certainly an extraordinary quality to the dog's baying. It was not the cry of an animal that heralds the approach of strangers. It contained no note of alarm. Rather, it was a lament —the plaint of a dumb soul struggling with emotions that it could not express.

Puzzled at the sound, the men with one accord stopped again and listened. Mutely they questioned each other.

The Irish boy's eyes became troubled.

"Do you mind that?" he said, with a superstitious backward glance toward his companion. "'Tis like the banshee, it is! Sure, an' I know that sound well. Johnny, 'tis no dog that we hear—take my word for it that knows." His voice sank to a solemn whisper.

"Yes—'tis the banshee's cry for the dead or the dyin'—an' who might that be in this God-forsaken wilderness but us?"

Suddenly he dropped to his knees in the dry, pebbly bed of the stream. An expression of keen anguish crossed his face.

"Oh, Mary, my darlin'—to think I'm to die so far away from you—helpless to help you—not a finger to reach out to you an' the baby! . . . Oh, wurra, wurra! That I ever came into this devil's country!"

His head drooped forward on his arms. His body rocked in an access of emotion. Tears trickled through his clenched hands.

The other man stood silent for a few seconds. In the dim, vault-like cañon some of the Irish boy's superstition communicated itself to him. He shivered involuntarily, and the sweat stood out on his forehead in little cold beads.

Again the sound—weird, mournful, prolonged—with startling distinctness.

The man addressed as Johnny shook his companion roughly by the arm.

"Be still!" he cautioned. "I'm trying to hear where it comes from. Don't be a fool! It's only a dog."

"'Tis a banshee, I'm after tellin' you!"

Johnny cleared his throat harshly.

"All right, have it your own way—*'banshee,'* then! But come on. I'm anxious to see it. I never did see a banshee."

He tried to make light of the matter, though there was a nervous ring to his voice that did not escape the notice of his companion. The Irish boy rose and stumbled along the trail in obedience to the order. He was accustomed to bend to the will of the other.

A few hundred feet more and they had reached the end of the cañon. Suddenly they found themselves in the sunlight once more—the blessed warm sunlight—entering a little valley that spread out from the cañon's mouth and lay in a brief, grassy space before climbing the wooded, craggy slope of the adjacent mountain.

Before them, in the grassy space, stood a rude hut built of logs plastered with mud. And in front of the hut sat the "banshee" on his haunches, regarding them in mournful surprise.

The relief was so great that Tom, the little Irishman, fell to laughing. Even the morose face of the other man relaxed somewhat from its customary severity. The horses started immediately to cropping the grass, the like of which they had not tasted since leaving Pine Nut.

The "banshee" rose stiffly and wagged his stub of a tail.

If he had been human, he would have expressed his belief in prayer and the sureness with which it is answered, in words. Being only a dog, he uttered a short, sharp bark. Directing a glance over his shoulder at the strangers, and making it as much of an invitation as possible, he started on a run for the hut.

The men looked at each other uncertainly.

The stillness of death lay over the whole place.

Yet there was unmistakable evidence of the hut's being occupied. A gourd-vine was trained over the doorway; near by was a stack of short logs for fire-wood, and a bench with some cooking utensils leaned against the wall of the hut.

Suddenly Tom drew back cautiously.

"Whisht! Did you hear that?" he demanded softly.

The dog pattered back to the doorway and emitted a low, distressed whine.

"What was it?" questioned the other man.

"Listen! There'd be some wan in there, I'm thinkin'. Don't you hear it?"

There was a repetition of the sound that had startled him—a husky, feeble cough.

"Yes—you're right. There's some one inside. Something wrong, too, I'll bet, from the way the dog acts. Let's find out."

He started toward the hut, and Tom followed.

The change from the bright sunlight to the dusky interior at first blinded them, and they stood peering into the room with unseeing eyes.

Then, quite suddenly, out of the gloom came a voice.

"Are ye seekin' the end of the trail, strangers? Ye came in time—jest in time!"

The voice was low and vibrant, but it trailed off weakly at the end.

When they became accustomed to the dim light they saw that the occupant of the place was a feeble, white-bearded old man. He lay on a rude couch in the far corner of the room, and from appearances was very ill.

His thin fingers strayed restlessly over the blanket that covered him. The dog crouched up against him and licked his hand with dumb affection.

Tom's face immediately became suffused with sympathy. Reverently and on tiptoe he advanced into the room.

"It's sick you are, sir?" he questioned softly. "Lucky for you we came—is there annything we could be doin' for you?"

The eyes of his companion, however, did not busy themselves with the sick man. John Newton was always shrewdly ready to take the first chance or opportunity that Fate threw in his path.

He glanced speculatively about the tiny place, taking in every homely detail. There was not much furniture, and what there was of it was rude and evidently fashioned by the occupant.

But the old miner was well supplied with provisions. A barrel of flour stood in one corner and several good, tempting-looking hams and strips of bacon hung from the ceiling. There was also a stock of canned goods on a row of shelves.

Several guns hung in a rack on the wall, and below them stood a small powder magazine.

The old man was not perishing from lack of food or the means to get it with. John Newton's mouth watered at the prospect of having a full-sized meal.

The sick man did not reply immediately to Tom's question.

He looked past the boy and apprehensively noted the inquisitive, roving eye of his other guest. A sharp line appeared between his brows.

Newton was not slow to catch the look the old miner directed for a brief second toward a small cabinet which was fixed to the wall just over his bed. The old man's hand crept toward the cabinet with an involuntary, protective motion. Then, as though suddenly recollecting the indiscretion, he drew it back.

This by-play, important as it was, escaped the notice of Tom. The little Irishman was first and last a humanitarian. For the present he was concerned only with the obvious necessity of rendering aid to a fellow creature in distress. He repeated his question sympathetically.

"Is there annything we could be doin' for you?"

The old man propped himself up on one elbow and regarded the guests thoughtfully. Then he said:

"You've a kind face, boy. Thank ye, thank ye! I'm old an' I'm purty near in—an', after all, I didn't reach the end of the trail! . . . That'll be for you." Again he glanced toward the cabinet.

Newton dropped wearily into a chair and yawned. Involuntarily, he, too, looked toward the cabinet.

"I'm near to death, strangers," went on the old man. "I know I'm stricken sorely, an' I'm right glad ye happened along. It kinder eases things. It's been two months sence I saw a white man's face."

"Look a-here," said Tom briskly. He, too, had noted the flour barrel in the corner. "Like's not you haven't had a bite to eat since you took sick. We're hungry, too. Say the word, an' I'll fix

us all some supper. Then it'll be time to talk about dyin'. Hungry! Lord—I'm star-rvin'!"

The old man waved his hand, indicating the provisions, and then sank back weakly upon the pillow.

"Mebbe you're right, son. Help yourselves. Fix some grub. Poor Pete, here—he thinks it's time for dinner, I reckon."

The men needed no second invitation. In less than no time they had the fire going, the kettle humming, and a batch of Tom's biscuits browning in the Dutch oven.

CHAPTER II.

THE SECRET OF THE CABINET.

THE old man was too feeble to partake very heartily of the supper which his guests prepared. But even the small amount of food which he managed to swallow revived him.

Notwithstanding the fact that he seemed stronger, he still insisted that he was on his death-bed.

Soon after supper it grew dark. Tom had built a blazing fire of logs, and the flames danced and crackled in the wide fireplace. The shadows of the men were thrown into black relief against the wall.

Cross-legged on the floor before the fire sat Tom, with Pete's head resting on his knee. Newton occupied a chair, tipped back against the rough wall of the shack. He was puffing silently and meditatively at his pipe as was his habit. Always a man of few words, to-night he seemed more than ordinarily morose and averse to conversation.

According to mountain etiquette, it was an hour for semi-confidences and explanations. Yet in that country it is a breach of courtesy to inquire too closely into your neighbor's business. He may volunteer information, if he chooses, but it is his prerogative to withhold it.

Suddenly the old man addressed himself to Tom.

"Goin' up Owl's Head way—you-all?" he questioned tentatively.

Tom flashed him a puzzled look.

The old man changed the question.

"'Quainted in these parts, stranger?"

"Nary a bit," responded Tom heartily. "We're goin' as the Lord leads us."

"Prospectin', eh?"

Newton, in the chair, slung one leg over the other and knocked his pipe noisily against the sole of his shoe.

Tom interpreted this as a hint to hold his tongue, and did so. But the old man was persistent.

"Prospectin'—for gold?" he asked craftily. "Everybody comin' into these yere parts prospects for gold—an' they none o' them get any."

Newton coughed and spat into the fire. He scraped his chair farther forward, then tilted it back again until it touched the wall.

Tom's face was troubled. He was not versed in finesse.

"They don't get any?" he asked, with such a crestfallen air that the veriest child could have seen through him.

The old man propped himself up against the pillows, where he could get a better view of his guests. His voice betrayed a new interest.

"Look here," he said good-naturedly. "Who be you two fellers? You ain't none alike—yet you're travelin' together—an' you've got the gold fever. Furthermore, you don't come from hereabouts. You're 'tenderfoots.' *Do* you know whar you're goin'?"

Tom laughed.

"You've got us some—pretty near right." He looked to Newton for confirmation, but his friend was studying the flames intently. Apparently the conversation had no interest for him.

As though to change the subject, the old man began again, half reminiscently.

"Well, boys, I ain't got nothin' to hide from you-all. My name's Kendrick—Jim Kendrick—an' I come from old Tenn'see, back in forty-nine, when the gold fever fust struck. Everybody was runnin' to California—but me; I came out yere. An' I been huntin' gold ever sence. . . . An' now, praise be the Lord, I'm goin' to my long home, whar I be'n wantin' to go these many years. An' I haven't kith or kin that I knows of in the world! . . . That's the pity of it, strangers—'cause—" He paused and looked again toward the cabinet.

Newton had stopped gazing into the fire and was regarding his host intently.

For the first time in an hour or more he spoke.

"Do you mean to tell me that you've been prospecting for twenty-five years and haven't struck anything yet?" he asked incredulously. "Why—I understood that this country runs rivers of it."

"Not that I ever see," replied the old man, rather pleased that he had managed to make his silent guest speak.

"Oh, I've had a little luck, off an' on. Jest enough to keep me goin'. I've had plenty to eat, plenty to wear, an' took an occasional vacation down to 'Frisco. But I come back every time—lookin' for the yellow 'rivers' you tell about. . . . An' that's the pity of it—that now—now, when—but no matter—being as you're so close-like in speech yourself, you wouldn't care none about hearin' about other people."

Newton's grim face relaxed into a half-smile. He was one of those men who know when to talk and talk freely—and when to keep silent.

To the innocent, guileless young Irish lad, Newton's flow of conversation at this point was little short of phenomenal.

"There's nothing much to tell," he began pleasantly, but neither is there anything to keep back. Tom Doyle, here, and I picked each other up down at Pine Nut—must be fifty, maybe a hundred, miles from here. I'm from back East—so's Tom. He's got a wife and baby back there somewhere—haven't you, Tom?"

"In New York," said Tom, in a half-stifled tone, patting Pete's head with unusual fervor. "But I haven't put me eyes on the baby," he added, "for 'tis only two months old he is!"

"Well, you're right about the prospecting," Newton went on. "As I said, we came together in the mining-camp down there. My name's John Newton. We were both strange to the country, and when we heard there was gold up this way, we scraped up two outfits and started out to look for it. . . . That's all there is to tell."

"An' faith, the sooner we go back the better, says I," put in Tom. The reference to Mary had clouded his usually cheerful spirits. He drew a well-worn letter from his pocket and opened it.

"'Tis sad news I hear in this," he said brokenly.

The old man looked at him with interested eyes.

"You—got a wife an' a baby?" he asked, incredulous. "Why, you're only a boy. . . . I never had no wife—nor no baby. I guess I ain't had all that's comin' to me out o' life. What's the trouble with 'em, sonny?"

"No money," said Tom shortly. "I ain't had any to send 'em—an' Mary writes maybe she'll have to let the baby go—put it out to an asylum or somethin'. Sure an' it's like to break the heart of me entirely!"

"That's for leavin' 'em," said the old man severely. "There now, cheer up. You never can tell what'll happen to you."

"But you've been prospecting for twenty-five years, and you haven't any luck," said Newton eagerly. "I think the best thing we can do is to turn around and go back—saying we can get back."

"You speak truly—an' then you don't. It's so—I have been huntin' gold for a long time. But now I—now I—"

The two men turned toward him sharply. Newton half rose from his chair.

"Kendrick," he said hoarsely. "Do you know where there is any?"

The old man stared ahead of him, unseeingly, for a brief moment. Then he stretched out his hands with a strange, fantastic gesture. His voice had an uncanny ring.

"Gold!" he cried softly. "Do I know whar there's gold? Boys, I know whar there's yellow fountains of it! I know whar it lies about in chunks under your feet, so to speak, whar ye can't step for treadin' on it!"

He dropped back again upon the pillows, exhausted.

There was a short silence. Then the old man spoke again.

"What was I sayin'? Foolishness? Yes, boys—you'd best turn about an' go East. 'Thar's nothin' to be gained by stayin' hereabouts."

Tom turned to Newton and touched his forehead knowingly.

"The old fellow's clean 'dippy,'" he said softly. "But he's right about one thing—about goin' back home. I think I'll be afther startin' to-morrow."

Newton did not reply directly. He rose, yawned, and announced that they had better look after the horses before turning in for the night.

When they were outside he grasped Tom by the arm eagerly.

"See here—cut out the talk about going back home. We're not going—not just yet. Do you see?"

Tom looked at him in mute wonder.

"But—Mary—and you heard what he said? What's the use of staying here any longer? Even now, I don't know what may have happened to her."

"Look here, Tom, don't be a fool. Don't let a chance like this slip through your fingers when you've come so far to get it. I tell you—there's something to be gained by staying. We'll camp here for a while. The old man's sick. He's right about that—he won't last much longer. And he's got a secret—"

"A secret!"

"You bet! I don't see what the Lord ever gave you eyes and ears for—you're such a dub! Why don't you keep them open?"

"What do you mean? Look here, Johnny, I'll stand a good deal from the likes of you, but—"

"There, now, don't get mad. But didn't you see? The old man's got a valuable secret, all right—and it's there—in that cabin!"

"Sure—an' where'bouts might it be?"

"It's in that box—that cabinet he's got tacked to the wall over his bed!"

Tom's jaw dropped in surprise.

"Well, I've eyes and ears, John Newton, but never did I pretend to be able to see through the side of a wooden box!"

"The box isn't transparent," he replied, "but old Kendrick is. He gave it away before we'd been in the place ten minutes!"

CHAPTER III.

THE OLD MINER PROVES OBDURATE.

Old Kendrick was a great disappointment to John Newton the following morning. Far from being worse and nearer to death, as he had predicted, and as Newton had expected, he seemed in a measure to have recovered.

He even forsook his bed and managed to crawl to the doorstep, where he sat in the sun and passed a very pleasant morning, relating various yarns and experiences to Tom.

Newton took himself off early on a private investigation of his own, but turned up in time for noonday dinner.

He met Tom angling for trout in a near-by stream.

"How's the old man?" he asked as they started back toward the house.

"So-so!" replied his companion cheerfully.

"Has he let out anything more to you?"

"About gold?"

"Yes."

"Not he. He's shut up tighter than an oyster. I did as you were afther tellin' me, all right. I made up to him real pleasant-like—asked him to start us off where we might have a decent run for our money—but he wouldn't listen to it."

"What did he talk about?"

"Oh, just about the hard luck he'd had all of his life, and such-like. There's many that talks like that—an' they don't have to be gold-miners, either."

"Does he say any more about dying?"

"No. He thinks our comin' yesterday saved his life."

"Then he ought to respond with some degree of gratitude," muttered Newton sullenly.

"Faith, an' I think you're altogether wrong about the cabinet. 'Tis maybe a few hundred dollars he has in there. Every man, be he poor or rich, has his vally'bles."

"And I'm sure the cabinet holds something more. I've a mind to open it—if we could get him away for a while—"

Newton's voice sank to a whisper and he grasped Tom by the arm, bringing him to a standstill.

"See here," he went on. "I tell you what—you get him out. Make him take a walk—go fishing—anything. Just so he gets away from the shack. Under-

stand? Then I'll find out what's in that box."

"Johnny!" cried the boy, almost too amazed for speech. "What's that you're sayin'? Sure, I'll do annything within reason—but I'll not rob—for you nor for annybody!"

"Fool! I'm not asking you to rob. I don't want to take anything he's got. All I want to know is—whether he's found gold or not. Don't you see? If he's found any, there must be plenty of it around here. As you said, there's enough for all. Then we'll stay here until we make good."

"But how—"

"That's all right. Do as I tell you. I'll attend to my end of it—and you'll share with me, as we agreed."

Tom's lips set in a stubborn line.

"I'll not do it," he said decidedly. "It won't do you a bit of good to ask me, Johnny. Fair means—or none at all. You can do as you plase—but Kendrick's taken us in, an' we were near to starvin'. Is it right to pay him back like that?"

Newton's face showed plainly his disgust for such scruples.

"All right, my good little boy," he said sneeringly. "You've served me up—now look out for yourself. I thought we were to be pals?"

"An' so we are," agreed Tom soberly. "Only we mustn't start wrong. We must keep on the 'level,' Johnny!"

"We must keep on the 'level'!" How very many times in the years to come did Tom Doyle think of those words.

The tall mountains, the cañon, the little grassy valley, the miner's cabin—all were destined to come back to him in memory again and again, when the whole breadth of the continent lay between them.

And his own words, "We must keep on the 'level,' Johnny!" Little did Tom Doyle reckon what that honest, sober little sentence was to cost him!

The expression on John Newton's face as they entered the cabin was not pleasant to look upon. Always silent and stern, at times his face settled into sullen, morose lines that bespoke the nature of the man more eloquently than words.

But what they found in the cabin turned the current of their thoughts and for the time being put everything else out of mind. In the middle of the floor, prone on his back, lay old Kendrick, gasping for breath. His eyes were closed and one hand clutched at his neckband, as though to loosen it. His face was bluish white, and there was a trickle of blood from a gash in his forehead, where he had struck against a chair as he fell.

"'Tis another attack he's had!" cried Tom, running swiftly to his side and unfastening his shirt.

"An' I'm thinkin' it'll be his last—maybe!" he muttered. He laid one hand over the heart, that was fluttering feebly.

"Whisky, Johnny! Quick—there's no time to be dallyin'!"

Newton sullenly brought the whisky-bottle, and Tom forced a little of the burning fluid between the old man's tightly drawn lips.

Gradually the stertorous breathing grew easier. The old man opened his eyes and looked first at one, then at the other, with slow comprehension.

He tried to speak, but found the effort useless.

Then, with a great effort, he raised one hand and pointed to the cabinet, trying to move his head to make them understand what he wanted them to do.

Newton was quick to respond to the action.

He knelt on the floor beside the old man, speaking rapidly:

"There's something you want to say? Is it about the cabinet? Something in the cabinet you want?"

Kendrick choked, and again his hand flew to his throat.

Newton's eyes were lit with a greedy, avaricious expression. He could scarcely control the muscles of his face. They fairly twitched with nervousness.

With a great effort the old man raised himself on one elbow. He looked into the face of Newton and then at Tom, and slowly shook his head.

"Not yet!" he gasped painfully. "Perhaps—not yet! Son, help me to my bed, will you?" The last was addressed to Tom.

The little Irishman tugged and lifted

and pulled until he had gathered the gaunt figure of the old miner into his arms. He staggered to the narrow bed with his burden and deposited it gently.

With an impatiently muttered word, Newton stalked to the door of the cabin and stood with his back to them, looking out across the mountains. His hands were clasped behind him. The veins stood out on them in ugly knots.

Slowly the old man regained his senses, and toward evening he was apparently as well as ever again.

He made no further reference to the cabinet, and he assumed a cold silence when Newton put to him one or two tentative questions concerning the gold country.

His distaste and distrust of Newton were growing as rapidly as was his fondness for Tom.

The two travelers flung themselves down before the fire to sleep, as on the previous night. It was nearly midnight when Tom was awakened by a soft, creeping movement by his side. Instantly his senses were alert. He had lived long enough in that wild country to learn to sleep with one eye open, as the saying is. He did not stir, however, nor cease his regular breathing.

Presently he was conscious that Newton was stealthily crawling away from him.

Tom affected a sleepy groan, and turned over on his side, with his face toward Newton. The other stopped like a shot and lay flat on the floor, making no further sound.

Several minutes passed.

Tom lay perfectly still. Presently his companion commenced creeping again, moving inch by inch nearer to the bed on which lay the old miner.

For a few moments Tom was puzzled to account for his actions. Then he remembered the cabinet over the old man's bed and Newton's burning desire to know what it contained.

Newton was planning to open the cabinet while they slept!

Tom's hand crept to his side. He grasped his revolver tightly and drew it from his pocket. It was loaded.

Softly he raised the shining weapon and took careful aim at Newton's back.

The other man had by now reached the foot of the bed. Here he paused a moment to satisfy himself that Kendrick still slept.

Then noiselessly he moved up toward the head of the bed, over which was the cabinet.

Tom realized that the time had come for action.

If he was to stop his friend from committing this crime, he must act without further delay. Yet, if possible, he wished to accomplish his purpose without the knowledge of the old miner.

Tom was a loyal soul, and, curiously enough, he was much attached to his companion.

He raised himself up, resting his revolver-hand easily on one knee.

Then he softly exclaimed, "Hisst!"

Like a panther, John Newton dropped back to the floor and turned toward the sound.

At that moment a cloud which had covered the moon suddenly broke and a flood of light streamed in through the open doorway, illuminating the figure of Tom Doyle and the shining revolver which rested on his knee.

In his astonishment, John Newton gasped with fright. Then recollecting himself, he gave a short, ugly laugh.

Tom's face was pale with anger.

"Come back here," he whispered; come back here—where you b'long. What's the matter with you? Ar' you all blackguard, entirely?"

"Hush, you fool!" exclaimed Newton, creeping back again toward the fire. "What do you mean by pointing that gun at me? Put it down."

"Not until you give me your sacred word of honor that you'll lave the old man's cupboard be! Then—not until!" There was a stubborn streak in Tom, which stood him in good stead at times.

In spite of his subjection to the will of the stronger man, when a question of morals was at issue he rose superior to everything but his own beliefs. He had determined that old Kendrick's secret should remain intact until, perhaps, such a time as the miner might choose to divulge it.

"Have I your sacred word, Johnny?" he repeated with grim insistence.

For a brief second Newton held out against him. Then he said coldly:

"I guess you have. Put up the gun."

"All right," replied Tom, with visible relief, dropping the revolver back into his pocket. "Now we're all right again—eh, Johnny?"

"Oh, are we?" replied Newton sarcastically. "I'm glad of that. It makes me happier to feel that you've taken me back to your bosom again."

"Stop your talkin'," said Tom. "Your love of gold's your weakness, I'm afraid."

Newton drew himself closer to his companion.

"Is it?" he said with a sneer. "No. I'll tell you what's my weakness; it's to get on in life, and not stay forever hunting the end of a rainbow. I've got to make something of myself in this world—even if I haven't a wife and child starving to death because I don't provide for 'em!"

The shot went home.

Tom's head dropped forward into the crook of his arms. A heart-broken sob burst from him.

"Oh, my God!" he cried, in a hoarse whisper. "You're right, Johnny; but it's not forgettin' them I am, even though you might think it. They're with me every blessed minute—"

"But, Johnny," he continued softly, "Mary'd not take a farthin' which I didn't come by honest. You're right. It's maybe starvin' she is this minute, and it's maybe she's had to give up the boy—but even for all of that, when I go back to her me hands has to be clean, or she'll not be after touchin' 'em."

Newton gave a disgusted exclamation.

"It's easy to see you're new to the ways of women. They aren't any too particular where the money comes from—just so they get it. You don't know women, I'm thinking, Tom Doyle."

"An' as for you, you don't know Mary!" retorted Tom. "When you do, maybe you'll change your opinion about women; they ain't all alike. Not by a darn sight!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE PARCHMENT MAP.

THE next morning old Kendrick was very feeble. He could not rise from his bed, and it was plain that the end was near.

He had no more attacks, but his vitality was slowly ebbing. But he clung persistently to life and to the hope that, after all, he might pull through.

It was not life itself that seemed to allure him. He had the restless, worried air of a man who has left a task unfinished.

There was something, yet, that he wanted to do, something that he had been on the verge of doing, and he referred to it mysteriously several times.

Toward noon he called Tom to him and asked him solemnly what he thought about his chances of recovery.

"I know I'm an old man," he said sadly, "but I'm strong, and my heart's been givin' out on me off an' on these many years back. Tell me, do you think it possible, lad, that I'll be able to reach the end of the trail?"

"The end of the trail?" repeated Tom, puzzled. "What do you mean? Ain't this here the end of the trail? That's what you were after tellin' us."

"No, it's another—a still longer trail. There's somethin' waitin' for me at the end of it, lad. Somethin' I've been huntin' all my life, an' only jest now—jest lately, that is—been able to get my hands onto it."

Newton crept up behind the pair with a fascinated light in his eyes.

"And that is—" he broke in excitedly.

Kendrick turned exalted eyes upon him.

"Gold! Yes—jest that. I know whar thar's bar'ls of the stuff. Ef—only—"

He turned again to Tom. "What say you, son? Am I a goin' to live—or am I a goin' to die?"

Newton gave Tom's ankle a sharp kick. "He's going to die!" he whispered quickly in his ear. "Tell him so! Don't waste your time—tell him right away."

Again the stubborn look crept into Tom's face.

He addressed himself to the sick man.

"You might live," he said dubiously. "You *might*—"

"Out with it, boy. Will I ever take the trail again?"

"Hell!" said Newton scornfully, turning away from the bedside and strolling moodily to the door. "What does he know about it? He's no doctor."

"If it's the truth you want," Tom blurted out miserably, "I should say it's me duty to tell you that you won't—ever take the trail again. You're a very sick man, sir—I misdoubt you'll stay very much longer with us."

The old man sighed and turned his face toward the wall.

"That's my own idea—only, I've been hopin' I was mistaken about it. Folks is—sometimes, you know."

He glanced toward the cabinet and, lifting one bony hand, pointed to it.

"Open that box, boy," he said, his voice shaking with emotion. "Here's the—key." He fumbled in the mattress and brought out the key, which he handed to Tom with trembling fingers.

Newton turned sharply from the doorway. His face was aglow with interest.

"I told you-all I didn't have kith nor kin—that I knows of. No one near, anyway. Yours is the last faces I'll ever see. I feel a sort o' gratitude to you-all—for comin' as you did. Like's not I'd 'a' died all alone—and it isn't good to die alone." His breathing became labored and he paused for a few seconds.

Newton flew to the shelf and got some stimulant to administer to him. "Yes—go on," he urged. "Don't wait. You are growing weaker every minute."

"I'm—trying—to tell you!" said the old man with a pitiful effort.

"It were two months back, I reckon," he went on slowly. "An Indian came through here—he had fallen over a cliff in the cañon an' hurt hisself—an' he died. I buried him out yonder by that sumac bush. But before he died—he give me—that—"

He pointed toward the cabinet, which Tom had flung open, and there before them was a little pile of shining quartz.

"Why—it's gold!" exclaimed Tom. "Where'd he find it?" The old man ignored his question.

"Take out that thar roll o' parchment an' open it," he said feebly.

Tom obeyed, and disclosed a queer, rough-looking map, drawn with bright red and blue paint, such as Indians use for their personal decoration. There were quaint symbols of bird and beast, following an irregularly drawn line.

The map itself was as Greek to Tom and Newton. They stared at it, with no comprehension of its meaning.

"Now reach behin' that pile o' quartz," commanded the old miner. "Thar—that's the key to it," he said, as Tom fished out a slip of paper.

"The key'll explain the map. It starts with the tall pine—over yander."

He pointed out through the door, where a giant pine stood sentinel on a slope of the mountain.

Every minute old Kendrick was growing weaker. He could scarcely find strength to trace the line on the parchment with a shaking forefinger. "You see—thar's the pine—it begins thar—the trail does. Only thar ain't no trail, really. You'll have to blaze your way and foller the signs. It'll take you two—mebbe three—weeks of steady travelin' to reach it—"

"Reach what?" asked Newton unsteadily. Already he thought he understood. The goal was within reach at last! Stoical, morose, sullen as he was, he could almost have thrown up his hands and shouted with joy.

"Reach—the place—whar the gold is!" replied the old miner.

"You—can take—the map and the key—both of you. It's yours—with my blessin', an' hopin' you'll strike it rich."

He closed his eyes and for the moment the men thought he had passed away. But presently he stirred again, and shortly afterward he fell into a light sleep.

Newton's spirits rose amazingly.

He took the map and the key and studied them both for the rest of the afternoon. Tom devoted himself to cooking the meals and to caring for the old man.

As the shadows of night commenced to fall, Newton came to his companion with a suggestion.

"Tom," he said in a whisper, "we mustn't wait, you know. Anybody might find that place and stake out their claim. Every moment is precious, and I'm for moving on. To-night we'll pack

up a load of grub and light out. We can find our way easily. The moon will make everything as bright as daylight."

Tom looked at him incredulously.

"What?" he demanded. "What? An' be lavin' the pore old chap to die by himself? Not much we won't, Johnny Newton. After all he's done for us, too! How can you be thinkin' of such a thing!"

"Look here, Tom, if I'd any idea you had such precious notions when we started — I'd — yes, I'd chosen another pal."

Tom grinned. "Even then you might 'a' done worse," he said. "You have to live with a person to know 'em," he finished laconically.

As it happened, however, old Kendrick did not detain them unduly.

That night the old miner took the trail himself. But it was the long trail from which no man ever yet has returned.

When they awoke in the morning, they found him lying peacefully, as though asleep. In one hand he held a piece of quartz, hard as flint and shining with countless little specks.

They buried him that morning. Newton was anxious to take the trail at once. Every moment that they delayed fretted him. He spent most of the day packing up a store of provisions from the bountiful supply the shack contained, choosing ammunition, and polishing the guns.

Tom set the house in order with a melancholy regret that its owner had passed away. The sadness which always surrounds death, no matter when or where it comes, awoke in him unhappy thoughts connected with his absent family.

He thought of Mary and the little baby whom he had never seen. Several times he took out her letter and read snatches from it, and the tears would spring into his eyes.

By four o'clock they had made every preparation to leave.

Tom was for delaying a little longer, for spending one more night in the shack and rising early the next morning. But Newton argued that they could easily make ten or twelve miles that evening, and as Tom invariably gave in to him on such matters, they set out.

The horses were in good condition from rest and food, and well able to bear the extra burdens they carried.

As they started forward, each man leading his pony, there came a pitiful whine from the deserted shack.

It was Pete. He stood beating his stub of a tail against the doorstep and looking after them inquiringly.

"Save us! — we 'most forgot the beast!" cried Tom.

At his invitation, Pete started after them joyfully. He leaped to Tom's side and licked his hand with gratitude, then fell into a gentle lope behind the second horse. Pete had often taken to the trail before.

From the pine, which stood some three-quarters of a mile from the miner's camp, the way led through the roughest kind of country imaginable. They were obliged to consult the two maps constantly. In some places there were blazed trees to guide them; then, again, they would go for two or three miles along the bank of a stream with nothing but the map to show that they were on the right path.

Of necessity, they traveled slowly. When night fell and they could no longer make out the way, they camped for the night. They had come perhaps a scant ten miles from the starting-point.

After supper, before they turned in to sleep, they drew up a rough sort of agreement.

Tom took charge of the parchment map which the Indian had given Kendrick. He stitched it into the lining of his coat for safe-keeping. Newton, himself, took charge of the miner's key and the samples of quartz.

Then they took an oath to stand by each other and share alike in the claim, should it prove valuable. In event of anything happening to either one of them, the survivor was to take charge of his comrade's share and see that it was disposed of according to his wishes. Newton himself had no one whom he cared to have benefit by his decease; he said he would think over what he wanted done in case he perished in the wilderness. But if Tom died, Newton was to see that his wife and baby received his half of whatever was got out of the claim.

It was an agreement of man to man. with no one but Pete and the horses and the stars to witness it. But to Tom Doyle the sacredness of it was as binding as though he had gone before a court of justice and sworn a dozen solemn oaths to keep his word.

This matter adjusted, they lay down by the camp-fire and went to sleep.

CHAPTER V.

TOM RECEIVES THE SHOCK OF HIS LIFE.

THE days followed one another in methodical procession. Each was a replica of the one preceding it, and they differed only in that at sundown the travelers were just so much nearer the desired goal.

Newton, after the first excitement was over, had relapsed into his accustomed sullen silence. He had long brooding fits, during which he would not deign to answer when spoken to.

Tom found that when his partner was in such a mood it was better to leave him alone, and he fell to making a companion of Pete. Such was his friendly nature that he had to be friendly with something.

His cheerful monologues to the dog irritated his traveling-mate very much. Several times Newton gave vent to his ill humor by striking out at the dog for imagined offenses. Tom always took the animal's part, and gradually there crept up a sort of bad blood between the two men.

Pete's understanding was almost human, and he kept close to the man who loved him, regarding Newton at times with ugly eyes.

On the morning of the tenth day the two men had a short, sharp quarrel. As usual, it was about the dog. Pete had offended Newton.

In the course of a merry chase after a rabbit, Pete had run between Newton's feet and almost upset him.

This gave the man the opportunity he had for some time desired. It was not so much that he objected to Pete. The dog only irritated him because of Tom's fondness for it.

With a muttered oath, he raised his gun to his shoulder. Another moment and poor Pete would have paid the penalty for his carelessness.

Tom saw what was about to happen. With his face white and grim, he darted forward, and as Newton pulled the trigger, the gun shot upward from a blow of Tom's hand and exploded without harming Pete.

Newton dropped the gun to the ground and, turning, faced his companion with blazing eyes.

"You—fool!" he cried hotly. "Mind your business."

"I am minding it," said Tom, with a temper that matched his own. "An' don't you be takin' out your spite on the dog; he ain't done nothin' to you! If you got any grievances, take 'em out on me—that can meet you fair and square—on your own ground."

"Fair and square, eh?" said Newton with a sneer. "Seems to me that's all I've heard from you since we started. I'm sick of the sound of it. Cut it out."

"As you please—since it offends you. You're the first man of me acquaintance who's objected to the term."

Newton did not reply to this thrust, but turned abruptly and, taking up his horse's rein, started forward again.

Pete tactfully dropped to the rear, where he stayed for the rest of the day, thankful to have his presence pass unnoticed.

There were no further words between the two men.

They tramped along silently. Tom's jaunty spirits dropped. It troubled him to be on bad terms with anbody. He had all the Irishman's love of an argument, and was not averse to using his fists if the opportunity seemed to require it, but this sort of quarreling worried him.

He couldn't argue with a man who turned from him in silent contempt. To knock Newton down and pound him until he yelled for mercy seemed a somewhat unreasonable thing to do.

They ate supper that night in the same unreasoning attitude toward each other. They cleared up the camp and attended to the horses without finding it necessary to exchange any words.

Tom longed to make peace, but the self-contained attitude of his companion

forbade any overtures. Evidently Newton found nothing in the situation which needed remedying.

With a homesick sigh, poor Tom composed himself for slumber, hoping that the morning would brighten the situation. He determined, on his part, to do what he could to straighten matters out before they took the trail again.

Along toward daylight Tom was awakened by a gentle whine at his ear, accompanied by a cold, wet touch on his cheek.

He roused himself with difficulty, as he was very tired from the journey of the day before.

"Pete!" he murmured drowsily. "Go 'way, Pete; it isn't time to get up yet. Lemme 'lone."

But Pete only responded with another whine. This time he thrust his nose under Tom's head and tried to raise him up.

"What's the matter with you?" complained his master.

Then it flashed upon him that perhaps something had happened; perhaps Pete was trying to tell him of some menace. Perhaps there were Indians near!

He sat up hastily, rubbed his eyes, and looked about him in the gray light of the early morning.

The camp-fire still burned feebly. Its dying embers were like small glow-worms in a pile of soft gray mold. From afar could be heard the soft tinkle of a waterfall. There was nothing else to break the mysterious, weird silence.

Tom looked about him hastily. Could he have moved in his sleep? Had he by any chance strayed away from the camp?

No. There beside him was the fire, and there were the trees to which the horses had been picketed, and just a little farther on were the remains of last night's supper.

But Newton was not there!

And the horses were gone, too. The packs were gone. Every vestige of food and ammunition—with the exception of the scraps from last night's supper—was gone.

Tom Doyle was alone in the mountains! Alone? Not quite. For there was Pete, also.

He sprang to his feet, white with rage. He had been using his coat for a pillow. He reached for it and searched it hurriedly. It had been pulled from beneath him as he slept, and the map had been torn out. A long jagged piece of the parchment remained where he had sewn it in, but Newton had as much of the map as he needed to guide him to the gold-lands.

Slowly the realization of what he had to face came to Tom. His revolver had been taken away. Empty-handed, with no food and no means of getting any, he would have to fight his way back to civilization.

He was unused to the ways of the woods. To follow after Newton was impracticable and dangerous. The trail often led for miles along the edge of some stream. It was easy to lose the scent under such circumstances.

Newton had all the guns and ammunition. In event of Tom's following after him, he would shoot to kill.

Tom faced the situation grimly. He knew that probably he would perish long before he could get back to the old miner's camp, granting that he could find his way to it. He realized the desperate straits he was in. But before one awful fact all else seemed small and of little consequence.

Newton had played him false! He had been tricked, betrayed, and deceived by the one man above all others who had sworn to keep faith with him. He had been left to die—he and the dog—with as little compunction as a man would cast off a pair of old shoes.

The iron entered the soul of Tom Doyle, that October morning, and seared it cruelly. The vow that he registered, calling upon God to witness, was not a pretty one.

CHAPTER VI.

ALONE IN THE SIERRAS.

THERE was but one thing for Tom to do, and that was to find his way back to the abandoned camp as quickly as possible. Every hour of delay was dangerous.

He drew on his coat—it was the only possession left to him—and stuffing into his pockets the pieces of broken biscuits which littered the grass, he whistled to

Pete, and they started back again along the weary way they had come.

The story of that return through the forest—of fording streams, of bridging chasms, of solitary nights spent in the open—is heart-breaking.

For the first few days it was not so hard. The trail was fresh, and his memory served him in helping to locate the signs which the map had designated.

But as he dragged himself wearily on, weak and starving, with the poor skeleton of a dog to bear him company, even Tom's indomitable courage began to flag. At the end of the week he had scarcely the strength to stand, much less to travel.

Winter was close at hand. Already the sharp winds whistled through the branches of the trees and gave promise of an early season.

One morning a thin film of ice lay over the surface of a stream by which he had camped for the night. The chill and dampness crept into Tom's very bones. There was a burning sensation in his head, and his chest was so heavy he could scarcely breathe. He fell back upon the ground, convinced that he could go no farther.

The sun came out and gradually dispelled the mists. He was warmed a little, and the desire to live surged through him once more. *He must live!* Mary and the baby needed him. He must try once more.

By sheer force of will he managed to rise again. The shivering dog, nose to the ground, took up the trail once more, patiently and uncomplainingly.

The berries had long since disappeared. Fortunately there were plenty of nuts, and upon these and the roots of bushes he managed to stave away the grim specter.

Pete made one or two feeble efforts to hunt, but he was not a young dog, and the creatures of the forest easily outran him.

Not once, but a dozen times, they lost the trail. By a miracle, each time, Pete found it again. Tom had long since given up the initiative. He was sick and starving. It was all he could do to stumble on blindly, behind Pete, trusting to the dog's instinct to carry them home.

His confidence was not misplaced. It was Pete who brought him again to the deserted camp.

They traveled slowly. It was a full month after Newton's cowardly desertion of them that a starving man and dog staggered into the open space where the little cabin lay, and limped painfully toward the haven of their desires.

Tom's clothes were in rags. He was haggard, unkempt, and so weak that he could scarcely stand upright. Pete was little better. One more day of exposure in the mountains would have finished them both.

With them came a cold blast from the north, bearing on its wings the first flurry of snow. Thicker and thicker fell the flakes. In a couple of hours the ground was powdered white. The air was so filled with the snow that it was impossible to see farther than a few feet from the cabin.

With the last of his remaining strength Tom broke open tin after tin of food, and he and the dog ate ravenously. It mattered not what they ate—it was all food! It satisfied that hideous gnawing at the pit of the stomach.

There were some charred, half-burned sticks in the fire-place, and he found kindling and paper. With these he managed to start a fire. The roaring flames soon warmed the little cabin. Tom and Pete felt that they were as near to heaven as they ever would be on this earth.

Outside, the storm raged fiercely. The wind howled and moaned. Gradually the snow turned to sleet and blew against the windows in sharp, stinging blasts.

Then, without warning, there began days of wild torment and delirium for poor Tom Doyle. The pain in his chest, which he had been denying for the past two weeks, came back again, and this time it would not be gainsaid.

For long hours at a time his mind wandered. He was miserably sick, and in his weakened state the disease managed to get a strong hold upon him.

For days he tossed helplessly on the old miner's bunk, calling pitifully for Mary, sometimes, and sometimes filling the air with denunciations of the man who had so cruelly betrayed him.

The cabin grew bitterly cold. The dog whined pitifully, and crept close to the sick man for warmth.

From time to time, as he was able, Tom rolled from the bunk, crept to the door, got snow, and melted it by the aid of a small blaze which he would build for the purpose. Thus they had drinking water. But the stock of wood in the house grew low.

All troubles come to an end, however, and it was decreed by fate that Tom Doyle was to live, not to die.

Gradually the fever left him, the pain in his chest stopped, and his mind grew clear. He felt curiously light and somewhat giddy from the fearful illness, but slowly he gained ground.

By degrees he grew strong enough to clean up the cabin, and then to venture forth as far as the woodpile in search of fuel.

He would have to spend the winter in the miner's cabin, for it would be impossible to reach Pine Nut while the snow lay on the ground. Even then, without a horse, the trip would be hazardous.

But to live in the cabin was no special hardship, as far as physical conditions went. There was plenty to eat and plenty of wood for fuel. There were a few books, also, to help him pass the time.

Tom's only misery during those long winter months was the thought of his wife and baby. Not to know what had become of them, nor to be able to tell them that he was still alive, was maddening.

There were times when he could scarcely control the impatience that was gnawing his heart away. When he grew stronger he made himself a pair of snow-shoes and, with these, took long trips about the surrounding country, killing small game, and making himself familiar with the lay of the land.

Many times he wondered what had become of Newton, and whether or not he ever succeeded in getting to the gold country. He wondered, also, whether his late companion would attempt to return by way of the old miner's cabin, and he speculated upon the surprise that awaited him in case he did.

But the months passed and there came no word or sign to indicate that Newton was alive or dead. Not a human soul passed that way. No living thing did Tom see during the whole winter but Pete and the wild things of the forest.

One morning toward spring he started out with his gun and snow-shoes on a hunting-trip. Visions of rabbit-pie for dinner had spurred him on, and he confided his dream to Pete, who was to accompany him.

"Come on, boy," he said cheerfully. "'Tis your duty to scare up a meal."

Ridge after ridge they climbed. The hard crust of snow made the traveling easy for man and dog. The air was like electricity; the sun was warm.

On through the forest they flew, and having bagged sufficient game, started for home as the sun dropped.

As they came along the edge of a sharp plateau, far below them, silhouetted against the white of the snow, was a dark figure, moving slowly and with apparent aimlessness.

Tom saw it, and stopped to watch it.

The creature was too far away for him to tell just what it was, but the manner of its traveling precluded the idea of its being forest-wise. He determined to find out what it was.

Cautiously he began the descent, keeping well to the windward, with his gun in readiness, and circling the mountain in such a manner that he could come into range of the creature again without himself being seen. He cautioned Pete to drop behind.

Down, down they flew into the valley. One more turn and he would be within a few yards of the mysterious animal.

But with all his caution, the creature had heard him. As he flew into range over the sharp crust of the snow, there was a startled neigh, and Tom found himself face to face with his own pony!

The saddle-blanket, weather-stained and torn from the bushes, was still fastened to him. His bridle was thrown over his head and dragged in front; he caught his forefeet in it at every step. He was thin and hungry-looking.

After the first note of alarm, he allowed himself to be approached. Indeed, he was too weak to attempt much resistance had he wished to do so.

Tom quickly captured him.

This was a piece of good luck the like of which he had not hoped for. With the pony he might reasonably hope to get back to Pine Nut alive.

That evening, with the horse safely corraled in an improvised shelter behind the miner's shack, Tom laid his plans for the trip back to civilization—and Mary!

That Newton had perished seemed probable. The return of the pony was almost certain evidence that the hand of God had reached forth and demanded its righteous retribution!

When the weather broke up, some few weeks later, man, dog, and pony started once more on the homeward trail. In due course of time, travel-stained and weary, they drifted into the mining-camp at Pine Nut.

CHAPTER VII.

TOM REACHES PINE NUT.

A HARD-LUCK story meets with little sympathy in a mining-camp. Every man Jack of the lot has his own tale to match it, or even to go it one better. Disappointments, broken faith, physical hardships belong to the life. A man who cannot protect his own interests deserves to be beaten.

Being more or less of a tenderfoot, Tom expected sympathy. And because he was a tenderfoot, and had got the worst of it, he received no sympathy.

His erstwhile companions at Pine Nut regarded him and his mishaps with amused contempt.

"So you an' your friend parted comp'-ny — unceremonious-like?" questioned Big Murphy, the wit of the camp. "An' he's goin' to find the pot at the end of the rainbow!"

"The pot's there, all right, and don't you forget it," asserted Tom glumly. "Old Kendrick knew what he was a talkin' about. But I ain't so sure about Johnny gettin' it. It looks to me as though he'd got his just deserts—the horse wanderin' back like that."

"Kendrick!" cried a thin, undersized man on the edge of the crowd. "What—that old fool scatter-brain? Ye be'n follerin' a scent he guv' ye?"

Tom nodded.

The crowd roared with laughter.

"Why, boy," said Big Murphy, slapping Tom on the back, "you're a tenderfoot an' no mistake. That feller was plumb loony. He'd been huntin' gold all his life, an' he didn't have as much to show for it as we here at Pine Nut. We're millionaires compared to him. He couldn't show you an ounce of quartz—"

"He couldn't, eh?" said Tom, growing angry at the growing merriment around him. "All right, now, you just wait a minute. You're a bunch of smarties, all right, an' I'll grant you've got me where the joke's on me, but I'll show you."

He hastily threw the pack off his pony, and commenced rummaging in it.

"That's where you've got another guess," he went on, busy with the pack. "It was an Indian that give him the clue."

"An Indian!"

Again the crowd roared good-humoredly at Tom's expense.

"See here, me boy," said Murphy, with affected paternalism, "yo're too little to be let loose in the woods. Yo' stay here an' do chores fur us aroun' the camp, an we'll larn yo', in time, mebbe."

"What do you mean?" said Tom, fishing out a small tin box, the object of his search.

"Jes' this: thar ain't any bigger liar on the face of the earth than an Indian, an' an Indian don't know gold from mica, when he sees it."

"Oh, he don't, eh? Well, I do, even if I am a 'tenderfoot,'" said Tom.

He stepped over to the group and opened the little tin box.

"Here's some of the quartz," he said. "Is it mica—or gold? Old Kendrick had a bagful of it at his shanty. Them yaller specks there—" He indicated them with his finger. "I'll leave it to you, gentlemen—tenderfoot or no tenderfoot—is it gold?"

The men crowded around him eagerly, peering over one another's shoulders to get a view of the box and its contents.

Big Murphy picked up a piece of quartz and turned it over silently, with clumsy fingers.

For a moment no one spoke.

Then the undersized man, who had worked his way through the bunch to the center, squeaked in surprise:

"Lord save us! He's right! It's gold!"

"It shore is," assented Big Murphy solemnly. "It's free gold, or I'm an Indian!"

"An' Newton got away with the goods, did he?" questioned Harper, one of the older men. "I never did like that feller's face. He was a sneak. I could 'a' told you that before you started."

"Ain't ye got nothin' to help ye find the place?" asked another man.

"Nothin'," assented Tom mournfully. "Only—this."

He drew from his pocket the tattered bit of parchment, from which the map had been torn away. "An' that ain't worth the match to touch it off."

Murphy took the odd-looking scrap in his hands and examined it curiously. Then he handed it back to Tom.

"Yo' keep that, lad," he said "No, it won't help yo' none to find the place again. That's done for. But yo' keep it, jes' the same. I've got a notion that Newton ain't so dead as yo' think he is. He might 'a' reached the end of the trail, an' he might 'a' staked out his claim. Yo' never can tell nothing about those things in this yere country."

The other men nodded wisely. Big Murphy was their accepted leader, and they had chosen him well.

But Tom had little faith that he would ever recover his share of the claim, even supposing that Newton had reached the end of the trail, and in his own mind he was very certain that his faithless comrade had perished.

Tom knew what the hardships of the winter had been. He was fresh from a bitter personal experience. He knew, also, that Newton was no better fitted to survive than he.

The little Irishman's health was broken from the exposure and severe illness he had undergone. His spirit was broken also. Still young in years, he felt suddenly as weary and hopeless as an old man, forced to commence all over again the struggle for existence.

To cap the climax, the postmaster gave him a letter from his wife, Mary, dated two months back.

She told of being in the most desperate of straits. The baby was sick. They had had nothing to eat for two days. If he did not come to her assistance immediately, she would be forced to give the baby over for adoption.

Poor Tom collapsed.

All the misery and hardships he had undergone were as nothing compared to this. He tossed the letter to Big Murphy, and throwing himself flat on the ground, sobbed as though his heart would break.

Murphy read the letter aloud to the little group of miners. When he had finished there was a silence that you could cut with a knife. Tears rolled down the cheeks of several of the men.

Then Murphy spoke, and his voice was husky.

"Well, boys," he said slowly, "what do yo' reckon? I guess it's up to us to send the 'tenderfoot' home. Don't yo' think so?"

There was a quick assent.

Nobody said very much. They were not given to expressing emotion or sympathy, but each man added his little mite to the purse. When it was counted, there was enough to send Tom back to New York, with a few dollars over for good measure.

They put him on the stage that very afternoon.

Tom was at a loss how to express his gratitude. Being warm-hearted and rather given to showing his feelings, he would have liked to thank the men more cordially than they permitted him.

He had nothing to give them but his pony, and Pete, and these he presented to the camp.

As he rode away on the top of the stage, that afternoon, the entire population of Pine Nut turned out to bid him good-by.

The men cheered and waved their hats, and Tom waved back at them until the stage rounded a corner and hid the little settlement from sight.

A mist dimmed his eyes. In all likelihood he would never meet those men again.

Long after Pine Nut became only a memory, Tom could see before him the picture of the rough, kind-hearted men bidding him God-speed.

But it was not this which brought the mist to his eyes.

A little dog, stub-tailed and mournful-eyed, had watched him ride away with as much of pained surprise and reproach as it is possible for a dog to convey. Tom felt that in Pete's eyes he was as faithless a friend as Newton had been.

CHAPTER VIII.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AFTER.

TWENTY-FIVE years passed over the head of Tom Doyle.

The last time we saw him, he was riding away from Pine Nut on the top of the stage, and waving a farewell to the miners and Pete.

How he finally reached New York, and after much difficulty located his wife; how he found that she had given the baby to a family for adoption because she could not care for it herself, are now all ancient history.

The loss of the baby was a terrible blow to the little Irishman. He grew old with a rapidity that was astonishing.

Half-heartedly he took up the burdens of life again, and together he and Mary managed to make a fairly decent living.

There were no other children, and the lost son, whom Tom had never seen, was the burden of their intimate talk whenever they were together.

The people who had adopted the boy had gone to Europe, and Mary had no way of keeping track of them. The child was lost to his parents.

Slowly the years passed. Tom's thatch of red hair whitened prematurely. He was old in mind and body, for he had left hope and faith and trust—all that go to make a man young—in the keeping of the mountains.

Always there rankled in his heart the bitterness and resentment of the wronged man who is denied retribution. Always, when he thought of John Newton, there rose in him a hatred that blazed at white heat. So furious and strong was this passion of hate that it warped his whole life.

But through the long space of those twenty-five years there came to him no whisper that his enemy lived.

Then, quite suddenly, out of a clear sky, two strange things happened.

It was Christmas night of the year 19—. Outside the snow was falling thickly.

Tom sat beside the center-table in his cozy little parlor, waiting for Mary to announce supper. He was reading the evening paper.

On a chair, handy for him to put on, were his cap and coat. Tom was one of the carriage men at the opera-house, and the position was not altogether an inconsequential one.

He had been reading for some time. Suddenly Mary heard him cry out in astonishment. She dropped the frying-pan—thereby spattering herself liberally with grease—and hurried into the parlor.

"What's the matter, Tom?" she said. "Didn't I hear you call?"

Tom's face was white. His hands trembled so that the paper rattled noisily.

"For the love of God, darlin'," she cried, running to him, "you aren't sick, are you? What'll be the matter with you, Tom? Answer me!" She shook his arm tenderly.

Tom's trembling finger pointed to a paragraph in the paper.

"Look," he said hoarsely. "Read that, Mary. It's—it's— I'm as sure as I'm sure there's justice in heaven—*it's him!*"

The article he pointed out was a short account of a runaway in the park, in which the daughter of a man of great wealth was involved. It concluded with the statement:

Miss Newman comes from the West, where she has been very popular in San Francisco society. Her father, John Newman, is one of the few unostentatious millionaires. So much of a recluse is he that few people ever get to know him outside of his business associates.

The beautiful white-marble palace he has built on upper Fifth Avenue is a shining monument to the gold he dug out of the Nevada mountains. Miss Newman, who is the chatelaine of her father's house, and who is said to be the one thing on earth that he worships aside from his enormous wealth, will entertain much this winter. The golden tide of her father's dollars, combined with her own beauty and tact, have opened the doors of the Four Hundred to her.

"Well," said Mary when she had finished reading it, "I don't see that this means anything. The man's name is 'Newman.'"

"So it is," assented Tom, "but he might 'a' changed it. Nothing easier or more natural—when a man don't want to be traced. That's 'John Newton' as sure as you're alive, Mary."

He paused and wiped the perspiration from his forehead with his faded cotton handkerchief.

"So he got to the end of the trail—after all!" he said slowly. Then his face blazed with anger.

"No, he hasn't—not yet!" he cried excitedly. "He's got a piece to travel—yet! *An' I'm goin' to show it to him!*"

He looked hastily about the room. "Where's my cap—my coat?" he commenced.

Mary made a grab for the articles in question, and held them tightly.

"Sit down, Tom Doyle!" she commanded firmly. "*Sit down!* As I'm tellin' you. There, now," she went on soothingly, as Tom obeyed her, after a moment of hesitation. "You listen to me a minute. I've given you good advice, Tom. If you'd taken it in the first place, you'd never have gone West. You owe it to me to listen to me.

"You an' I are gettin' old, Tom. We've had sorrow upon sorrow, an' we've brooded over our troubles more'n is good for us. Why, Tom, lad, never do I go out on the street but I'm lookin' into the face of every young man I see, wondering could he be our boy!"

She stopped speaking a moment and brushed the tears from her eyes with a corner of her apron. Then she went on bravely:

"It's like that with you, Tom. Time and again have you told me that you knew he was dead. This great man isn't the same one. Sure, how could he be? The other was poor, like yourself—"

"But if he found the mine that the old man told us about, he'd be as rich as Crœsus. Don't you understand?"

Mary shook her head stubbornly.

"It's not the same one at all," she persisted. "How should I be knowin'? I don't know. But I know what I believe."

Tom shook his head impatiently.

"What'll you have me do, then?" he said crossly.

"Wait; don't do anything foolish. Supposin' it is the same? Will you gain anything by rushin' at him? No; wait, as you've waited all these years. Promise me, Thomas, you'll do nothin' rash this night."

When Mary spoke thus, Tom knew that he had to obey. He realized that her counsel was good. She was the balance-wheel to his hasty impulses. So he acquiesced, albeit with bad grace.

Two hours later Tom was in his accustomed place on the sidewalk in front of the opera house. He had kept his promise to Mary. For the present he would do as she wished, and make no attempt to seek out the identity of the Western millionaire. But his mind was fully occupied with speculating upon the probability of John Newton and John Newman being one and the same.

Mechanically he opened carriage-doors for the throngs of exquisitely gowned women and happy, prosperous-looking men. He distributed the checks from sheer force of habit, but his thoughts were far away on a lonely mountain-top where a sick Irish boy and a skeleton of a dog were fighting their way back to civilization.

He could see them struggling through the trackless wilderness, falling only to rise again when the blind instinct to live prodded them on.

He recalled again that pitiful moment when he and Mary came face to face and she had to tell him that their child was lost to them. With money he might have found the child again. With only a little of John Newton's wealth—supposing that John Newton *was* John Newman—the whole unhappy course of Tom's life might have been changed.

And then it was that the second strange thing happened.

A smart brougham drove up to the curb. Tom threw open the door, and a man stepped out. He turned to give his hand to a young woman who followed him. Then he held out his hand for the carriage-check.

Tom started back. For a moment, every muscle in his body was paralyzed.

So keenly was the memory of John

Newton's face impressed upon him, that fine raiment, and years of luxurious, well-fed living had not obliterated it.

The man he had hated and hunted for years stood before him in the flesh.

Oh, to spring upon him, to denounce him, to crush him! To kill him—even! No, a better plan still was to ruin him in the sight of all men. To leave him stripped bare of virtue. To make of him such a creature as even his own daughter would turn from.

And then the cold, well-remembered tones of his enemy recalled Tom to his senses.

"When you're ready, man, I'd like that check!" he said curtly.

Tom handed over the check with a mumbled word of apology, and John Newman, his beautiful daughter clinging to his arm, disappeared with the throng of operagoers, through the brilliantly lighted lobby into the opera house.

Tom turned and followed them with his eyes.

Then, quite suddenly, he recollected that through the whole of their barren, poverty-stricken lives, he and Mary had never seen the inside of a high-class theater or heard an opera.

Theirs had been the bitter portion of the poor, made doubly bitter because of the great wrong done them by Newton.

CHAPTER IX.

AN UNEXPECTED OPPORTUNITY.

THE question that was with Tom Doyle always, in the days that followed, was how best to go about the chastisement of Newton.

Tom was old with suffering and poverty. He was ignorant; he was helpless. At Mary's insistence he kept silent. She wisely pointed out to him the grim futility of attempting to prove anything against the millionaire. Newton — or Newman, as he had chosen to call himself—held the leading cards. He was plainly master of the situation.

Who was there to believe Tom's story? Who was there to listen to it, even? And in what way could he force his old partner to make restitution?

All of these questions Mary put to him, and he could answer none of them. On reflection, he decided to follow her advice until they could think of some plan whereby justice could be done him. They spent long hours discussing the matter, but never got any nearer a solution than they were at first.

It had not occurred to them to seek the services of a lawyer, and even if they had thought of doing so, the expense would have deterred them.

Meanwhile, at his post before the door of the opera-house, Tom kept his eyes and ears open.

By judicious inquiry of a friendly man in the box-office, he found out that John Newman and his daughter, Irene, were subscribers and attended the opera regularly every Tuesday and every Friday evening.

He made it his business to be on hand promptly when their brougham stopped at the curb. With his heart beating like a trip-hammer he would throw open the carriage-door. Sometimes he received a friendly nod from the young lady. And usually Newman slipped a coin into his hand.

He even cultivated the acquaintance of the Newman coachman, so anxious was he to get in touch with the habits and life of the man who had betrayed him.

One night the coachman told him that he expected soon to quit his job.

"Hi'm going back to Hengland, Thomas," he said in a burst of confidence. "This is the larst time Hi'll be seein' you. 'Is nobs'll be gettin' 'im a new gentleman to sit on the box."

He looked Tom over critically. "'E's arsked me to choose the new gentleman for 'im. W'y don't you try it, Thomas? I'll speak for you. Does you know anythink about 'orses?"

Tom's heart almost flew into his throat, he was so excited. Here was just such an opportunty as he had been longing for. It seemed almost as though the hand of Providence, so long hesitant where his affairs were concerned, had at last got down to work in earnest.

As it happened, during the years when he had been knocking about from pillar to post, he had served for a brief season as hostler in a fashionable livery-stable. This experience now stood him in good stead.

"Do I know anything about horses?" he repeated, trying to speak naturally. "Sure I know a whole lot about 'em. Didn't I work over to Green's once?"

"Did you, now?" said the coachman admiringly. "Would you care to take service with Mr. Newman, then? 'E's fair on the wages, though somewhat odd to know personal. Hi leaves 'im alone, myself."

"I think I'll be after takin' it," said Tom quietly. He knew perfectly well that the change would mean less money to him, on account of the tips he received as carriage man, and he could ill afford to sacrifice any of his little income. But the temptation to come into closer contact with this man was too great to be withstood.

He worried a little as to how Mary would accept the news. He expected to have an argument with her about it. But for all that, he determined to take the chance.

"All right, then," said the Newman coachman, as Tom went to summon him late that evening. "You come to our house to-morrer—the servants' entrance is on the court at the back. To-morrer at three."

Tom nodded shortly.

The words "servants' entrance" galled him almost beyond endurance.

So he was to come obsequiously, hat in hand, to the servants' entrance of this rich man's house, to try for the position of coachman! He was to be a servant in the employ of the man who had so bitterly wronged him! *Subject to his orders and in his pay!*

To Tom's surprise, Mary was pleased at the idea of his taking service with Newman.

"It's the will of God!" she exclaimed piously. "The way will be shown to you, Tom, lad, an' he'll do the right thing by you yet. Maybe he ain't all bad. Maybe his conscience has troubled him about lavin' you alone in the mountains that night."

"Maybe it has," said Tom contemptuously; "but it don't show none in his looks, I can tell you. Sleek an' as elegant as a tabby-cat he is, an' with all the airs of a gentleman born.

"It's true, he always was well-spoken. He'd been to school more'n the likes of me. But for all of that, Mary, I'm glad I'm myself, poor as I am, an' unfortunate as I am, instead of havin' on my mind what that man has on his.

"I remember the vow I made when he left me alone an' I faced dyin' all by meself in those lonesome mountains—me an' Pete. I mind the vow I made then. I swore that if I ever laid eyes on him again I'd shoot him on sight. And I'd have kept that vow, Mary, but for you. I can't bring any more sorrow to you than you've had already. God knows, it's enough!"

Promptly at three o'clock on the following day, Tom appeared at the servants' entrance of the rich Mr. Newman's home.

He wore his best suit, neatly brushed by Mary's loving hands, and he was clean-shaven, as a well-ordered coachman should be.

But there was no likelihood of Mr. John Newman recognizing in this humble white-haired applicant for a coachman's job the gay, high-spirited Tom Doyle of other days. As far as he was concerned, the Tom Doyle of the Sierra Nevada Mountains had perished these many years ago.

It was a decade since Mr. John Newman had allowed his mind to dwell on that ugly incident of his youth. That belonged to the past of *Newton*—Newton, the man who had emerged from the gold-fields with an enormously rich claim staked out, who had drifted to Denver and narrowly escaped being shot in a gambling-den for a shady transaction that he could not explain.

The John Newman who appeared later in San Francisco and obtained financial assistance in the working of his claim, who married and settled down to affluent respectability, had nothing to do with Tom Doyle.

Henry, the first footman, ushered Tom into the servants' sitting-room, where he was to wait until summoned by the master of the house.

This room, which was used as a gathering-place for his old comrade's servants, was so much better than anything Tom himself had ever possessed, that he could only wonder what the rest of the house could be like.

"I can't sense it," he muttered to him-

self. "Johnny Newton, what traveled with me from Pine Nut to Kendrick's—an' was just like me. An' now he's equal to any—while I'm still plain Tom Doyle, an' lucky to be that!"

Fortunately, he did not have time to let his mind linger on his wrongs. Henry returned in a few minutes and told him that Mr. Newman wished him to wait in the library.

Tom followed the footman wonderingly. The soft rugs and carpets, into which his feet sank at every step; the rich, beautiful furniture, the like of which he had never seen in his life, filled him with a sense of awe.

With a whispered word that the master would see him presently, Henry left Tom alone in the library.

He surveyed curiously the luxury that he should have shared. The library was big enough to take in the whole of his modest flat. It was furnished lavishly. All about the walls were bookcases extending from floor to ceiling, filled with books in rich dark bindings.

The furniture was of mahogany, massive and heavily carved. The floor was covered with a priceless Oriental rug

The only wall-space not occupied by bookcases was over the onyx fireplace, where hung an odd-looking picture.

Something indefinitely familiar about it caught Tom's eye. Unconscious of the liberty he was taking, he stepped nearer to get a better view.

Then he saw what it was—that it was not a picture at all. His hat dropped from his nerveless fingers. He gave an involuntary gasp of amazed surprise as the full meaning of it came over him.

There before his eyes, framed, on the wall of John Newman's library, hung the mutilated parchment map that had guided the millionaire to the gold-fields twenty-five years before!

Underneath the map, neatly typed, was a statement to that effect, telling how the map came into the possession of its present owner through the kindness of one Kendrick, a dying miner who had been befriended by the beneficent Newman.

There was no mention made of Tom Doyle. Nothing was said of a deserted pal who was to be a joint owner of the Kendrick bequest.

Yet folded carefully away in Tom's little box of valuables was a long tattered strip of parchment that fitted exactly the ragged side of the framed map. The thought that he had saved that strip of parchment, as Big Murphy had advised him to do, filled Tom with a sense of exultation.

Tom studied the parchment map silently, oblivious of his surroundings, until a light step behind him recalled him to himself.

He turned awkwardly and picked up his hat from the floor, where it had dropped. Then he flushed crimson with embarrassment.

He faced, not Mr. John Newman, but the daughter.

For a few seconds neither of them said anything. Irene was evidently puzzled to account for this breach of conduct on the part of a well-trained servant, while Tom Doyle was speechless with admiration and confusion.

Then she said with gentle dignity: "I beg your pardon—you are the coachman?"

Tom bowed.

"I'm tryin' for the job, miss," he said simply.

"Very well. My father is detained. He will be here presently."

She stepped quickly to the door and listened for a moment. Then she swept back into the library to a desk on which stood a telephone.

Lifting the receiver, she gave a number softly, and waited with evident impatience, turning several times toward the door, with the receiver held to her ear, as though fearful of some intrusion.

Presently she spoke, her lips held close to the instrument, her voice scarcely audible.

"Hello! This is Irene. . . . Don't come this afternoon. He is home. . . . I can't tell. Perhaps all the afternoon. . . . No, it isn't wise. You must do as I say. . . . I can't explain now. Good-by!"

Her cheeks were flushed as she hung up the receiver. She stood uncertain for a moment or two, drumming on the edge of the desk, her back to Tom.

Then a quick step sounded in the hall and a man's voice was heard giving some curt order to a servant. Irene started

guiltily and picked up a book, turning the pages with affected interest.

Another second, and Mr. John Newman entered the room.

CHAPTER X.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

MEETING him face to face in the light of day, Tom had an idea that his old companion might know him.

He was prepared for recognition, and, indeed, almost hoped for it.

But Newman scarcely looked at him. He had a habit of treating inconsequential inferiors with scant attention.

"Your name?" he said shortly, preparing to make the entry in his pay-roll.

Tom hesitated. This was an emergency he had not counted upon. His wits were none too nimble, and he was not an adept at ready lying.

"Well—when you've thought of it, my man—" said Newman impatiently.

"Excuse me, sir," said Tom, affecting a humility he was far from feeling. "My name's Thomas Dugan, sir."

After a few more questions, Tom was dismissed with the order to go to the stables, where the departing coachman would explain his duties to him.

Henry appeared as if by magic, and conducted Tom out. As they passed Newman's desk, the millionaire had his back turned to him. He was bending over his desk, absorbed in something. Already he had forgotten the existence of "Thomas Dugan," the new coachman.

Tom hesitated. He clenched his hands rebelliously. Was he to endure being treated as the servant of this man? Was he to slave for a monthly dole of his own gold?

The blood mounted hotly to Tom's temples. He almost forgot his promise to Mary.

Then Newman wheeled about in his chair, conscious that the new coachman still lingered when he should be gone.

"What else do you want?" he exclaimed irritably.

He looked keenly into Tom's face this time, but the glance held no recognition. It was intended merely to subjugate the forward servant.

Tom dropped his eyes to the floor.

"It's only this, sir—" he said hesitatingly. "You've no objection to my living along at home, as usual? I've a wife an' a home, sir, an'—"

"Suit yourself about that," interrupted Newman curtly. "Only see that you attend to your duties. That's all I require of you. *Now you may go.*"

Tom acted upon the suggestion and went.

From the corner of his eye he saw a sweetly troubled face regarding him over the top of a book. The book, he noticed, was held upside down. It was quite evident that the young lady of the house had a few weighty cares of her own.

There was a long silence in the library after Tom had gone. Irene continued to read from the upside-down book. Her father was engrossed in business papers.

Finally the girl sighed, rose, and laid the book upon a table. She looked at her father for a moment, but he appeared to be unconscious of her presence. Then, slowly, she started to walk from the room.

As she neared the door, he turned sharply in his chair.

"Irene," he said, with a shade of tenderness in his voice, "I did not mean to be harsh with you—I hope you understand that."

Irene lowered her eyes, and a pink flush spread over her face.

"Possibly not, father. Nevertheless, you were harsh"

"Then I am sorry. Surely, I can say no more than that."

"I think you can," she replied stubbornly.

He rose from the chair and faced her. His somber eyes shone with the light of love. "Little girl," he said gently, "you know that you are all I have in the world—all I have to live for. I think—sometimes—you take advantage of it."

"Oh, father, dear!" she cried reproachfully. "How can you say such things to me? You know I love you dearly. This is the very first time we've quarreled — in all our lives — think of it!"

"Do you know why?" he asked quickly.

She shook her head.

"It's the first time we've quarreled because I've never opposed you before. This is the only thing I have asked you to do for me. It's the first time I ever made a request of you in my life—and you have refused me! The very first time!"

Tears sprang into Irene's eyes.

"Oh, you are cruel—daddy!" she said, with a sob in her voice. "You are cruel—and unreasonable. I wish my mother had lived! I think a mother would understand—this—"

John Newman's lips tightened, and a pained look came into his eyes. "I wish she had, too," he said, "for your sake—as well as for mine. I've had high ideas for you, Renie. I'm determined that you shall have the best."

"How do you know what is best?" she flashed hotly. "Must I have it when I don't want it? When I'm perfectly satisfied—"

"With a man of no antecedents—and no money or prospects?"

"We have money enough, I'm sure. Anyway, you can't buy happiness!"

"You can't, eh?" said Newman sharply. "Well, let me tell you, my girl, you can pretty nearly buy it. Just try getting along without it once, and see what happens to you. You haven't been brought up to work. You've never done a thing for yourself. Why, one of your dresses costs as much as the average man pays for a year's rent—"

"You're mistaken. It can't be true!"

"I'm not mistaken. I know. I've been poor. I know the value of money better than most men. But I've never taught it to you, because I made up my mind that you would never have to consider it. And you won't—if you obey me."

"And if I don't?"

Irene's chin tilted haughtily at the conveyed threat in his words.

Her father regarded her for a moment in silence. A grim smile spread over his face.

"I don't think, my dear, that there is the slightest danger of your not doing it." He paused a few seconds, then he said slowly, weighing each word: "You have too much sense—or will have, when you come to think it over. You will make up your mind that nothing on this earth quite compensates for the loss of wealth."

Irene drew back in amazement and horror, as though she had caught a glimpse of her father she had never seen before, and it repelled her.

"Do you really feel that way?" she said evenly. "I wonder if you do, because—"

"Yes? Because—"

"Because, if you do—would money compensate you, say for the loss of—me? Does it compensate you for the loss of my—mother?"

"We are not discussing that phase of the matter at all," replied Newman sharply. "What have you or your mother got to do with young Hardin? There is no comparison."

"But there is," said Irene quietly. "Only you are blind and will not see it."

"Very well. Grant that I am blind. But you can tell him this, if you will. Tell him that if he takes you, he can count on supporting you without any aid from your father—tell him how much the dress you have on cost—and see what he says."

Irene threw back her head proudly.

"Very well," she said. "I'll tell him—and I know what he will say." She turned abruptly and left the room.

Newman stared after her, hardly believing the evidence of his senses.

"Irene!" he called, with a pathetic ring in his voice. "Irene—daughter!"

But Irene paid no attention. She flew up-stairs to her own room and locked the door.

CHAPTER XI.

TOM PLAYS CUPID.

IT was a strange household of which Tom Doyle, *alias* Thomas Dugan, found himself a member.

The little Irishman kept his eyes and ears open and played a patient, waiting game. He knew that sooner or later his opportunity would come. If it delayed too long, he would make an opportunity for himself—would force the issue, if necessary.

Every morning he mounted the box and drove John Newman to his office down-town, and called for him again,

late in the afternoon. He learned to touch his hat to his old enemy with just that shade of deference which marks the well-trained coachman.

Newman, sitting at ease in the comfortable coupé, little dreamed of the identity of the man who was driving him. His mind was fully occupied with the care of his enormous wealth. The care and responsibility he accepted gladly for the pleasure of possessing the fascinating stream of gold.

Money was his creed—his god. In only one other thing on earth did he have the slightest interest, and this was his daughter, Irene.

During the day, Tom was at the service of Miss Newman. She used the carriage constantly for calls and shopping expeditions. And then, quite suddenly, Tom found out that he was being made a party to a love-affair, clandestine in every essential.

Little by little he learned the story. The other servants gossiped and questioned him, but he kept his knowledge to himself.

There was forming in Tom's mind a plan to get even with Newman in a way that would injure him most—to strike him through his daughter. If he could make the father contemptible in Irene's eyes, Newman would be amply punished.

He had not decided exactly how to go about it. For one thing, Irene herself deterred him. He began to like the girl. He felt very sorry for her as he watched her pink cheeks grow paler, day by day, and her manner more listless and dispirited.

There was some talk of going to Europe, but Irene firmly refused to leave New York, even for the delights of the Riviera. And so the winter wore slowly away.

Tom pretended to be as blind as the little god to what was going on under his nose. Sometimes, by Irene's orders, he would drive to a fashionable lunching-place—fashionable, but not too popular. And then he would catch a glimpse of a tall, handsome chap hovering just inside the revolving glass doors. Always the same young man, with the same anxious expression that cleared instantly at sight of Irene.

As soon as she was inside, the young man disappeared. An hour or so later, when Irene entered the carriage to be driven home, there was always a light touch of pink in her cheeks and a happy expression in her eyes. And Tom knew that she had been disobeying again.

From the servants he learned that the lover's name was Richard Hardin, and that he was an artist who painted good pictures, but made very little money. It was known that Newman objected to Irene's marrying Hardin because of his poverty and obscure social position.

"Though w'y he should, the Lord only knows," said Walker, the pompous English butler; "for he ain't much, 'imself, I've been told, as far's family goes. An', as for money, Miss Irene'll get all 'e 'as, some day, an' it ought to be enough to keep 'er an' 'er 'usband, both of 'em."

Indeed, the sympathy of the servants was all for Miss Irene, whom they worshiped and loved as cordially as they detested her father.

Blanche, Miss Newman's maid, had but one objection to the lover. He had red hair, she said, which in her estimation was a good deal of a drawback. But if it suited Miss Irene, no one else was qualified to find fault.

It was quite plain that Irene distrusted the new coachman. She was very careful to keep from him the secret of whom she lunched with at Cherry's—at least, she thought she was. Evidently, she believed that her father had posted instructions with the servants to keep her under surveillance.

But practising the deception continually was a hard matter, and one day, quite unexpectedly, she threw herself upon Tom's mercy.

"Thomas," she said, trying to be severe, "I am going to ask a favor of you. We are to drive into the country this afternoon—with the victoria. There will be—some one with me. Please say nothing about it to my father—will you?"

Tom could scarcely repress the twinkle in his eye, as he gravely touched his cap and said, "Right, ma'am. I'll hould me tongue."

They picked up the "some one" at lunch, and at last, Tom got a look at him. He was a clean-cut young fellow, with a frank, open, rather lovable face

and a hearty laugh that found its way to your heart at once.

There was something familiar about the laugh, and something familiar about the face, that Tom for the moment could not recall.

What was it? Where had he seen this youngster before? Where had he heard that boyish, ringing laugh? It was like a dim echo from the long ago. Something heard and almost forgotten—perhaps only dreamed.

They drove out beyond Harlem, into the country, and the spring breezes and the odor of the blossoms and the tender green grass all spoke of hope and new life.

The two in the victoria fell into sober little silences. Sometimes they talked in low tones, and then again fell silent.

After a while Tom became conscious that he was asking and urging something of much importance—and that she was hesitating and questioning the advisability of it.

"We have waited long enough," he said earnestly. "What if he does cast you off? We can go to Italy and live—it costs scarcely anything to live there—and I can make enough, plenty, for both of us."

"Italy?" she said reminiscently. "Why, surely, it costs horribly. We stayed in Rome—"

"At the American Hotel, I presume?"

She nodded.

"That's very different, dear. We'll live in the country—in some old palace. I know, because I spent most of my boyhood there. Are you going to throw me over, Irene?"

"Oh, no," she cried, half sobbing. "I shall never do that. I keep hoping he will give in—but he doesn't. He is just as—prejudiced against you as ever."

Tom listened with anger growing in his heart against Newman. Who was Newman, anyway, that he should be so particular?

Presently Irene ordered Thomas to stop at a little inn, and she and Hardin got out. They had sandwiches and milk at a table under the budding trees, and were as happily unhappy as it is possible for two young people in such circumstances to be.

Just as they finished lunch, the daughter of the proprietor of the inn appeared with a camera. She offered to take their pictures.

Irene hesitated. Then she smiled up into young Hardin's eyes. "It has been such a beautiful day," she said, "why not? Perhaps we shall never have another quite like it."

"Nonsense!" he said, with an effort to be stern. "We shall have many, many more—even more beautiful. But it would be nice—yes, let's have it taken, together!"

"In the carriage, then?" she questioned.

"No—under the trees."

"Then, in the carriage, afterward—just to show that we've been chaperoned—in case any one ever saw them." She smiled at Tom.

So the pictures were taken, first standing under the trees and then sitting side by side in the carriage.

The sun began to slide down low in the west. Tom touched his hat to the young lady.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Newman," he said. "If we'll be goin' now, I'll just about have time to change the horses and go for Mr. Newman."

Irene acted upon the hint quickly.

"I had no idea it was so late," she cried, springing into the low carriage. "Hurry, Dick!"

Hardin paid for the pictures and told the girl where to send them, and then he, too, jumped into the carriage, and Tom turned the horses cityward.

They drove back much more rapidly than they had come, for there was no time to lose, if Mr. Newman was not to be delayed.

It had, indeed, been a happy day, but it left the good-hearted Tom Doyle with other troubles than his own to consider. His affection for Irene was growing to be more sincere than he would have it. He wondered if she would care very much when he exposed her father's wickedness—and then he wondered one other thing.

Wasn't there a chance that it might make a difference in Irene's and Richard Hardin's love for each other?

Did Tom Doyle hold in his hands a weapon with which he could destroy

utterly the happiness of two innocent young people?

And, again, did he wish to use that weapon?

Think over the nature of little Tom Doyle, as you know it, and answer the question for yourself. Much as he hated Newman, he drew back at the thought of inflicting pain upon a beautiful girl who already had had her share of sorrow.

But Tom determined upon one thing. If possible, he would force Newman to let his daughter marry the man she loved.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PICTURE.

SEVERAL days after the memorable ride into the country, Irene stealthily slipped an envelope into Tom's hand as she was about to enter the carriage.

"It's one of the pictures, Thomas," she said hurriedly, half under her breath —"one that we had taken the other day —you remember? I wanted you to have one. You look so fine sitting up there on the box—I thought perhaps your wife might like to see it. Only—" and here her voice sank to a whisper, "only, be careful. Don't show it to anybody else —to any of the other servants. You —understand? This is to be a secret."

"Yes, miss," said Tom sympathetically, "I understand, an' I'll keep it careful. Thank you, miss. It was kind of you to remember me."

When he had an opportunity, Tom examined the picture. It was, as Irene had said, a fine likeness of himself, as well as of the others. The sight of the picture brought back to the good-hearted little Irishman the memory of that day, with its happiness for the two lovers.

Then he wondered if young Hardin had yet persuaded Irene to elope with him. They made a fine-looking couple, sitting side by side in the low carriage. Irene was bending forward a little, looking into the camera with smiling eyes; Hardin's face was half turned toward her. From the happy, contented look of their faces they might have been some blissful bridal couple, instead of a pair of thwarted lovers.

Tom slipped the envelope into his pocket and did not take it out again until he was back in his own home.

It was eight o'clock when he came in. Mary was sitting by the lamp mending stockings. The quiet restfulness of the little room, with its homelike aspect, moved Tom strangely.

"I'm thinkin', Mary," he said softly, "that in a way the Lord knows best. Here I've been envyin' that thievin' rascal his money—but if I had it, would I be after livin' like him? Not a bit of it. His ain't any home—it's a hotel. He ain't got a thing I envy him—except maybe one—"

Tom stopped speaking suddenly. A sob choked him.

Mary laid down her mending basket.

"I know what you mean, Tom," she said with sympathetic understanding. "You envy him his child—his daughter. Many and many's the time I've wondered what's become of our baby. Only this last hour, sitting here by myself, I've been tryin' to picture him. When Mr. Newman makes it right with you, Tom, we must take some of the money and find our boy. I'm thinkin' you can do 'most anything with money. But that's all I want it for." She sighed disconsolately.

Tom looked glumly down at the carpet.

"Don't be countin' too hard on his ever doin' even the shadow of the right thing by me, Mary, dear," he said bitterly. "He won't do anything if he can help it. He'll try to crush me again, and maybe he'll succeed. I ain't fitted to do battle with the likes of him."

Mary's eyes flashed.

"Look here, Tom Doyle, if you sit up and own you're beat at the start, you *are* beat! I'm ashamed of you!"

"Now, Mary, listen. It isn't that I'm afraid of him. I'll do anything to get even with him. I'd give five years off my life, now—an' I ain't so young—to be able to give him a good hiding. But —it's something else—"

"Well?" questioned Mary sharply. "What is it?"

"It's—the young lady. You know the chap I told you about? She's in love with him. She wants to marry him—an' I think she'll do it in spite of her father.

She's sweet an' good. She don't deserve any unhappiness. If I carry out that plan we talked over an' drag her father down in her eyes—maybe—she's just the sort that would—maybe she'll break off with the young man—"

"What sort of a young man is he?" interrupted Mary.

"Here's a picture of 'em. The day I drove 'em out to Woodlands—you remember. She thought you might like to see it. She thought you might like to see how your husband looks when he's fillin' the job of coachman." Tom laughed at what he considered a joke.

Mary took the picture and studied it carefully.

She looked at it so long and so steadily that Tom fidgeted uneasily in his chair. Finally he said in a rather exasperated voice, "Well, what do you think of it?"

Mary made no reply, but her lips tightened. Once she glanced from the picture to Tom, and back again to the picture.

When she spoke at last, her voice sounded strange to him.

"Tom," she said, "tell me something. It's a funny thing to ask, I know, but what color hair has that boy got?"

"Hair?" Tom laughed aloud with amusement. "There you go! Women are all alike, I do declare. It's his hair that Mam'zelle Blanche objects to—I hate to admit it, my dear, but it's red—as red as mine used to be."

"I knew it! I knew it!" cried Mary, with a little scream.

"Knew what?" asked Tom, thinking that she had suddenly taken leave of her senses.

"*I knew it!* I always knew I should know it! What's his name, Tom?"

"Name? She calls him 'Dick.' His last name's 'Hardin.'"

"'Hardin?' No—surely not. 'Harding.' I'm sure it's 'Harding.'"

"Why, Mary," said Tom, half rising. "Are you crazy, dear? Has it turned your mind completely? You mean—"

"You know very well what I mean, Tom. As sure as you're living, Tom—*that young man is our son!*"

She laid her head down on the table and sobbed aloud.

Tom came over and laid a heavy, comforting hand on her head. "You say you're sure, Mary," he said, still believing that her mind was affected from continued brooding. "Explain, girl. I'm not very smart. Tell me how you know?"

Mary raised her tear-stained face, and again picked up the picture.

"He's the exact image of what you were at his age, Tom. Except, maybe, he's taller. I'd know him in ten thousand. He's just as I always knew he'd look. He has your hair, your eyes, your mouth. I'll bet he has your laugh, Tom."

Tom drew in his breath sharply. "Mary!" he half whispered. "I'm thinkin' you may be right. When I heard him laugh the other day, I says to myself, 'Where have I heard that voice before?' An' I studied a long time over it, too. There was something about him that looked familiar to me, too—an' I couldn't place him."

"Listen," said Mary breathlessly. "Now about the name. The people that took him—you remember I told you? I sewed for the lady. I thought the name was 'Harding,' but we can get out the papers and make sure. I named the baby 'Thomas Richard'—and she said she would call him 'Richard.' They went abroad—"

Tom jumped from the chair.

"Where's my hat?" he cried. "I'm going to see the boy—"

Mary grasped his arm. "No—not yet, Thomas."

"Why not?" asked Thomas. He was fairly quivering with excitement. He could scarcely contain himself.

Mary leaned back in her chair. "Because, Tom," she said wistfully, "I've lived through so many disappointments—I couldn't bear another. Let's go to sleep to-night believing that we've found our boy. To-morrow will be time enough. But this one night—I must be happy about him.

"You see—" she paused a moment, then went on bravely—"you see, Tom, we've got this to face. He's a gentleman now. He's going up in the world—and—*suppose he should be ashamed of us!* That would be worse—almost—than never seeing him at all."

"I hadn't thought of that," said Tom, in a strained voice. "I hadn't thought

that our boy—" he broke off short and his face cleared. "Ah, but Mary—he hasn't got the face of a man who would be ashamed of his own father an' mother! You should see him wance! You should hear him laugh, and see the tender way of him. 'Tis proud to be his father, I am."

"Tell me all about him," cried Mary, the tears again streaming down her face. "Oh, to think you laid your two eyes on him, Tom!"

And Tom told her all that he knew about young Hardin. Then after a while they sat silent, each thinking about this strange thing that had happened to them.

Finally Tom spoke again.

"Supposin'," he said—"just supposin' that he *is* our boy—what are we to do about Miss Newman? Would she be after marryin' a coachman's son, do you think?"

"I can't be tellin' that," said Mary. "Need she know?"

"It'll be hard to tell how things will work out," said Tom, evidently puzzled. "I don't know. It's Newman that he has to reckon with. But this much I'm sure of. More than ever am I determined that she shall marry him. That'll be one way he can do justice to me—through my boy.

"For ourselves, we'll not be wantin' much, Mary, lass. But the boy has his birthright comin' to him, an' he'll get it. He'll get it if I have to fight Newman with my bare fists!"

CHAPTER XIII.

TOM OBEYS INSTRUCTIONS.

EVENTS began to move rapidly the following day.

Emboldened by her former success in eluding the parental eye, Miss Newman tempted Fate even further. Young Hardin called at the house, and although Walker had strict orders from the master not to admit him, he was ushered in and invited to make himself at home in the drawing-room until Miss Newman came down.

Frightened as the servants were of John Newman, they would gladly make any sacrifice for his daughter.

Presently Irene joined young Hardin, and they went out together almost immediately afterward.

When they were gone, everybody in the house breathed a sigh of relief. It was all very well to disobey the master, if one was not caught at it. The sin lay in being found out, and no one could guarantee that he wouldn't be found out, for Mr. Newman was notoriously clever at laying traps.

A couple of hours passed and no word was heard of the truants. Then came a telephone summons for Thomas to meet Miss Newman with the carriage at the Fifty-Ninth Street entrance to the Park.

Tom was not surprised to find young Hardin with her. From the exalted, happy attitude of the pair they had been enjoying themselves hugely.

"Drive us through the Park for about an hour—and then home," said Irene.

Thomas hesitated. "Both of you?" he questioned. He could scarcely keep his eyes from young Hardin. Oh, how he longed to question him, to make sure—

"Yes—both of us," replied Irene, her eyes shining like twin stars.

So Thomas obeyed orders, and at the end of the hour, turned the horses' heads toward home.

As they pulled up under the *porte-cochère,* the unexpected happened—or, rather, the expected, since everybody had been waiting for the drop to fall.

The door opened and a man stood facing the three culprits—for Tom was as much a sinner as the other two. It was not the benign countenance of Walker that greeted them, but John Newman himself. He was plainly in a towering rage.

Curiously enough, however, Tom felt no fear of this man, who had always inspired him with awe in the old days. He believed that he himself held the trumps, and that it was nearly time to play them.

He looked straight ahead, his face slightly contemptuous, a fact which did not escape the shrewd eye of Newman.

"So you've come back, have you?" said Irene's father, with crushing emphasis. "Do you remember what I told you with regard to this—young man?"

"Yes, father!" said Irene softly, her

eyes lowered. "I'm sorry I had to disobey you—"

"*Had to disobey me—*" Newman's face showed plainly that he thought he had misunderstood.

Then he recollected himself quickly. "Come inside. We will discuss this matter later. As for you, Thomas, you know what the general orders of the house are—Walker has probably informed you. I will deal with you later. Drive this young man home—and then report to me."

"Right, sir!" said Thomas, touching his hat, with grim satisfaction. "I'll do so, sir!"

Hardin, however, was on the point of jumping from the carriage. His face was scarlet with anger and his fists were clenched.

Irene stepped to him and whispered a few words in his ear.

"For my sake!" she added softly.

Still he demurred.

Then a strange thing happened. Thomas, the coachman, the human automaton, bent down from his perch and said in a soothing tone: "Do as the young lady's askin' you, lad. It'll be best—for all of us."

"Hold your tongue," roared Newman, losing his temper completely. "Your interference isn't requested—"

"Right, sir!" said Tom, a broad grin spreading over his face. Had Newman but known it, it was the grin of all the "Fighting Doyles" concentrated, boiled down, the very essence of malicious wrath.

Before Hardin could object further, Tom had touched the horses with his whip and they were off.

He drove rapidly. The young man in the coupé was too much occupied with his own thoughts to notice at first the direction the carriage took, but after a while he came to himself.

He saw that the neighborhood was a strange one. Tall apartment-houses lined the narrow street. There were children playing in the streets, more children than he had ever seen together at one time in his life. Little corner groceries and meat-shops abounded, and the rumble and roar of the elevated railroad kept pace with them.

Presently the carriage stopped in front of a cheap but respectable-looking apartment-house. Tom climbed down from the box and did an unheard-of thing. He produced a hitching-strap and proceeded to tie the horses to a convenient lamp-post, engaging a small boy to keep an eye on them.

"What in thunder—" exclaimed Dick Hardin, springing out of the carriage. "Where have you brought me, Thomas?"

Tom laid his hand on the young man's arm. There were tears in his eyes.

"I've brought you—home, my boy," he said gently.

"I want you to come up-stairs with me. There's something most important for us to be talkin' over—an' now that Newman's shown his hand, I'm prepared to show mine. I want your help, lad."

Hardin followed him up the stairs, his wonder growing every second, until they had reached the door of Tom's modest home.

Tom opened the door with his latch-key. They entered, and as the door closed upon them there was a muffled woman's cry from within.

Tom had brought his boy home.

Mary's intuitions were correct. Incredible as it may seem, inquiry revealed the fact that Richard Hardin was her own son.

Tom, also, had been right when he said that the boy would not be ashamed of his parents. Dick's eyes were as wet as their own when they had questioned each other, inspected the papers that Mary had in her possession, and gone through the whole sad story for the second or third time.

When Tom told how he had been tricked by Newman, the young man could scarcely believe the story until his father brought out the strip of parchment from the little tin box.

"Irene has told me many times how her father came into possession of the map," he said meditatively. "She is immensely proud of that map. It was she who had it framed. I know she said he was not enthusiastic about it. I think I understand now why he wasn't." He paused.

"I wonder," he went on, "if we can't take a chance on it. I believe that Newman's a coward at heart."

"Faith, an' I know he is!" said Tom warmly. "I've had every reason to know that."

"What's more, his whole life is bound up in Irene. He wants her to believe in him. We'll go back and face him together—father!"

Tom's face flushed with pride as his boy used the unfamiliar name. A lump came into his throat, and he could scarcely speak.

Then the little Irishman grew very sober.

"See here, boy," he said, "I'm not ashamed of myself—nor of my poverty. That ain't no fault of mine. It's only an accident. I ought to be rollin' in money like that blackguard of a Newman—but—" He stopped, then went on bravely: "But there's a chance that the young lady might throw you over, Dick, if—if she knew that I'm your father."

"She'd be more likely to throw me over because of her own father's wickedness—if she ever discovered it," said Dick. "Irene's true blue. She's a lady, if she *is* his daughter."

He paused and smiled. Then he said slyly:

"But the truth of the matter is, she can't throw me over whether she wants to or not. *We were married this afternoon!*"

"Married!" cried Tom, beginning to understand. "When you went out—this afternoon?"

Dick nodded.

"That's the size of it. And I'm mighty glad, too. No matter what happens, we can't be separated now!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MILLS OF THE GODS.

MARY felt that she could not spare Dick right away, so Tom drove the carriage back alone.

It was not in his mind to have any controversy with Newman at this time. He had promised his wife and Dick that he would wait until affairs so shaped themselves that the matter could be handled with some assurance of success.

They must lay their plans and have every proof. The millionaire must find himself hemmed in by evidence so damning that he could do nothing but hold up his hands.

Dick insisted that his father should receive justice. But they must wait a few days until it could be decided what was the best way to go about it.

As Tom drove the coupé into the stable, he felt that he had never been so nearly happy in his life. The mere finding of his son was nothing compared with the joy and pride he felt that the boy was not ashamed of him or of his mother.

Tom whistled softly to himself as he went about assisting the stable-boy to put up the horses. He had quite forgotten the orders Newman had given about reporting to him when he should have driven Hardin "home."

The telephone reminded him. He answered it, and the frightened voice of Walker came to him over the wire.

"The marster's wantin' you, immediate—in the library," it said. Then added softly, "Mind 'is temper—it's somethin' orful!"

"I'll mind it," said Tom, so gayly that Walker shuddered. It was too bad that the new coachman did not realize the enormity of his offense, or the perilous position he was in.

Tom stalked through the house to the library. He had not looked for this interview. If anything came of it—well, he would tell Mary and Dick that it wasn't his fault.

At the door of the library he paused. Newman was standing before the desk with his back to him, and paid no attention when he entered. Tom coughed. Still the millionaire feigned not to notice.

Then Tom spoke.

"You were wantin' me, Mr. Newman?" he said politely.

Newman turned upon him with savage, glowering face.

"Yes, I wanted you. Why didn't you come before?"

"I'm here now, if it pleases you," said Tom, feeling the blood of his fighting ancestors rising up in him. He let his hand rest on the torn strip of parchment which he had thrust into his pocket.

"You understand the orders of this house, do you not?" questioned Newman.

"What orders?" parleyed Tom.

"About that cur Hardin!"

"He's no cur!" cried Tom, losing control of himself completely at this epithet. "I'll have you hould your tongue when you speak about your betters!" he roared.

Newman rose from his chair, choleric with wrath.

"Why—why—" he began, almost choking. "I can scarcely keep my hands off you, you low-born—"

"Don't keep 'em off—come on—I'm waitin' for you!" said Tom, stripping off his coat and flinging it to the floor. "I've been waitin' to get even with you a long time—*Johnny Newton!*"

Newman looked quickly toward the bell-rope. He thought the coachman had suddenly gone insane.

"No—not yet. Don't you be after callin' Walker nor none of 'em—yet, unless you want me to tell 'em everything. If you know what's good for you—*Johnny Newton!*" He repeated the name with insulting emphasis.

A cunning look came into the face of the other man. It was mingled with fear.

"What do you call me by that name for?" he said, in even, low tones.

"Take a look at me, Johnny, and answer the question for yourself," replied Tom, lowering his voice to match the other's.

"Take one good look at me—don't I remind you of anything?"

Newman did so. Slowly his face paled and beads of perspiration stood out about his lips. He shivered, as though suddenly cold.

"When you look at me," said Tom, getting right down to an enjoyment of his victim's torture, "what do you see? I'll tell you, Johnny. I can read your mind." He stepped closer, and Newton retreated a step or two.

"No—don't go away. This ought to interest you. I know you've been huntin' for to find me. The last time you saw me, Johnny, it was daybreak—no, maybe it was midnight—I can't tell exactly, when you took your French leave. But I was sleepin' and you didn't wake me up to say good-by. Do you remember, Johnny? Those cold, lonesome mountains—an' Pete an' me? I wonder did you ever think of us, an' how we took it when we woke up at last—an' you an' the horses gone?"

Newman's whole body shook as though with the ague, and he dropped weakly into a chair.

"It can't be possible," he cried in a hoarse whisper. "I say it can't be possible—that you—that you are—"

"That I'm 'Tom Doyle'? You wonder how I ever got out of it alive? I've wondered myself many and many's the time. I thought, as far as I was concerned, that the trail ended there on that mountain. But it didn't end there, Johnny, nor did it end at the gold-fields, where you got the wealth that was comin' to both of us. No, it didn't end there. It's led straight up to here. An' the curious part of it is, Johnny, that we've fetched up together, as Kendrick meant we should."

"What do you mean?" cried Newman, with sudden courage. "Don't you try to blackmail me—you—"

"Blackmail nothin'!" roared Tom. "That's a nice word for you to use! Listen here—call it what you please. This I'm goin' to tell you, here an' now. I'm not greedy after money like you, Johnny. All I want's enough to live comfortable on the rest of my days. An' when I say comfortable, I don't mean nothin' too small, either. Mary an' I have been wantin' to go back to the old country these many years. Give me enough of my own money to buy us a good farm an' home—an' that's all I want for *myself.*"

Newman eyed him suspiciously.

"All you want for yourself?" he repeated cautiously.

"Yes," said Tom. "But it'll probably be news to you that it's my own son that your daughter is in love with—"

"Hardin!" cried Newman, "I don't understand—I—"

"You don't have to understand. Scarcely do I understand it myself, but it's true. She's goin' to marry him—an' I'll see that you do the right thing by 'em both before I lave these shores—"

"And I'll see *you* dead first!" cried the other, his eyes blazing with wrath. "Get out of here—not one penny of my money—"

"Your money, eh? I'll show you."

"I never saw you before in my life! You're a crazy man—I'll have you committed—"

"You will, will you?" said Tom quietly. "So that's the game." He lifted his finger slowly and pointed to the parchment map hanging on the wall.

"There's a strip torn off that map," he said with subtle meaning. "You forgot to take it with you when you left that night—you took everything else—but I've got the strip and it fits that map. Your daughter—do you think I could make her believe me? If I was to show her the strip an' explain—"

"You lie!" cried Newman; "you haven't got the proof of anything."

"It's here in my pocket," said Tom.

There was a slight stir in the hall outside the library. Both men stopped speaking. Presently the curtains were brushed aside and Irene stood in the doorway. Her face was tear-stained.

"Father," she cried piteously, "I think I ought to tell you—Thomas isn't to blame. Not in the least to blame. Don't scold him. It was all my fault."

Tom could scarcely restrain himself at sight of her grief.

"Don't you be worryin'," he said soothingly. "It's all right. Your father an' I will settle it."

"Yes, Irene," said Newman, endeavoring to control his voice. "I can deal with Thomas."

"Faith, an' can you?" said Tom under his breath.

But Irene did not go. Instead, she came farther into the room. "There is something else, father," she said, "I didn't tell you before, because you were so angry. It's—it's—just this."

In her confusion she forgot Tom's presence completely. She ran to her father's chair and knelt on the floor before him.

"Father," she whispered, "please forgive me! I simply could not live without Dick—and we were married this afternoon!"

"Married!" cried her father. "Married to that—that—"

"Gentleman!" said Tom sharply.

Newman favored him with an ugly glance.

"I told you that if you married him—" he began threateningly.

"Now, see here," interrupted Tom, "I know it isn't any of my business, but I'm going to make it so. You let her be happy—"

Newman jumped to his feet.

"This is too much—" he began hotly.

"Is it?" said Tom, rattling the piece of parchment in his coat-pocket. "What was it you said about 'blackmail' a minute ago?" He paused, and Irene looked on, wondering what it all meant.

Newman sank back again into the chair and mopped his forehead with his handkerchief.

"All right," he said thickly. "It's done and—can't be helped, I guess!"

"Oh, father, and you forgive us? You are not angry any more?"

"Faith, an' he has a good heart, Miss Irene," said Tom lightly. "He'll do more'n that by you!"

"Now, go, daughter," said Newman, pushing her from him gently. "It's all right, I told you. You've won out, as you always do. I have a small matter to discuss with—Thomas."

When Irene had left the room, Newman looked like a broken old man. He rested his head on his hand wearily.

"She must never know!" he murmured half to himself.

"An' she won't know—not through me," said Tom. "All I ask of you is to do the right thing, Johnny Newton!"

Tom paused a moment.

"Look here, Johnny," he continued impulsively. "I used to think that hangin' would be too good for you. I used to think I wouldn't be able to keep my hands off you when I saw you—supposin' that I ever did see you again. But I've learned different. . . . Even now I don't trust you altogether, an' you'll get your lawyer up and square this thing before I quit you. But I've got less hard feelin's than I used to have. I guess it's because I've suffered so much myself."

His eyes filled with tears and he mopped them off awkwardly on his coat-sleeve.

"It's queer, Johnny," he concluded—"it's queer—what you find at the end of the trail! It ain't always what you think it's goin' to be."

John Newman nodded his head slowly in acquiescence.

THE SCARLET NECKTIE.

By C. LANGTON CLARKE,

Author of "The Diamond in the Discard," "An Expensive Boarder," "Cousin Almira's Baby," etc.

In which Mrs. Scales lands her long-suffering husband into hot water and his friend Butterworth shoves him completely under.

MRS. SCALES, with a small mountain of cardboard boxes in front of her, and a pessimistic clerk regarding her gloomily across them, held up a necktie of a particularly vivid coloring, the while she regarded it critically with her head on one side.

"Do you know, I rather like that one," she said to her friend, Mrs. Forrester, who had accompanied her to select a present for Mr. Scales.

The tie was of a brilliant scarlet, with a tracery of green, and liberally sprinkled with large blue forget-me-nots.

"Not for Mr. Scales, surely!" expostulated Mrs. Forrester in accents of astonishment.

"Why not?" demanded Mrs. Scales defiantly.

"Because," said Mrs. Forrester, "Mr. Scales's tastes always seemed to me to run to neutral tints; I never saw him wear anything more pronounced than slate color."

"That's where he makes such a mistake," retorted Mrs. Scales petulantly. "He always looks as dingy as a sparrow. I have been at him for ever so long to get a suit of checks, but he won't. Now, if I bought him this tie, he would simply have to get something a little more striking to go with it."

"He would if he wore it," assented Mrs. Forrester.

Mrs. Scales's lips tightened, and her eyebrows drew together.

"If I buy this tie for Mr. Scales," she said simply, "he will wear it."

The clerk, who had been listening languidly to the conversation, thought it time to put in a word of encouragement.

"It's a very handsome tie," he remarked.

"And it's not loud, is it?" queried Mrs. Scales. "The colors blend beautifully, and I ought to know something about color, because I took a course of art lessons once. The teacher said I had a wonderful eye for it."

"Loud?" cried the clerk. "Not at all. There's lots of gentlemen wear far louder ties than that."

"They must wear something over them," commented Mrs. Forrester. "I never saw them."

The clerk greeted this remark with a smile of tolerant contempt.

"The fact of the matter is," he said in tones of confidence, "that tie has a sort of history. It is one of a special weave made for King Edward. There were a few left over, and of course the manufacturer could not sell them in England. Our buyer noticed them, and bought three on the express condition that they were to be sold on this side. The other two went to our New York house, but I guess they were snapped up long ago."

"There!" cried Mrs. Scales, turning triumphantly to her friend. "What have you got to say now? I guess if King Edward can wear them Mr. Scales can."

"Perhaps the king bought them as presents for some of his servants," suggested Mrs. Forrester aggravatingly.

Mrs. Scales tossed her head, and sniffed aggressively. She was in the main a good-tempered and reasonable woman, but direct opposition invariably confirmed her in her own view of a subject, and rendered her deaf to all arguments.

"I'm going to take it anyway," she declared. "I think I can trust my own taste."

A faint smile on Mrs. Forrester's lips still further strengthened her determination, and she threw the tie over to the clerk with a brusk query regarding the price.

"Two dollars and a half, madam," re-

plied the clerk, who believed in making the most of an opportunity and was aware that Mrs. Scales had irrevocably committed herself.

"Two dollars and a half?" repeated Mrs. Scales. "Why, these others are only a dollar."

The clerk explained patiently that this particular tie must not be regarded as at all in the same class with the rest, and Mrs. Scales handed over the money with a very ill grace.

"I believe he cheated me," she said to Mrs. Forrester in an aggrieved tone as they left the store.

"I'm quite sure he did," replied her companion cheerfully.

"Then I think you might have said so at the time," responded Mrs. Scales. "No business of yours? Oh, of course, if you look at it in that way. No, thanks—I don't want any tea—I'm going home."

"Take care you don't lose the tie," laughed Mrs. Forrester good-naturedly. "I would give anything to see Mr. Scales's face when you present it."

Mrs. Scales bit her lips in annoyance, and turned away with a curt farewell.

II.

"I BOUGHT a tie for you this afternoon," Mrs. Scales said to her husband as they sat at dinner. "A very pretty tie. Mrs. Forrester was with me, and she was awfully nasty about it. Said she was sure you wouldn't wear it. I just told her that if I bought it you *would* wear it. Don't you think I did perfectly right?"

"I haven't seen the tie," replied Mr. Scales, whose countenance betokened some alarm.

"I don't see that that has anything to do with it," said Mrs. Scales sharply. "It's a question of principle. You know I wouldn't want you to do anything you shouldn't."

"Of course not," Mr. Scales concurred heartily. "Let's have a look at the tie. I suppose it's a little more pronounced than I'm accustomed to."

"A little," assented the wife.

She picked up a small parcel which lay beside her plate, and passed it to her husband.

Mr. Scales, unwinding the wrapping with hasty fingers, sank back in his chair, and regarded the enclosure with every manifestation of abhorrence.

"Good Lord!" he gasped. "Where on earth did you pick this thing up?"

"What's the matter with it?" demanded Mrs. Scales quickly.

"It's a lovely tie," replied Mr. Scales with bitter sarcasm. "Quite unique. Where's the rest of the outfit?"

"What outfit?" asked Mrs. Scales belligerently.

"Why, the striped suit, and the big collar, and the banjo," replied her husband.

He picked up a soup ladle, and sweeping his fingers over imaginary strings, trolled a few lines of a coon song to give additional point to his criticism.

Mrs. Scales burst into a flood of tears.

"I think you're just too mean for anything," she sobbed. "You are not a bit funny—only vulgar. I spent a whole hour picking it out, and now you make fun of it."

Mr. Scales, who, like most men, had a nervous dread of tears, hastened to express his contrition.

"I didn't mean to hurt your feelings," he said soothingly, "but—but you must admit that this tie is a little—shall we say striking?"

"Of course it's striking," replied Mrs. Scales. "That is why I bought it. I want you to wear things a little more striking. One would think you were a Puritan elder. Nobody will ever look at you, the way you dress."

"But I don't want people to look at me," expostulated the husband. "I'd much rather they wouldn't."

"It's all very well for you to talk," insisted Mrs. Scales, "but don't you think a woman wants her husband to look well dressed? It may be all right for good-looking and distinguished people to wear very plain clothes—"

"Thanks," interjected Mr. Scales dryly.

"But," continued Mrs. Scales, "you need something to set you off."

"This tie would set a powder magazine off," remarked Mr. Scales, who, though not a vain man, was not best pleased at his wife's disparaging reference to his personal appearance.

"You will put it on after dinner," said Mrs. Scales in a tone of finality, "and let me see how it looks."

Mr. Scales shrugged his shoulders resignedly, and the meal was concluded in painful silence.

III.

"I'M sure, George, it looks splendid," Mrs. Scales explained, when her husband appeared later in the study, with the obnoxious neckgear tied so as to display its glaring colors to the greatest advantage. "Not a bit loud. You will wear it to your office to-morrow. Now, it's no use your looking like that—I told Mrs. Forrester you would wear it, and you've just got to. And you had better order a suit to go with it. People who don't know you will take you for Lord Elsingham—I see by the paper that he is staying at the Imperial."

"More likely they'll take me for a bookmaker," growled Mr. Scales.

"And you will wear it to-morrow night when we go to the Forresters'," continued Mrs. Scales, unheeding. "Mrs. Forrester asks us around for a quiet game of bridge. I want her to see that I was right."

"She must be very easily convinced," Mr. Scales was beginning, when the door-bell rang, and a few moments later the servant ushered in a short, stout, well-groomed man of middle age.

"Hello, Butterworth!" Mr. Scales cried hospitably. "Glad to see you."

Mr. Butterworth, having shaken hands with Mrs. Scales, turned to his host, and then, reeling against the door-post, clung there with one hand, while he shaded his eyes with the other.

"Take it away!" he cried hoarsely. "Take it away—it's blinding me."

"Take what away?" asked Mrs. Scales, alarmed by this unexpected demonstration.

"That tie," explained Mr. Butterworth in a faint voice. "My eyesight is not as strong as it used to be."

"So I should imagine," replied Mrs. Scales in her most chilling tones, while her husband grinned appreciatively. "*I* bought that for Mr. Scales. Have you got anything to say against it?"

"Not a word," responded Mr. Butterworth hastily, and resuming his normal demeanor. "It's a beautiful tie—but—"

"Well?" demanded Mrs. Scales in a hostile voice.

"But," continued Mr. Butterworth diplomatically, "I'm not used to seeing Scales in bright colors. What would look all right on other people is apt to produce a startling effect when he wears it."

"What did I tell you, George?" Mrs. Scales cried triumphantly, as her husband scowled fiercely at his friend. "You see Mr. Butterworth has noticed it. Even your best friend thinks you dress too dingily. I'm glad to say, Mr. Butterworth, that he is going to turn over a new leaf. To-morrow he is going to order a new suit of clothes."

"I'll help him to pick them out," cried Mr. Butterworth enthusiastically. "We'll make him look like Solomon in all his glory."

Mrs. Scales laughed, and bidding her husband let himself be guided by the advice of persons who knew more about dress than he did, departed to attend to some domestic arrangements.

"What the devil do you mean by siding with my wife?" Mr. Scales demanded ferociously, when the two men were alone.

"You don't suppose I was going to get *my* head bitten off for want of a little diplomacy," replied the other. "I flatter myself that no one can pick himself up quicker after a stumble. I know when I've put my foot in it."

"You've put my whole leg in it with your confounded diplomacy," said Mr. Scales angrily. "Nothing will persuade my wife now that this monstrosity is not perfectly correct. She has somehow acquired the absurd idea that you are a man of good taste."

"You ought to be proud of her powers of discrimination," observed Mr. Butterworth calmly.

Mr. Scales emitted a grunt of disgusted dissent.

"She insists that I shall wear this thing to-morrow," he went on, "both down-town and at the Forresters'. We are going there in the evening to play bridge. And all because Mrs. Forrester said I wouldn't wear it, and my wife

insisted that I would. She wants to prove herself in the right at all costs. Doesn't think of my feelings. Just like a woman. And you heard what she said about getting that new suit?"

Mr. Butterworth, gazing abstractedly at his toes, made no reply.

"Why don't you answer?" demanded Mr. Scales aggressively.

"I was thinking," responded the other.

Mr. Scales laughed in a disagreeable fashion.

"Rather an unusual exercise for you, isn't it?" he remarked.

Mr. Butterworth glanced at him with an air superior to all taunts.

"I was thinking about you," he said. "I've got an idea. Your mention of that suit of clothes put it into my head."

"Let's have it," replied Mr. Scales bruskly. "If it's like most of your ideas I don't suppose it's worth much."

"My idea is this," went on Mr. Butterworth, too intent upon his scheme to pay heed to the other's manner. "Why not give your wife a lesson?"

"A lesson?" echoed the puzzled Mr. Scales.

"Precisely. She wants you to get a suit to match that tie. To-morrow we will go to a ready-made clothing place and pick out the loudest suit we can find. I saw some startlers in a window a few days ago. Take 'em home with you and dress yourself in them in the evening, taking care to put on that long Inverness before your wife sees them. Let her catch first sight of them in the Forresters' drawing-room. I think she will be quite content to let you wear quiet colors afterward."

"She might make things unpleasant," said Mr. Scales dubiously.

"You don't need to worry about that," replied Mr. Butterworth, with all the happy confidence of the bachelor. "Besides, she won't do anything of the kind. She has more sense of humor than most women. And, anyway, you've got to make a stand. I don't see why you married men are such slaves."

"You will some day," hinted Mr. Scales darkly. "However, the idea is not a bad one. I'll think it over."

He continued to think it over, and Mr. Butterworth to ply him with insidious arguments, until he agreed to the plan.

"It's not as if there would be any one else there but the Forresters," he said. "And I guess they'll appreciate the joke as much as any one."

"Of course they will," Mr. Butterworth assured him in tones of conviction. "I might drop around myself—I'd like to see the fun. Of course, I rely on you not to give me away. I don't want to get into your wife's bad books."

Mr. Scales gave the desired assurance, and the other took his departure, promising to call for his friend at his office the following morning, and help him select raiment suitable to the much despised necktie.

IV.

"HAVEN'T you got something a little more startling?" Mr. Butterworth inquired of the salesman in the clothing emporium, as he held up a suit which appeared to have been fashioned out of a horse-blanket. "This is pretty noisy, but my friend here wants something a little louder."

The clerk, after an involuntary glance at Mr. Scales's sober raiment, turned his eyes again on Mr. Butterworth, his brow puckered in bewilderment.

"It's for a fancy dress ball," said Mr. Scales, who, in justice to himself, felt bound to volunteer some explanation.

"Oh, indeed?" replied the clerk, obviously relieved. "Well, sir, I believe we have something that might do. We do a little in the made-to-order business. A few months ago, Mike McGraw, the saloon man—he's a brother-in-law of the boss—ordered a suit off an odd sample length we had in stock. He dresses pretty loud, but when he saw that suit made up, he said he wouldn't wear it at a coon ball if he got paid a dollar a minute. It's something fierce. Of course, his being a relation, the boss took it back. He said he might be able to sell it for some vaudeville act, but we've got it still. I guess it would just about fit you."

"Bring it along," said Mr. Butterworth, rubbing his hands with delight. "If Mike wouldn't wear it, it must be something out of the way."

The clerk departed, and presently returned with a set of garments which made both customers open their eyes.

The cloth was of black and white checks, about three quarters of an inch square, and running horizontally, vertically and diagonally were stripes of vivid crimson, orange, and purple. The cut was decidedly sporting, with tight trousers and open vest.

"First rate!" cried Mr. Butterworth, enchanted. "You couldn't improve on that."

"You don't suppose I'm going to wear that abomination," Mr. Scales expostulated indignantly.

"Why not?" insisted the other. "What's the use of doing things by halves? Here's Providence throwing this suit of clothes in your way. You might search for a week and not find anything like them—and now you want to back out. It's almost irreligious. Your wife told you to get a suit of checks, didn't she? You'd call this a checked suit, wouldn't you?" he continued, turning to the clerk.

The man, with a furtive grin, said he thought it might be correctly so designated.

"We'll let you have it at half price," he added. "Only ten dollars."

"We'll take it," said Mr. Butterworth decidedly, and turning a deaf ear to his friend's protests. "Let's have another look at the tie, Scales."

Mr. Scales, who had sallied forth that morning under his wife's eye wearing the new tie, but had substituted another in the recesses of the first convenient alleyway, sulkily produced the ornament from his pocket.

"Capital!" exclaimed Mr. Butterworth, laying it on the coat, and regarding the combination with his head on one side. "See how the colors blend, Scales?"

The other, unable to make any headway against the enthusiasm and determination of his friend, grunted an inarticulate reply, and Mr. Butterworth, having negatived a proposal that the parcel should be delivered, on the ground that Mrs. Scales might open it, tucked the purchase under his arm, and towed the unresisting Mr. Scales into the street.

"And don't you forget," he said authoritatively, as he handed the parcel over, and took leave of his friend. "Dress in your own room, and be sure you have your cloak on before your wife sees you. Better roll your trousers up well. I'm acting the part of a real friend in this, Scales—giving you the chance of your life to assert yourself—and you'll thank me later."

He turned a deaf ear to the strong expressions of doubt to which the other gave utterance, and hurried away.

Later in the day Mr. Scales received a small parcel containing a pair of socks of the royal Stuart plaid, and an imitation diamond pin the size of a marble. Enclosed was the following brief note:

> Here are a couple of finishing touches. If you fail to come up to the scratch after all my trouble, I'll never forgive you. Be a man. BUTTERWORTH.

Mr. Scales, after bestowing one glance of extreme disfavor on the gift, thrust the parcel into his overcoat pocket with a shrug of the shoulders.

"Oh, well," he said resignedly. "If I'm going to make a monkey of myself to please Butterworth, I may as well do it thoroughly."

Then he dismissed the subject from his mind, and settled down to clear off some arrears of work.

He finished a full hour before his usual time for leaving, and having nothing further to occupy him; and being anxious to get his parcel safely into his dressing-room before his wife's return from a tea she was attending, took his departure, greatly to the satisfaction of his office boy, who at once ensconed himself in his employer's desk chair.

The youth, with his feet on the desk and a cigarette between his lips, was deep in the evening paper, when he was interrupted by the entrance of Mr. Butterworth.

Gloom sat enthroned on the visitor's brow, and he scowled darkly on the abashed culprit.

"Where's Mr. Scales?" he demanded sternly.

"Mr. Scales went home, sir, about half an hour ago," said the boy, thrusting the lighted cigarette into his pocket. "Did you wish to see him, sir?"

"What d'ye suppose I came here for?" asked Mr. Butterworth, who was obviously in an extremely bad temper.

The boy made no reply, and Mr. Butterworth's eyes wandered about the room, as though in search of some further object of resentment.

Suddenly his gaze rested on a note, lying conspicuous on the desk, and he picked it up.

"When did this come?" he asked, as he closely examined the superscription.

"About fifteen minutes after Mr. Scales left," replied the boy.

"Do you know whom it is from?" demanded the other.

"No, sir," replied the youth hurriedly. "The boy as brought it said there was no answer, so I left it for Mr. Scales to get in the morning."

For a full minute Mr. Butterworth stood regarding the note with a frowning brow, and it was evident even to the limited intelligence of his youthful observer that a severe struggle of some sort was going on within his breast.

Finally, his countenance cleared, and to the intense surprise of the boy, he patted him kindly on the head.

"You're a smart lad," he said, "but you smoke too many cigarettes, I'm afraid."

The boy, emboldened by his manner, ventured to proffer a request.

"I hope you won't say nothing to Mr. Scales, sir."

"N-no," replied Mr. Butterworth. "I don't see that it's any of my business. But, in that case, perhaps you had better not mention my having called."

He threw the note back on the desk, and the boy, with profuse expressions of gratitude, and promises of amendment, sprang to open the door.

He partially closed it behind his visitor, and then, with his eye glued to the crack, watched him pass through the outer office.

To his surprise, Mr. Butterworth, instead of departing, sank into a chair, and gave way to an ecstasy of suppressed merriment.

"I simply can't help it," the boy heard him say in strangled tones. "It would be flying into the face of Providence. The joke's too good. I wouldn't miss seeing their faces for a thousand dollars. Forrester has only himself to blame. He ought to be more careful."

He recovered his composure in a few moments, and passed out, and the office boy returned to his cigarette, and a fruitless attempt to solve the mystery of the visitor's behavior.

V.

"DID you order that suit?" Mrs. Scales demanded of her husband as they sat at dinner.

"I did," replied Mr. Scales shortly.

"Checks?" persisted Mrs. Scales.

Mr. Scales nodded. "Black and white checks," he said.

"Really?" cried his wife, clasping her hands in delight. "You couldn't have got anything I like better. I just love shepherd's plaid. You remember old Colonel Grimes. He always wore shepherd's plaid, and you know how distinguished he always looked."

Mr. Scales, wiping his lips with his napkin for a full half minute, made no reply.

"And don't forget to keep on that tie for the Forresters," Mrs. Scales continued. "You've no idea how it changes your appearance. I'm just dying to make Mrs. Forrester admit she was wrong."

Mr. Scales diplomatically diverted the conversation into other channels, and during the remainder of the meal the question of his personal adornment was not again referred to.

"Nearly ready, George?" Mrs. Scales shrilled from her bedroom half an hour later.

"In five minutes," responded the husband.

He was standing before the pier glass in his dressing-room, and regarding, with an expression of mingled disgust and amusement, the startling figure in the mirror.

The new clothes, which sat tightly on his somewhat portly form, looked even more glaring, if that were possible, by gaslight than in the shadows of the store. Amid the folds of the new tie, which the low-cut vest displayed to the fullest advantage, the imitation diamond gleamed glassily, and four inches of brilliant tartan leg and ankle put a complete finish to the grotesque whole.

For a full minute he wrestled with an

almost irresistible desire to cast off the disfiguring raiment, and attire himself in his own sober-hued garments, but the recollection of his promise to Mr. Butterworth, and his own determination to present to his wife an object lesson in male attire, came to his rescue.

He snatched his Inverness cloak from the closet, buttoned himself up to the chin, and went out into the passage to meet his wife emerging from her room.

"Ready at last, George?" Mrs. Scales asked cheerily. "Good gracious! What have you got on your feet?"

"A pair of socks Butterworth gave me," responded the husband glibly. "I'm sure if you don't object to the tie, you can't find any fault with them."

He opened the neck of his cloak, and displayed a square inch of scarlet to his wife's gaze.

"I suppose not," said Mrs. Scales dubiously. "What have you got your trousers rolled up like that for?"

"Muddy," replied Mr. Scales laconically. "Besides, it's raining in England, and I've got to be in style."

Mrs. Scales sniffed disapprovingly at this levity, but accepted the explanation, and the pair started for the Forresters'.

They were nearing their destination, when a figure, habited like Mr. Scales in a long Inverness, approached them from a side street.

"Hello, Butterworth!" cried Mr. Scales, replying with a slight nod to the anxious query in his friend's raised eyebrows. "We're just on our way to the Forresters'."

"That's a piece of luck," responded Mr. Butterworth heartily. "I was just on my way there myself. Thought I'd drop around and have a cigar."

Mr. Scales glanced severely at his disingenuous friend.

"I told you last night we were invited to play bridge," he retorted.

"Did you?" said Mr. Butterworth carelessly. "I don't remember. It's impossible to remember all you say, Scales, once you get started talking."

The approach of a couple of baby carriages abreast necessitated a single file formation, and gave Mr. Butterworth the opportunity to remind the other that his, Butterworth's, complicity in the plot, was to remain a secret.

"If you gave me away after all I've done for you," he said in a warning whisper, "our friendship ceases."

On their arrival at their destination they were met in the hall by Mrs. Forrester, who whisked Mrs. Scales up-stairs to take off her things.

"Mr. Scales is wearing that tie," the latter said with a proud glance at her husband.

"Is he?" replied the hostess, with a puzzled look at Mr. Scales. "That's very nice. Take off your overcoats, will you, and go into the drawing-room. Mr. Forrester will be down in a few minutes."

Mr. Butterworth was the first to remove his outer husk, and Mr. Scales glared with indignation on an immaculate dress-suit and gleaming expanse of snowy linen.

"What the devil do you mean by putting on your dress clothes?" he demanded. "This isn't a party."

"I like to wear 'em," Mr. Butterworth replied coolly. "Besides, I shall be a sort of foil for you. Hurry up, and let's have a look at your make-up."

Mr. Scales wrenched off his coat, and Mr. Butterworth walked around him with delight written on every lineament.

"You certainly are the limit," he said at last. "Come on—don't let them see you out here."

He dragged his indignant friend into the drawing-room. A trim parlor maid, who was just coming out, gave one glance at Mr. Scales, clapped a duster to her lips, and beat a hasty retreat down the hall.

"Beginning to create a sensation already," said Mr. Butterworth, delightedly. "Here they come! For Heaven's sake, try to look natural and cheerful."

Mrs. Scales was the first to enter the room. Her eyes fell on her husband, and she stood rooted to the floor, deprived of all power of speech or motion. Mr. Forrester, entering with his wife, greeted Mr. Butterworth with cordiality.

"Didn't expect to see you, Butterworth," he said. "Glad you came around. And how's my friend Scales?"

Mr. Scales, who had retired somewhat into the background, came forward with an embarrassed shuffle and extended hand.

Mr. Forrester was a trifle near-sighted, although he would never confess to it, and it was not until his guest was close to him that he was able to grasp the details of his costume.

"Good Lord—Scales!" he cried, regarding the grotesque figure with a look of mingled astonishment and annoyance. "Are you crazy?"

Mr. Scales smiled fatuously.

"This is my wife's doing," he replied, with a downward glance at his apparel.

"Didn't you get my note?" Mr. Forrester demanded peremptorily, while Mrs. Scales fought for her breath.

"Note?" replied Mr. Scales, staring at him. "What note?"

"I sent it round to your office at half past four," said Mr. Forrester bruskly. "I don't understand why you didn't receive it."

"I left my office at a quarter past," returned the other, with a sinking heart. "What was in it?"

Before Mr. Forrester could reply the door-bell rang again, and a moment later voices were heard in the hall. Mr. Forrester threw up his hands with a despairing gesture, and went out, followed by his wife.

"Haw'r' you, Forrester?" said a voice with an unmistakably English accent. "Hope we're not too early. Lady Elsingham has a perfect mania for running ahead of the clock."

"George," said Mrs. Scales, in a horror-stricken whisper, "what does this mean? Never mind trying to explain now," with a stamp of her foot. "Get out of sight."

"I can't," cried the unfortunate man, staring wildly about him. "There's no way out but the window."

All the color had fled from his cheeks, and his face reflected the anguish in his wife's.

"Crawl under the sofa," suggested Mr. Butterworth, with a hypocritical assumption of concern.

The look which Mr. Scales bestowed on his treacherous friend would have withered a cactus.

"I have you to thank for this," he said furiously.

"*Me?*" returned Mr. Butterworth in accents of intense surprise.

Mr. Scales's reply was interrupted by the entrance of his host, accompanied by a tall, high-bred looking man with aquiline features, and a fair mustache, already beginning to grizzle.

"Lord Elsingham—Mrs. Scales," said Mr. Forrester.

The lady was too much flustered to have any distinct recollection afterward of how she went through the ceremony of introduction. A live lord was something new in her experience, and a sidelong vision of her husband, concealing as much of his person as possible behind an armchair, completed her discomfiture.

"Mr. Butterworth," said Mr. Forrester.

"We have met before," replied Lord Elsingham, looking down benevolently at the other through his monocle. "Had quite a chat at the club this afternoon on your very interesting country. I told him I was coming here, but I don't think he mentioned that I should have the pleasure of meeting him again."

"N-n-no," said Mr. Butterworth, in considerable confusion. "I—I don't think I mentioned it."

"Mr. Butterworth is an unexpected guest," said Mr. Forrester dryly. "*Mr. Scales.*"

There was that in his tone which seemed to add: "This is a person for whom I disclaim all responsibility."

Mr. Scales, compelled to abandon his shelter, came forward, and Lord Elsingham turned his eye-glass upon him. An uncontrollable flicker of surprise crossed his countenance, and his slightly raised eyebrows allowed the monocle to fall dangling against his vest. He recovered it with deliberation and re-affixed it in his eye, while Mr. Scales felt like some monstrosity under the lens of the microscope.

"Ah!" said his lordship. "Hah de do?"

There was an indefinable condescension about the brief utterance, much as if he had suffered an introduction to a friend's butler.

Mr. Scales, who was painfully sensitive, flushed to the roots of his hair, and retired again behind his armchair, whence he shot lightning glances at Mr. Butterworth, who took special pains to avoid his eye.

The entrance of Lady Elsingham was the occasion for another ordeal, the noble

guest regarding Mr. Scales with the unaffected surprise of one beholding for the first time the splendors of a chief of some barbaric isle.

"What do you say to a game of bridge?" queried Mr. Forrester, after half an hour's desultory conversation, in which Mr. Scales, who felt like an outcast, took no part. "Care to play, Scales?"

The question so clearly conveyed the expectation of a refusal that Mr. Scales shook his head.

"No, thanks," he replied shortly. "Not to-night."

"You play bridge?" queried Lady Elsingham, addressing him for the first time. If she had added: "I thought only the upper classes played bridge," she could not have more clearly expressed her meaning.

"Mr. Scales is quite a player," interrupted Mr. Forrester hastily. "Only he isn't always in form. That will make the number just right, Lady Elsingham and Mr. Butterworth against Lord Elsingham and Mrs. Scales."

He wheeled out the card-table, and the game was soon in progress, Mrs. Scales's unbroken succession of mistakes, due to her agitation, taxing her partner's politeness to the uttermost.

Mr. Scales, thankful that the attention of the other members of the party was temporarily distracted, sat gloomily on a sofa, revolving his difficulties in his mind, and trying to think out some way of escape. The chance words which Lord Elsingham had let slip convinced him that Mr. Butterworth had been fully aware that his lordship was to be there that night, and that his propensity toward practical jokes had proved too strong even for a friendship of many years' standing.

Incidentally, he recalled several particularly painful forms of medieval torture, and regretted that the advance of civilization had placed them beyond the reach of one seeking revenge.

"What the deuce possessed you to make such a monkey of yourself, Scales?" asked Mr. Forrester, seating himself by the side of his despondent guest, and speaking in a voice which conveyed in its tones both reproof and disgust.

"It's that beast Butterworth," replied Mr. Scales. "He got me into this. You heard what Lord Elsingham said. Butterworth knew well enough that he was to be here to-night. I suppose that is what your note was about?"

Mr. Forrester nodded.

"Lord Elsingham is a sort of third cousin of mine," he said. "I met him this afternoon and he accepted a hurried invitation. I wrote you a line to let you know, so that you might dress. A man is apt to feel a little awkward in morning clothes."

"He feels a blame sight more awkward in this kind of clothes," replied Mr. Scales bitterly.

"But I don't understand how you came to wear them, lord or no lord," persisted the other.

Mr. Scales, considering that his friend's treachery entirely absolved him from his vow of secrecy, poured out the whole story, putting the whole blame on Mr. Butterworth.

"What I don't understand is," he continued, "how he knew that I had not heard from you. He must have known, because when we met him on the way here, I could tell from his manner that he fully expected that I was carrying out his infernal trick. I felt all along that it was a fool business, but you know what Butterworth is — he'll persuade you that black is white."

"There's no mistake about the black and white in those clothes," commented the other. "I shall have a word to say to Master Butterworth myself. Making fools of us all! You ought to have had more sense, Scales."

"If you would think of some way for me to get out of this instead of finding fault, I should be obliged to you," said Mr. Scales morosely. "It's a hanged sight worse for me than for you. I can't explain that it's all a joke. Anyway, they're English and wouldn't understand it if I did."

Mr. Forrester coughed expressively, and his guest glared at him.

"What am I to do?" he asked fiercely.

"I don't know," replied the other callously. "I guess we'll all have to tough it out."

It was at this juncture that the woman's wit of Mrs. Scales came to the rescue.

"Don't be late, George," she said.

"Late?" echoed Mr. Scales, staring.

"Yes," replied the lady, carelessly, scanning her cards. "I shouldn't like you to disappoint the children."

Mr. Scales, bewildered, waited silently for further enlightenment.

"Some friends of ours," continued Mrs. Scales, addressing her partner with an ingenuous smile, "are giving a children's fancy dress party to-night. Mr. Scales is a great favorite with them, and he promised to drop in some time during the evening. They insisted on his coming in costume. He had no end of trouble getting something which he thought might amuse them. Unfortunately we didn't know we were to have the pleasure of meeting Lady Elsingham and your lordship; otherwise he would not have put them on."

Mr. Scales, who had listened to his wife's recital, heaved a sigh of relief at the prospects of an early release.

"Oh—Ah—Yes—" said Lord Elsingham, turning slowly in his chair, and scrutinizing Mr. Scales's garments. "Very funny, I'm shaw. May I ask what you are supposed to represent?"

"He is supposed to be an English tourist," said Mrs. Scales, sweetly, as her husband hesitated for an answer. "You've no idea what odd specimens we see sometimes."

For a moment Lord Elsingham seemed about to resent what looked like a covert impertinence, but Mrs. Scales's countenance was so guileless that he thought better of it, and laughed good-naturedly.

"It's not very hard to amuse children," he said. "I'm shaw I hope Mr. Scales's efforts will be successful."

"Men are but children of a larger growth," commented Mr. Butterworth.

"You're a pretty good illustration of that yourself, Butterworth," said Mr. Forrester significantly.

Mrs. Forrester, who had listened astounded to this conversation, was about to ask a question, but caught a warning frown on her husband's brow.

Mr. Scales glanced at his watch, and rose with a grateful glance at his wife, which was very coldly received.

"I'm afraid I'll have to be going," he said, with well-feigned reluctance. "As Mrs. Scales says, it isn't fair to disappoint children. You'll put my wife into a cab, won't you, Forrester?"

"Mr. Butterworth will see me home," said Mrs. Scales brightly.

For a moment Mr. Butterworth hesitated. He was beginning to regret the lengths to which his joke had been carried, particularly since it was manifest that his part in it had been discovered.

"With pleasure," he said at last.

"Thanks," said Mr. Scales, with an hypocritical assumption of cordiality. "And if I am home before you, you might come up to the study, Butterworth, and have a nice, cozy, comfortable chat."

Mr. Butterworth was not to be inveigled in this fashion.

"Sorry," he replied, "but I'm afraid I can't. I have to catch the seven o'clock train for New York to-morrow."

For a moment their eyes met. Mr. Butterworth's countenance was the picture of bland innocence, Mr. Scales's dark and lowering.

"Going to New York at seven to-morrow, are you?" asked the latter when he had made his farewells.

Mr. Butterworth nodded.

"Anybody coming down to see you off?" persisted the other.

"Not that I know of," Mr. Butterworth replied.

"Well, I will," said Mr. Scales.

THE TRUEST CONQUEROR.

WHO quells a nation's wayward will
May lord it on a throne;
But he's a mightier monarch still
Who vanquishes his own.
No power of fortune lays him low;
No treacherous smile allures;
King of himself, through weal or woe—
He conquers who endures.

A CONFLICT WITH CÆSAR.

By F. K. SCRIBNER,
Author of "The Eagle of Empire," "The Ravens of the Rhine," "The Eleventh Rider," etc.

A story of the Roman conquest of Gaul, in which one of the barbarians is pitted against another under a vow before witnesses.

CHAPTER I.

THE PASSING OF A WOLF.

THE captain kicked a smoldering ember into the fire. The action sent a shower of snow, fine as emery-powder, over the half-dozen soldiers gathered around the blaze.

One or two muttered under their breath, and each drew his cloak more tightly about him, but the captain of the guard only shrugged his broad shoulders.

"There is at least the moon's light, else it would be black as the pit in this cursed wilderness," he growled with a little shiver.

Then, as no one replied, he rose stiffly and stamped his feet, encased in their rough bearskin covering.

"And, after all, my friends, it will not be so bad for that poor devil of a Decius; better to take a short shrift than to be slowly frozen to death or tortured in the hands of these barbarians," said he gruffly.

A dark frown passed over the faces of some of his companions; for a moment there was silence; then one, a huge fellow, his face seamed with many scars, growled forth:

"And is there, then, no hope for the man? Are we so many that we must ourselves slay one another? If the order comes to me I have a mind to—"

The captain of the guard raised his head quickly.

"Beware, fellow, what you are saying, or it may fall ill to you also. Let such words reach the commander's ears, and it will be two, not one, the enemy is relieved of. Decius dies to-morrow; the order is imperative."

But the old veteran was not to be so easily quieted; he struck his hand sharply upon his quilted harness.

"By the seven hills! And it has come to that pass—these Germans cannot kill us fast enough, but we must turn and rend one another? And for what is the young man to die? Because, like these human wolves, his locks are flaxen and his eyes blue? Has he not served faithfully under the Eagles these months past? Have we not seen his sword cut through the very center of the opposing ranks? Is he not as brave as those who can show their dozen scars of battle? Why is he to die, I ask?"

The captain shrugged his shoulders and glanced up at the moonlit sky. He fancied no more than the others what must occur on the morrow, but his rank compelled him to hold his peace when his rougher companions might express their views more openly.

The old soldier threw out a knotted fist.

"First, because the commander is ill pleased; secondly, because, having taken a prisoner, he did not kill the fellow, but permitted him to lie unmolested and wounded where he fell. And because this prisoner happened to be a man of note among them, and Decius spared him, the young fool is to die to-morrow. I have seen men honored who were guilty of worse crimes."

Several of his companions nodded their approval, but the face of the captain grew stern.

"No more!" said he sharply, "else I must take note of it; words cannot benefit the prisoner."

Then, fearful that the other would not hold his tongue and he must unwillingly maintain discipline, he moved away from the circle around the fire and passed on, his steel head-piece and harness gleaming cold in the moonlight.

The old soldier scowled into the fire, then at his companions. One broke the silence.

"It is a sorry thing—that the boy must meet such an end, and after so promising a beginning," he muttered.

The old veteran raised his head sharply.

"So you all pity him; but that will scarcely save his head. You have served the commander these six years, and you know him: none more brave, none more thoughtful of our welfare or more generous, but—he is terrible in such a case. It has been told me that the Suevi whom the youth spared has been as a thorn in our side these many weeks, for he was no small man among them, and where he leads his wolves follow him into battle without fear of destruction. To have such a one under the sword-point and permit him to live, a free man, has angered the commander beyond measure. He even holds that Decius is a traitor, carrying the blood he does in his veins."

"I have heard something of that," answered one of his companions. "As you have said, Lucullus, the youth bears much resemblance to these northerners. Is it then true that their blood is in his veins?"

For a moment the old soldier gazed sternly about, then answered gruffly:

"It is true, but until now had not counted against him. The youth's father saw much service under the Eagles and was ever reckoned a loyal man; he even received certain honors as a reward for deeds of daring. That this Decius is somewhat akin to this breed of wolves came about thus:

"His grandfather, a person of some note among them, was taken prisoner in battle. For a long time that one was the slave of a nobleman and gave service in such a manner that he was rewarded with his liberty. But, having taken a fancy to the country, he remained there and married one of our women; from him has sprung this Decius, in the second generation of freemen born among us."

"And the youth has borne himself well; it is a pity, if he must die, that it cannot be in honorable fashion."

"So great a pity that, were it possible, I would give my left hand to save him. It was he who sprang into the river and saved me from perishing, loaded down as I was with trappings," answered old Lucullus fiercely.

One who was sitting next to him leaned forward and poked the embers with his foot, holding his palms outward toward the blaze.

"To do so would not be to lose one's hand only, but his head, too; yet, it is not impossible," he muttered in so low a voice that only Lucullus heard him.

The old soldier glanced into the man's face sharply, a shadow crossed his own, and his lips tightened. The other looked around the circle of grim, silent figures.

"It would not be surprising, if the youth has truly the blood of these wolves in his veins, that the place where he awaits death would not prove a barrier to freedom; these Germans are wonderfully smart in many ways. It was only last night that the guards, stationed well beyond the edge of the forest, saw many wolves, some of which approached the lines boldly. And that had happened frequently. But last night one of the guards, exasperated beyond endurance, hurled his spear at a beast more bold than the others; the creature was pinned to the earth, but in dying uttered a cry which no animal could give.

"The guard ran forward and made a surprising discovery: the wolf which he had slain was in truth no wolf at all, but a German disguised in a wolf's skin. In such manner some had entered our lines, either to obtain information, or perhaps to search out the commander and slay him. It was either that, or these people have the power of changing themselves into wolves; I have heard of such things happening. If that is the case, may not this Decius become a wolf and as such escape from confinement?"

No one answered, but it was plain that all were impressed by the words. After a moment Lucullus arose, stamped his feet upon the ground, and turned away from the fire; there was an expression upon his face which none of his companions noted, like one who has arrived at an unalterable determination.

Turning his back upon the warmth, he crossed the frozen ground separating him from the groups of rude huts which formed the quarters of the legions. Once among these, in the majority of which the occupants were sleeping, he disappeared from the sight of his companions.

But he did not enter any of the log shelters, though his own stood not very far from those nearest the fire. The lane between the rows of dwellings was wide and paved with trampled snow; at stated intervals the shadows cast by the huts stretched across it, forming dark, immense bars upon the white ground.

When Lucullus passed through one of these strips of shadow he disappeared almost completely; but, coming into the moonlight again, his form appeared to be that of a gigantic specter hurrying through the silent night.

Near the farthest end of the lane and near the edge of the forest, which surrounded the camp on three sides, a wall of rough logs rose to the height of half a score of feet; at intervals this wall was pierced by openings, and at each was stationed a soldier holding a long-handled spear, whose steel point glistened in the moonlight.

Lucullus passed these guards without greeting, even holding his cloak so that it concealed his face. And the guards, in turn, paid no attention to him, but shivered under their fur covering, and from time to time stamped their feet violently upon the snow.

Having reached the last hut but two, the soldier stopped and opened the door softly. It was plain the place was occupied, but also evident that whoever was within was sleeping soundly, for deep breathing filled the dark interior.

Lucullus listened for a moment, then crossed the threshold and, groping his way to a corner, stooped down and lifted something carefully from the ground. It was the wolfskin which had covered the body of the German slain the night before; and the man asleep was the soldier who had hurled his spear at the supposed beast.

Lucullus concealed the skin under his cloak and passed out of the hut, closing the door softly behind him. Having done so, he retraced his steps until he reached a structure built without windows and standing a little back from the line of adjoining cabins.

At the door stood a single sentry, who raised a benumbed face at the sound of approaching footsteps.

But the man never learned what manner of creature prowled through the night; his senses, deadened by the cold, had not fully asserted themselves when the shaggy wolfskin, which Lucullus had hidden under his cloak, was tightly wrapped about his head. Smothered in the thick folds and strangled suddenly, the spear dropped from the man's fingers; scarcely struggling, he was borne backward to the ground. The pressure of the rough, hairy covering shut off the air from his lungs, and unconsciousness speedily followed.

At this particular spot the shadow of the hut lay heavy upon the snow, so the other sentinels, only a little way off, saw and heard nothing of what had happened. Having assured himself that his victim could not give an alarm, Lucullus removed the wolfskin and pushed open the door of the hut.

Through the opening he dragged the unconscious man, dropped him upon the floor, and closed the door behind him. In the darkness he could distinguish nothing, but raising his head, he whispered in a low voice: "Decius."

For a moment no one replied; then a voice answered:

"I am here."

Lucullus stretched out his hand in the darkness.

"Your cloak!" said he shortly. "You will no longer have need of it, for I have here a warmer covering."

Then, as the prisoner did not reply:

"But you are bound, and a bound man cannot use his hands freely; I had forgotten that."

"I am bound," replied the captive in a harsh voice, "but who are you that demands my cloak of me? Is it not enough that I must die to-morrow? Must I be robbed also?"

Lucullus crossed the hut and knelt upon the ground beside the young soldier. Feeling with his hands, he touched the rope binding the prisoner's wrists.

Having assured himself that it was not, as he feared, a chain, he drew from his belt a knife, inserted the point beneath the strands, and severed the hemp completely. The arms of the unfortunate man dropped inertly to his side, the tightly bound rope having held them so long in one position.

Lucullus bent forward and put his mouth close to the soldier's ear.

"Listen," said he in a gruff voice. "At your feet lies the guard who might have prevented your escape; we will wrap his head in your cloak, but in such manner that the breath will not entirely leave his body, for we do not wish to kill him. With this rope we will bind his legs; then you will leave this place and go where you will, for by so doing you shall not die in the morning."

To these unexpected words the prisoner listened with incredulity and amazement—an amazement so great that for the moment power of speech was denied him.

"You hear?" said Lucullus gruffly, "or is your brain frozen also?"

"And who are you that has come to me?" asked the soldier.

"I am Lucullus, and I do not forget to pay what I justly owe; you gave me my life, and in return I am determined to save you. Come, there is no time to waste."

The prisoner got stiffly upon his feet; Lucullus snatched off his cloak, muffled the sentinel's face, and took up the wolfskin.

Decius could now move his hands a little, and began to rub them violently together.

"And what would it profit me to leave this place?" he asked.

"What, but to save your head?" replied the old soldier.

"To save my head; that might be so," answered the prisoner bitterly. "But I should die in any event. Beyond this camp lies the forest, covered with snow; even should I succeed in passing the guards out there, I would surely perish: either through cold and hunger, or at the hands of those we have come to destroy."

Lucullus made an impatient gesture.

"You can think of that afterward—when you have escaped from this place; and is it not better to die in the way you have mentioned than before the whole army after the manner which is ordained?"

The young man struck his palms together; had it been lighter in the hut his companion might have seen that a deep flush had overspread his pale face. When he replied it was with lips that trembled.

"And why am I to die—will you answer me that? Because I showed mercy to a brave man? Does then everything count for nothing? The blood, the suffering, the trials which I have borne in this wilderness? I do not for a moment wish to praise myself, but men have seen what I have accomplished; and now I am to die dishonored before the whole army."

His face began to work with suppressed anger; the deep blue eyes under the shock of flax-colored hair blazed ominously. The sense of his wrongs dominated all other feelings.

And although Lucullus could not see his face, he understood by the tone of voice what was in the mind of his companion. Fearful lest the youth should refuse to leave the hut, he seized the psychological moment.

"That is what every one is demanding, but this will be of no avail. It is certain that later he who has commanded that you die without honor will regret; but will that replace your head upon your shoulders? Such being the case, you have a perfect right to save yourself and join whom you please. You understand?"

"What are you saying?" demanded the other in an unsteady voice.

Lucullus shook the wolfskin.

"Only that a fool would stay here and be slaughtered like a bullock dressed for sacrifice. There is, indeed, the forest and a snow-covered wilderness before you, but this wilderness is inhabited—by those whom you know. Not so many years ago your grandfather was one of these, and you understand perfectly what blood runs in your veins. Well, does that count for nothing? Having been cast out by him you would serve, it will bring no dishonor to seek service elsewhere. Surely, you will not tell me you are afraid—to enter among your own people, who, at least, appreciate courage."

For several moments deep silence reigned in the hut; then the young man began to mutter, as though to himself:

"May the lightning strike me if such a thought ever entered my head till this man put it there. To go out into the wilderness; to save myself in such manner—surely, to some it might seem dis-

honor, but now I do not think so. It is the truth I have been cast out—and for no reason; why should I remain to become a sacrifice?"

Suddenly he stooped down and tore the sword from the unconscious sentinel's side. Then he arose and faced Lucullus.

"Yes," said he in a passionate voice, "there are other services in the world; this one man does not hold everything in his hand. But first go you upon your own way, for I would not have harm come to you, having befriended me."

"I do not fear it," replied Lucullus calmly; "have no anxiety concerning me."

"But it *is* to be feared," answered the other quickly, "for a tumult may arise when I leave the hut."

"And why? Surely, you will go quietly?"

"Unless some one opposes me. And do you fancy the guards will permit me to walk out quietly? Blood is certain to flow, and you, my friend, have nothing to do with that."

It appeared as if suddenly the higher civilization of two generations had departed from Decius, leaving in its stead the wild, ungovernable spirit of his northern ancestors. He grasped the hilt of the sword so firmly that the veins stood out like great cords upon his arm; even his body trembled with the purpose that was in his heart. Lucullus had accomplished more than he intended; the youth panting before him was of gigantic strength and build, and he proposed to throw himself like a whirlwind upon the unsuspecting guards and cut them to pieces.

The old soldier did not for a moment intend to permit this. To assist a prisoner to escape was one thing: to stand by and see him cut down his comrades was another. He laid his hand upon the young man's arm with a force which compelled Decius to restrain himself.

"I have come here to-night that you might escape an ignominious death before the army; so far, I am willing to lend you aid. But, as the moon shines above us, I will not stand by and see the guards fall before your sword, even though I betray myself in preventing it," said he earnestly.

Decius turned his fierce eyes upon him, though because of the darkness he could not see the other's face plainly.

He moistened his lips twice before the words could pass them.

"You bid me leave this place and plunge into the forest; but how can I do so unless the guards are swept aside? Will you tell me that?"

"I have thought of a way, and it is this," replied the old soldier. "Of course, if you are attacked and in danger of being taken, you may strike those who hinder you, but it must not begin otherwise. I hold in my hand the skin of a full-grown wolf, sufficient to cover the body of a man; it was the same in which a spy attempted to pass into our lines no later than last night and was pinned to the earth by a spear. You will put this covering over you—when you will at once become a wolf. In such a manner it may be possible to slip past the guards and enter the forest even as a wolf might do."

"You mean to run on all fours through the snow?" said the young man in a strained voice.

"And why not? For by so doing you will outwit them through cunning. To fall upon unsuspecting men is an easy matter, but to walk among them and have them suspect nothing is more honorable."

"But seeing a wolf within the lines, why will they not remember what occurred last night, and there will be two spear-holes instead of one in the wolf's hide?"

"On that you must run chances, and it will be a proof of courage. I know perfectly well you are not lacking in that," Lucullus answered.

"But to get into that wolfskin I must remove my outer garments above the waist. You have already taken my cloak; do you wish me to freeze entirely?" demanded the other.

But even as he was speaking, he cast aside his padded upper garment and reached forth his hand for the wolfskin.

A few minutes later Lucullus stepped from the hut, glancing keenly in every direction; and, having done so, he stooped down and began to gather together a great ball of snow, which he packed firmly between his hands.

When this ball was of sufficient size and hardness he moved away from the door and remained standing motionless in the shadow cast by the building. And at that moment Decius, covered by the shaggy wolfskin and bending over so he resembled that animal, passed from the hut.

Thirty paces distant a guard was standing before one of the openings in the wall which protected the camp on the side toward the forest.

The soldier was cold and his eyes misty because of the severe frost which he had endured for more than an hour. Therefore, when Decius, running like a wolf, approached him, he did not distinguish clearly just what was happening until the swiftly moving object was close to the opening.

Then, indeed, he collected his senses, and his numb fingers closed upon the haft of his spear. He recognized in the thing which came from the direction of the huts a great gray wolf, and remembering, as Decius had surmised he would, what had occurred the night before, he believed that a spy had indeed entered the lines disguised as an animal.

To give an alarm would have required but a second, only so long as it took to open his mouth; but the soldier desired to obtain some honor out of so excellent an opportunity, and to kill an enemy, even within the lines, would give proof of his watchfulness. Therefore, he turned quickly and raised the spear, poising it somewhat unsteadily above his head.

It seemed that nothing could prevent the casting of the weapon, and the mark was not twenty feet away. Decius half rose and his hand grasped the hilt of the sword strapped at his hip; but in that moment something happened.

As the soldier drew back his arm, Lucullus, standing in the shadow of the hut, hurled the ball of snow with all his force. Even had it missed, it must have distracted the guard's attention—but it did not miss.

The icy missile caught the man squarely in the face, stunning him and filling his eyes with snow. When he recovered and was able to raise the spear once more the wolf was past the opening and approaching the border of the forest swiftly.

On the inner side of the wall nothing was visible save the rows of silent huts and the bright moonlight upon the glistening carpet of white.

CHAPTER II.

THE INVADER.

AMONG the warlike Bituriges was a family of considerable importance, the Treveras, whose lands lay not many leagues from the capital town, Avaricum.

In the course of the long war which had overtaken the entire country, most of the male members of this family had entered the army; therefore, the houses upon the estate were occupied principally by women and those men too old to take active part in the conflict, which raged incessantly and with stupendous energy, even as it had done for five years.

But though the most active of the Treveras were absent, such as remained at home were not to be despised. The old men retained something of their one-time vigor, and the women could not be easily subdued; for, so trained in warfare were the Bituriges that, in common with neighboring tribes, every one could fight in some degree.

Of this particular ancient family, which boasted of many chieftains, but one member of direct descent remained quietly at home; and this was because, being a girl, it was not permitted Alesia to go with her brothers. Therefore, in their absence, she ruled the household at Trevera, being obeyed without question in place of a sterner master.

Nor indeed was this daughter of an ancient house less courageous than the warriors who were battling with the invaders from the south; in some things, indeed, her spirit was greater, though, being a woman, she was softer, more merciful, and weighed matters more carefully. Her brothers, in fact, now and then consulted her.

On the same night on which the prisoner Decius escaped in the manner already set forth, the girl Alesia had retired early, for the severe cold which gripped the land penetrated through the thick walls, and the inmates shivered even before the great fire which roared on the hearthstone in the main chamber.

Either because of this, or that the barking of the dogs chained in the courtyard awakened her, she was roused suddenly from sleep at an hour when the first rays of dawn were struggling in the heavens. The dogs continuing their clamor, she arose and went to the window overlooking the country toward the forest, and covered by thick frost as with a curtain.

For a time she could discern nothing, and, growing impatient, rang a bell violently. When, finally, a waiting-maid, heavy-eyed and shivering, appeared, Alesia demanded why the dogs barked so loudly and why no one had quieted them.

Thereupon, as though in answer, there came suddenly up from the courtyard the sound of a loud voice and the cracking of whips; the dogs yelped more frantically, stern words of command were uttered, and silence followed, as the animals, beaten into submission, crouched beside their kennels. The mistress of the house bade the woman go to another window, which looked out upon the courtyard, and learn what had happened; she thought possibly that one of her brothers might have returned.

But when the woman again appeared she brought strange information. Looking down into the courtyard, she saw several men there, five of whom were retainers of the house. But among them, guarded on all sides, stood a sixth, and this one was not of the Bituriges.

His head was indeed bare, and flaxen, but his upper lip was shaved, and he wore no manner of beard, after the manner of the warriors of the various tribes. Besides, he was clad above the waist only in a shirt, though a fresh wolfskin, thrown across his shoulders, protected him somewhat.

The woman had noted also that his legs were covered by a protection of an unfamiliar pattern, and that, in place of the long, heavy weapon such as the Franks and Suevi carried, he wore at his hip a short, wide-bladed sword.

"And they have bound him?" asked the girl quickly.

"He is not bound, nor do I think it would be an easy thing to do, were he unwilling, for he appears to be a man of great strength," answered the woman.

Alesia crossed the room and took from the wall a short, heavy sword, whose handle was of polished silver.

"Is it such a weapon he carries?" asked she.

"It is the same, only I did not note the handle," answered the woman.

"And you tell me his face is shaven?" demanded the girl.

"Even as a boy's," replied the other.

For a moment her mistress balanced the short weapon in her hand.

"This was taken from one of the invaders; it is such a weapon as they use against us. And I have been told that it is their fashion to go with the face shaven. If what you have told me is true, can it be possible that such a one has come to Trevera?" said she.

The waiting-woman shivered, not wholly from the cold.

"Would *one* come alone? It is plain the man was not brought a prisoner, for he is unbound and armed," she said.

The girl pushed back the long braid of flaxen hair which rested across her shoulder.

"Help me to dress quickly, for I must inquire into this thing. If the man be an envoy, no violence must be offered him; if he be other, he should not be permitted to stand armed and unbound in the courtyard of Trevera," said she sharply.

It was well, indeed, that the mistress of the place decided as she did; at least for the man who stood shivering below. Those who had at first accosted him, and quieted the dogs, were servitors only of the house, but even as the two in the upper chamber were talking, others appeared at the door of the building.

And among these were some of the older men, whose age had precluded them from taking part in the war. Such ones were able to act with some authority, and they straightway did so.

Seeing in the stranger an enemy, and aroused to passion at sight of one who was presumed to belong to the hated invaders, the oldest among them did not stop to inquire why he had come there, but rushed into the house and seized a javelin from among a number which stood in a corner of the main living-room. Others followed his example and, crowding back through the doorway, straightway assumed a threatening atti-

tude—one even preparing to hurl his weapon at the stranger.

And another, and perhaps greater, danger threatened Decius. One of the servants, taking his cue from his betters, rushed to the kennels and unloosed the dogs; these, to the number of a dozen, at once began to bristle ominously.

White fangs appeared between parted lips, and a deep, sullen growling filled the courtyard. Then, for the first time, the young man spoke, throwing out his bare arm from beneath the wolfskin.

"Hold back the beasts, for I would not do them harm, having come with nothing but good-will in my heart!" cried he sharply.

The elders among his assailants looked at one another, for he had spoken in their own language: not as a foreigner might speak, but even as one of themselves.

The one who was preparing to hurl his lance held his arm, but with the dogs it was different; comprehending that they had been loosed for a purpose, and seeing before them a stranger, they rushed forward swiftly, the hair upon their bodies raised in anger.

Whatever peaceful intention Decius might have entertained, he understood perfectly well that to remain passive would result in being torn to pieces; for the dogs were half wolf of great size, and savage beyond measure.

With a quick movement, he drew his sword, sprang toward the wall of the house and, pushing one of the serving men violently aside, placed his back against the building.

This sudden change of position infuriated the dogs the more; the first of the pack leaped into the air and launched itself forward: with the instinct of a wolf it sought to reach the throat of its enemy.

With the quickness of lightning, the young man threw the sword before him in such a way that the animal met the point squarely; the steel pierced its vitals, and a savage howl of agony filled the courtyard. With a mighty wrench, Decius jerked the sword loose, and just in time.

A second dog was already upon him, so close that he felt the beast's hot breath upon his cheek; the gleaming teeth snapped together viciously, but missed their mark. The next instant the sword was buried in the shaggy throat of the animal.

Then what was expected happened. The two dogs that had felt the sword-point were the first of the pack, having outdistanced their fellows; now the ten which remained threw themselves in a body upon the man whom they intended to destroy.

Once again the sword tasted blood, but, strong as he was, Decius could with difficulty retain his footing upon the slippery snow. To protect his face and throat was still possible, but already the blood was flowing from deep gashes in his legs and arms; he struck fiercely, but it was beyond human power to beat off the attack upon him from three sides.

Whether it was the purpose of those who stood looking on to permit the dogs to tear the stranger to pieces, or that astonishment had rendered them powerless, no hand or voice was raised in protest. Only the snarling of the animals and the deep breathing of their victim was heard in the courtyard; and this had continued for several moments when Alesia appeared suddenly in the doorway.

For an instant she gazed at the frenzied dogs and the man battling valiantly against them; then without a word she snatched a lance from the hand of one of the onlookers and stepped quickly forward.

It is probable that Decius did not notice her approach. At that critical moment one of the animals, the largest and fiercest of the pack, had seized the wolfskin and was attempting to drag it from the man's shoulders.

The strain of the skin across his right arm made the free wielding of the sword impossible; Decius was practically deprived of his weapon, and though he fought off the enraged beasts with his bare left hand, the teeth of one or two had already grazed his throat.

Alesia Treveras had seen this as she halted in the doorway. She realized perfectly well that at any moment the fangs of the dogs might reach the mark for which they were striving. And on the instant she came to a decision.

With the lance balanced in her right hand, she advanced straight upon the

dogs; no light matter, for the beasts, enraged beyond measure and frenzied at the sight and taste of blood, were beyond the power of making distinctions.

The girl realized this also, but she did not hesitate. Decius, panting for breath, his eyes dim with blood and perspiration, discerned through the mist the flash of a bare white arm. The whistle of a lance sounded in his ears, and the death-howl of the great wolf-dog echoed through the courtyard. Then a sharp voice arose above the tumult.

"Beat off the dogs! On your heads be the blood of this stranger!"

And the mistress of Trevera holding, in the absence of her brothers, the power of life and death, those whom she commanded did not hesitate. With whips and lance handles they fell upon the pack and beat them back, raging and snarling. Only five dogs remained at the feet of the stranger; and of these, three were dead and two sorely wounded.

For several moments Decius remained leaning heavily against the wall; then he threw back the wolfskin and brushed his hand across his eyes. That other hands beside his own had beaten off the pack he comprehended, but believed it to be the will of men whom he had confronted in the courtyard.

Now being able to see more clearly, what he beheld astonished him beyond measure: the slender form of a tall girl who stood before him with flushed face and blazing eyes. These eyes were intensely blue and looked straight into his own; above he noted the mass of flaxen hair, fashioned into a long, thick braid, which hung to her waist.

She was clad in a loose-fitting habit of white, edged with purple, held at the waist by a broad belt embellished with a great gold clasp. Despite the biting air, her arms showed bare to the elbow, and upon the right wrist hung a wide, curiously carved bracelet of dull red metal.

He knew that it had been the white flash of that rounded arm which he had seen when the lance sped which saved him from the great wolf-dog.

For several moments the two gazed at each other, the man with parted lips, the girl coldly. And when she spoke her voice had the ring of cutting steel.

"How come you here, you who have the manner and the color of our race, but whose face and arms are those of the invader?" she demanded.

"With no spirit of hostility, madam; though your men have set their dogs upon me, and would have stood by and seen me torn in pieces," replied the young man calmly.

"And it was cowardly—to set on the dogs—that I grant you; but war has taught us a cruel lesson in these parts. Come you as an envoy from our enemies or as a spy?" the girl answered.

"Neither the one nor the other, for had it been the former I had come in a different fashion, and as to the latter, a spy would scarcely walk openly into the midst of his enemies. I am come in peace, through blood and hardship, seeking to serve where courage is its own reward."

"You speak in riddles, and I am little apt at guessing them. Tell me plainly and with straight speech whence come you; from beyond the Rhone or from the south?"

Decius drew the wolfskin about his shoulders, for the air was piercing cold and the teeth and claws of the dogs had torn his tunic into ribbons.

"By the spear of Hesus! In truth, I can answer you both," replied he. "But as to the last, I am come from the south, to which, the gods granting me their favor, I return no more."

The girl turned suddenly and made a gesture of command to her followers standing nearest the door.

"Make way that we may enter the house, and see to it that the logs are lighted in the great fireplace; then conduct this man thither," said she.

And passing through the entrance, she disappeared.

One of the old men approached Decius.

"It is lucky for you that you have gained at least a little of the mistress's favor; had the lords been here it would have been another matter. But before you enter it is necessary that you deliver up your sword," and he spoke gruffly.

For a moment the young man hesitated, for a soldier does not like to part with his weapons. But understanding the customs of the country, and because

he had come to those people of his own free will, but most of all because he wished to enter the house, he turned the hilt of his sword toward the Biturige.

The old man took it and motioned Decius to precede him; and proceeding thus, they came into the main room of the dwelling.

This room extended quite the length of the building, and the sun, not yet having fully arisen, was but poorly lighted. But a great fire roared on the huge stone hearth, and the glow from it enabled the newcomer to distinguish into what manner of place he was come.

The low ceiling was spanned by great rafters of smoke-stained oak, the earthen floor was thickly covered with dried rushes, which in some places were completely hidden by the skins of bears and wolves. Upon the walls many skins also hung, and in the spaces between could be seen all manner of weapons, both for war and the chase.

Of seats there were plenty, but mostly rude benches set against the walls; though near the fireplace, there were other seats: great chairs covered with bearskins.

It was to one of these chairs that Decius turned his attention, for upon it, and before the fire, was seated the mistress of the place. Near by stood a grim man leaning upon a lance, and behind the chair was a waiting-woman.

At a gesture from his guide the young man approached the fire, shivering as he did so; for at first the heat only intensified the cold which for long hours had gripped his bones.

For several moments the girl neither spoke nor stirred, but continued to gaze steadily into the fire; then suddenly she raised her eyes and looked intently upon the man who was awaiting her pleasure.

"Tell me," said she, in the cold tone she had before adopted, "if you indeed came with peaceful intent, why the tumult in the courtyard and why did you slay my dogs? Surely, it savored not of friendliness."

Decius removed his eyes from contemplation of the fire.

"The first, because your men rushed out upon me and I demanded to have speech with one in authority. And concerning the dogs: the pack was set upon me, and I but defended myself—though one which is dead fell not by my sword," he answered.

"As to that, it is passed; and no one desires to see a brave man torn in pieces," replied the girl coldly. "But I tell you plainly, if suspicion is confirmed, you will be bound with chains to await the coming of the lords of Trevera, or I will myself order you to be taken into the forest and slain. It is because of the courage you have shown, and because that I desire to be just in all things, that I am willing to hear what you may say. Either you are an escaped prisoner—for you have come through the forest only partly clothed—or else you desire to deceive us. You will speak plainly that I may decide."

Then the young man, raising his head, answered her; and as he spoke he stretched out his right arm, gashed by the fangs of the wolf-dogs, and his blue eyes looked boldly into hers.

"I understand well enough that in coming to this house I put my life in peril; but even that was preferable to what had gone before. In any case, I must have lost my head this day, and it were more to my liking to die honorably by the swords of your people than in shame in the presence of a whole army.

"It is, indeed, true that I came into your country with weapons in my hand, to kill and to destroy; in summer and in winter I have toiled and shown some courage, but it appears that such things count for nothing because I chose to show mercy when I might have slain."

"Then you have served with them—with the invaders of this land?" the girl interrupted, and it seemed as though a note of disappointment crept into her voice.

"Even for three years—with fire and sword," answered Decius without hesitating.

"With the man who is called Cæsar? With the Roman legions?"

"Even with them; through blood, through toil, freezing, and starving I have served, and in the end I was rewarded with the sentence of death."

As they had done before Lucullus in the cabin, his eyes began to blaze fiercely, and he clenched his hands so that the blood flowed afresh from his wounded

arms. For the moment he forgot where he stood and remembered only his wrongs.

"Even this Cæsar I served, and he condemned me to die; can the swords of your servants do worse?" added he bitterly.

For some little time the girl gazed at him without speaking, and in the fierce anger she saw in his face she recognized the wild spirit of her own countrymen.

"But you are not a Roman, though you served them?" she asked coldly.

"Until last night, yes, for I was born among them, as was my father before me. But now I am not a Roman, and the loyalty I cherished has turned to hatred; therefore, have I spent the night in the forest protected only by a wolfskin."

"Because it was commanded that you die—and a brave man thinks little of death?"

"To me death is nothing, but ingratitude is more than I can bear; that and to be dishonored before all men," he answered bitterly.

The mistress of Trevera bent down and stroked the head of a great deer-hound which lay at her feet. For several minutes she remained silent, as though debating something in her mind. But after a time she spoke.

"That you have been of those who are destroying our territory is sufficient to merit death, but I would hear yet more concerning this matter. In what manner did you escape from those who had dishonored you, and for what act were you condemned to die?"

"The first was by cunning, for in the skin of this wolf I passed out of their power. And it was because, having under my sword a chieftain of your people, I spared him and permitted him to be at liberty that I aroused the anger of Cæsar. Yet, the man being brave, I could not slay him," answered Decius.

"And you fled from his camp thinking to find safety elsewhere—among the people whose homes you ravished?"

"Not safety, but service; or to be devoured by wolves in the forest if the gods so intended."

"But you say you are a Roman; yet I have heard that they differ much from us, while save for your shaven lip you might be taken for a Biturige."

"For two generations were we Romans; before that, my grandfather was a person of some consequence among the Belgæ, but being taken prisoner in battle and afterward liberated, he remained in Rome and married there."

"I have heard of such things, but to me it is incomprehensible," the girl answered, and again became silent.

Then, after a time, she rose to her feet. The deer-hound got up also and thrust its muzzle toward the stranger.

"There is more than one thing to be considered in this matter, and in the meantime you will remain in this house. By Hesus, or by your Roman gods, you will swear that you will neither attempt to escape or to do violence to any one until I have reached a decision," said the mistress of Trevera quietly.

"Neither now, nor at any time, will I do harm to that which belongs to this household, nor will I depart without first informing you," answered Decius.

She turned to the waiting-woman.

"Go! See that suitable clothing and refreshment is provided for this man; afterward he is to be permitted the freedom of such rooms as are set aside for guests of lower degree." she commanded.

CHAPTER III.

ON TRAMPLED SNOW.

For three days Decius remained at peace in the house where he was practically a prisoner. Of the girl Alesia he saw nothing, and the other members of the household, fearing the anger of their mistress, did not molest him.

It is true that, walking in the courtyard, and even a short distance from the building itself, he met with sour looks and scowling glances, but to these he gave little heed, for he understood perfectly that those about him, and especially the old men, accepted his presence with disfavor.

Two persons only manifested friendliness: a young man, a bondsman, who served his meals, and a forester who inhabited the house. This latter had at one time been so torn by an angry bear that he must remain a cripple until the end of his days, and was precluded from bearing arms.

Perhaps it was because the stranger had fought off the dogs so valiantly, and the forester, Badon by name, understood the feeling of fangs in one's flesh; but, at any rate, the man spoke much with Decius, and related to him many things concerning the house and its inmates.

From him he learned that the girl who had befriended him was considered above other women throughout the neighborhood, and even in the capital town of Avaricum. For this reason she had many suitors among the nobility of the Bituriges, but though all were welcomed at Trevera, no one had succeeded in his quest for favor.

Of the masters of Trevera, there were two: the elder a chieftain of great hardihood, and the younger a youth who had served his country for scarcely a year.

Decius listened to these things with interest, and even asked questions; but he could obtain no inkling of what had been decided concerning him, for in truth the forester did not know.

He told him, however, that, was this decision left to the old men, he would be speedily taken into the forest and put to the sword; for they looked upon him as a Roman and a spy. Something of this belief had even penetrated beyond the walls of the house and was spoken of by those who dwelt in the district.

Many things were rumored, and even a few, impelled by jealousy, spoke lightly of the girl Alesia, in that she harbored and lent her protection to a stranger who had thus suddenly appeared in the neighborhood.

"And the maiden? Surely a word will silence these gossip-mongers," said Decius hotly.

"It is doubtful if she has knowledge of what is said, and even were it so, she would hold her peace, for she is very proud, and accounts to no living soul except her brothers," replied the forester.

It was on the fourth day that a diversion arose which broke in upon the peace of Trevera, and in which Decius was most intimately concerned.

He was walking in the courtyard, in conversation with the forester, when suddenly there arose a tumult outside the gate: loud voices, the cracking of whips, and the tramp of horses. In another moment there dashed into view four horsemen, clad in furs, the breath frozen upon their mustaches.

A half-score serving-men hastened toward them, and the foremost of the riders, pulling up his animal, leaped from the saddle, calling upon his companions to dismount also.

Then the tumult increased, and in the midst of it the four horses pawed the snow, the steam arising from their bodies in clouds. The riders also stamped their feet upon the ground, beat their hands together, and began to talk loudly, until one of the elder Bituriges appearing, he bowed to each in turn and invited them to places before the fire.

When they were gone and the horses had been led to the stables, Decius asked the meaning of so boisterous an arrival and who the men might be.

The forester replied that they were lesser chieftains, at least the first who had dismounted, but those who accompanied him he did not know.

"It is Ataulf," said he, "a person of some considerable wealth among our people, and of all the suitors for the hand of our mistress the most pressing; but, as yet, I believe he has received nothing from her by which he can set much store."

"And is it, then, the custom for such ones to come with shouts, tumult, and like a whirlwind?" asked Decius.

"It is more than likely that Ataulf and his companions have ridden from Avaricum, and have stopped more than once on the way. For there are numerous places where one may refresh himself along the road. But he will be quiet enough, never fear, when he stands in the presence of the mistress."

But that Alesia had not as yet come down to greet the guests became at once evident, for from within the house arose fresh tumult, loud voices, and the sound of hurrying footsteps. One of the serving-men appeared suddenly in the open doorway, his hand clapped to his shoulder.

When he would have passed, still running, the forester caught him by the arm, demanding to know the meaning of his sudden haste.

"Does not one fly from wild beasts, and it is such have taken possession of

the house. Go in yourself, and I warrant you will run also, unless you desire to receive a broken head," panted the man hoarsely.

"Of whom are you speaking—surely not of those who have ridden hither?" demanded the forester.

The man began to rub his shoulder gently, screwing up his face as he did so.

"And who else?" answered he. "It is plain certain places along the road over which they came have been well patronized; but notwithstanding that, no sooner were they before the fire than the noble Ataulf began to cry loudly for hot mead. It must have gone straightway to his head, for at once he began to act like a madman. I did but seek to remove the empty tankards when he struck me upon the shoulder with the flat of his sword, and would have slain me had not I taken to my heels. Blood will surely flow before the matter is ended."

The forester glanced toward the door, through which still came the sound of loud voices.

"It were better that we walk a little way, for at such times this Ataulf is a terrible fellow," said he, nodding to Decius.

But the young man remained standing where he was.

"That may be," said he, "but how can it concern us? We have nothing to do with him or his companions."

The forester hesitated, began muttering to himself, then touched his companion upon the arm.

"You see, it may be this way: Ataulf having stopped often on the road — it may even be possible that certain ones who are not friendly to our mistress have gossiped. You know what I mean; and it may be you he is seeking," he explained.

Decius's eyes began to blaze ominously.

"And you tell me that? It is I, then, with whom this fellow desires an acquaintance? Well, do you fancy I will run away from him?" he demanded.

"Under ordinary conditions, I should be the last one to think it, but now it is somewhat different. You can understand that," answered the forester.

"Because I have promised your mistress that I will commit no violence? Well, I will even keep to what I have agreed, yet I will not hide behind corners like a whipped dog," retorted the young man angrily.

But even had he chosen to beat a discreet retreat, the opportunity was suddenly taken from him. The tumult from within grew louder, and the fur-clad figure of the noble suddenly appeared in the doorway.

From under a mass of unkempt hair, which almost covered his eyes, he glared around him; it was evident that he had been drinking heavily, but this caused no unsteadiness in his movements, and it was plain it was his temper that was affected.

Decius stood but a few yards from the doorway, and at once the other's gaze became riveted upon him. He tossed back the matted hair from his forehead and descended from the threshold. Walking straight up to the other, he halted, and his teeth began to gleam from beneath his mustache.

"It is easy to rob a wolf of its skin, but to deceive honest men is a more difficult matter; when the wolf hide is stripped off, the rogue beneath is exposed to the eyes of the world," said he in a harsh voice.

Decius understood that the Biturige referred to the manner in which he had come to Trevera, and the hot blood leaped to his head. But by a powerful effort he restrained himself, and answered nothing.

The noble turned to his companions, who stood behind him.

"Such ones can howl loud enough in the forest, and even before women, but now you see how it is," cried he.

The forester plucked Decius by the sleeve.

"Come," he whispered, "do you not see the drink has mounted to his head?"

But Decius remained standing where he was; only this time he looked the Biturige straight in the eyes, and his lips began to tremble.

But the noble, feeling sure of himself, and taking the other's silence for fear, continued in a sneering tone:

"It is fortunate that I am somewhat skilled in the hunting down of such beasts as exhibit courage only under

cover of the darkness. It being night, such advance boldly and gnash their teeth terribly; but if a torch is lighted, or one kindles a fire, it is only their tails which are visible."

"It were better were you skilled in bridling your tongue; yet it is easy to understand—only weak men and fools are overcome with drink," replied Decius unexpectedly and in a measured voice.

At once a murmur arose among the spectators, for it was plain something was about to happen. As for Ataulf, at first astonishment deprived him of speech; then his face flamed as though a fire raged beneath the skin. With a great oath, he snatched out his sword and drove the point into the frozen ground.

"Come!" cried he, in a voice which trembled with passion. "I am waiting."

Those who looked on understood why it was he did not at once strike the other dead at his feet, though, indeed, the insult to a noble of the Bituriges was beyond measure.

To consume mead, and even stronger drink, yet to remain steadily upon one's feet, was a matter of pride among them. But Decius being after a fashion the guest of the mistress of Trevera, and under her protection, to have slain him as one would slay a slave or a wild beast would have occasioned the enmity of her brothers, who would consider it imperative to avenge the insult to their sister.

Therefore, Ataulf did not raise his sword, and, though consumed with passion, was forced by custom to challenge his enemy to combat. Did he slay him in fair fight, nothing more would be heard of the matter.

But though Decius understood perfectly well what was in the other's mind, and that because of what he had heard upon the road he had purposely picked a squarrel in order that he might kill him, he remained motionless where he was. To seize a weapon and spring to meet the man would have pleased him above all things, but he remembered his promise to Alesia. And this promise bound him to commit no violence until a decision was forthcoming.

Ataulf did not understand this, however, and his rage was increasing with every moment. Believing the man before him to be allied with the Romans, and filled with jealousy because Alesia had shown him some favor, there was only in his mind the thought to slay him.

Then there was the insult to himself to be avenged, in the presence of those who had heard it. He struck the earth sharply with the point of his sword, so that a shower of snow flew up and clung to Decius's clothing.

"I am waiting!" cried he passionately; "but I might have expected it. It is safer for one's skin to stand still than to exhibit even a little courage."

Decius bit his lip until he tasted blood plainly; for the instant the desire to spring upon the man and kill him with his bare hands almost overpowered him.

Great beads of sweat gathered upon his forehead and he swallowed with difficulty, but he managed to reply in a voice strained with forced calmness.

"To fight you I desire above all things; but to do so here is impossible."

The Biturige laughed harshly and his three companions did likewise.

"The fellow is afraid; see, even his face has grown pale," said one.

"It is no wonder the Romans drove him from among them," added another.

Even some of the people of Trevera began to laugh sneeringly.

"At another time, willingly; even with bare hands," cried Decius hoarsely.

Ataulf threw down his sword and turned to one of the attendants.

"Bring hither a whip, fellow; for it is plain this man was born a slave," commanded he harshly.

Near the dog kennels lay a number of whips with long lashes, and the attendant hastened to place one in the noble's hand. Ataulf stepped back a pace, drawing the long thong through his fingers; Decius standing perfectly motionless, followed the movement with his eyes.

But at this moment, when the Biturige drew back his arm, an unexpected thing happened. From an open window directly above the heads of those in the courtyard a white arm was extended for an instant; something—a gleam of light—flashed through the air and a sword fell upon the snow at the feet of Decius.

And the sword was such as the invaders wielded in battle, and the handle was of polished silver.

Instinctively all eyes turned upward, but only the window, half open, was visible; yet Decius fancied he caught the glimmer of a white arm and the sheen of a broad hand of dull red gold.

Then, even before he lowered his gaze, a sharp whistling sound filled the air and it was as though a brand of fire touched his cheek. The Biturige had loosed the lash.

A harsh laugh arose from the crowd; the forester, standing behind his companion, ground his teeth together. For the second time Ataulf drew the lash through his fingers and bent back his arm.

Suddenly Decius stooped down and caught up the sword. His face was pale as death save for the livid welt where the lash had met his cheek. Twice he opened his lips and twice swallowed with difficulty; then those gathered in the courtyard heard a voice, passionless, cold, and measured.

"Take up your sword, and lest you be incumbered remove the fur coat you are wearing."

Ataulf stood motionless, the whip half poised. He had seen cold anger in men's eyes before, and the lust of combat, but the look which met his now might have been that of a savage beast that sees her cubs torn in pieces before her eyes. Instinctively he dropped the whip and caught up his sword.

"Remove the coat," said Decius sternly; "or are your wits so beclouded that you would choose to fight at a disadvantage?"

The Biturige began to tremble with passion, and, handing his sword to one of his companions, tore off the heavy garment which covered the upper part of his body. Then he seized his weapon and faced Decius.

The latter regarded him sternly.

"To fight with such a footing is common only in general battle and among slaves. Let the snow be trampled under foot as is the custom in single combat where death is waiting," said he coldly.

A dozen of the serving men at once ran and began to beat down with their feet a wide stretch of snow near the center of the courtyard; for all were eager to witness what was about to happen. And in the meantime certain of the old men whispered among themselves, telling each other that surely this strange youth understood the manner of fighting among the tribes of the north.

For it was understood, from released prisoners and others, that, there being little snow at any time in Italy, the Romans were not required to beat it down with their feet in order that the combatants might secure a firm foothold.

Also, while the attendants were doing their part, two of those present hurried into the building. The one was a companion of Ataulf, and the other the forester, Badon.

The Biturige hastened to fetch his friend's shield, and the forester to select one from the armory for Decius. For to carry a shield on the left arm was the custom in all manner of combats.

At length, everything being in readiness, the two adversaries faced each other, standing a few yards apart and looking sternly into each other's eyes.

To those who observed them closely, the advantage seemed to be with the Biturige; for his sword exceeded in length by at least a yard that carried by Decius, and his shield was longer and broader. Yet, on the other hand, the youth stood half a head above the noble, and in physique he far exceeded him, though the Biturige was a man of no small strength and dexterity.

A deathlike silence had now fallen over the courtyard; it was allotted to one of the old men to give the signal to begin, and all waited breathlessly. And at length the signal was made.

Decius remained perfectly motionless, as though carved from stone, but the other began to advance cautiously; it was doubtless in his mind that by a sudden rush he might take his adversary off his guard, even for an instant, and cut him terribly. But Decius was not off his guard, and his eyes followed carefully every movement of the man who hovered in front of him; neither did he look upon the combat lightly, and in that he held no little advantage.

For the Biturige, confident of his skill, and holding the youth in front of him in contempt, was less cautious than he otherwise might have been, and advanced more boldly.

Suddenly Decius raised his shield a

little, at the same time springing lightly to one side; the noble had delivered a terrible cut with his long sword, as if he meant to decide the combat by one blow. But the point of the weapon only grazed the edge of the opposing shield, and Decius, wheeling in a half circle, thrust fiercely with his sword.

This also, being very skilful, Ataulf met with his shield; though so powerful was the blow that the heavy guard was beaten back against his body. Then, for several minutes, only hoarse breathing and the ring of blows sounded in the courtyard.

Advancing, giving back a little, the combatants circled around each other, receiving the attack upon the surface of the shields, delivering blows with the rapidity of lightning, yet saving each his strength as much as possible.

But after a time the noble began to lose patience, for he realized he was not gaining. Straightway he began to taunt Decius, thinking by such means to enrage him beyond endurance, so he should fight more recklessly.

But though wild anger surged up in the breast of the young man, and he grew paler, he replied nothing nor lessened even a trifle his vigilance. Only he began to push nearer to the other, striking more fiercely and thrusting his shield forward; so frequently it pressed against the one opposing. And each time this thing happened the arm of Ataulf tingled from wrist to shoulder, for it was as though a great weight was hurled against him.

Understanding that after a time repeated blows must render his arm wholly powerless, he became enraged beyond measure, and resolved no longer to trust to skill in guarding.

Giving back a little, he drew on his opponent, advanced his shield as though to protect his head from the expected blow, and waited. Decius indeed struck fiercely, and, as was his custom, pushed his shield quickly forward. But, as had happened before, it did not crash against the other. Springing quickly to one side, Ataulf dropped his shield upon the snow, and seizing his sword in both hands, struck with all his strength.

A cry arose from the spectators, for they thought to witness the youth stretched upon the ground; but Decius, though taken by surprise and thrown off his balance by meeting only empty air with his shield, yet was able to dodge the blow if only by an inch. But the Biturige was not so fortunate, and before he could recover himself, Decius thrust forward and cut him deeply in the shoulder.

Then, indeed, death hovered very near him, and the youth was preparing to deliver a second stroke when there suddenly appeared, as though from the clouds, two horsemen in the gate of the courtyard. And the foremost, pushing forward, commanded in a loud voice that the combat cease.

At the same instant, one of the old men cried shrilly:

"It is our lord—Harling of Trevera!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE ANGER OF HARLING.

IT is doubtful, even in the face of this stern command, if Decius would have withheld the thrust which must have proved fatal to his antagonist; for he had resolved, if fortune favored him, to kill the man. Perhaps he was even unmindful of the unexpected interruption, for all his attention was concentrated upon the combat.

But though custom and the law in such matters gave him the life of the Biturige, in that place the word of Harling of Trevera superseded custom and the law. On public territory, even in a town or village, no Biturige would have interposed though it was above his own brother that death hovered.

But the ground upon which the combatants fought was Harling's ground, and over it his control was absolute in all things.

Therefore, even as the victor drew back his arm and the sword was poised, certain of the serving-men rushed forward and struck up the weapon with outstretched lances. At the same instant the Lord of Trevera pushed his horse into the space of trampled snow.

Who the combatants might be he knew not, for his coming had been so sudden and their movements so rapid he had not

been able to discern faces; he understood only that before his door death was waiting to touch one of the men who contended so fiercely.

Looking down he discerned Ataulf, pale as death and with one shoulder bloody; then his eye lighted on the gigantic form of his opponent standing in the midst of the attendants. And upon the youth's face shone the lust for battle and his eyes flashed fearlessly at the man on horseback.

Harling bent forward in the saddle.

"What is this," said he sternly; "that among yourselves you would stain with blood my very threshold; and the maid, Alesia, within the house!"

One of the old men answered.

"It was a fair fight and properly conducted, my lord, and no unseemly brawl. Ataulf of Elmet issued proper challenge to combat, therefore—"

"And because Ataulf of Elmet chooses to turn my courtyard into a slaughter-house must you stand by and permit it? Had the thing gone farther it would have proved an ill hour for some I left in Trevera. If this matter concern my sister, and they fought here because of her, I swear by Hesus, now is their love-making ended."

The Biturige noble, his face white with pain and the sting of defeat filling his breast, replied hoarsely.

"It was not that, my Lord Harling, and in speaking thus you have unwittingly laid insult upon your sister. Perchance you have learned upon the road what of late has taken place at Trevera?"

"I have learned nothing, for my business was with those who invade the land, not with idle gossip," answered the chieftain.

"And mine also; this man being come from among the Romans. That I could not kill him—being protected by the favor of the maid, Alesia — you can understand; therefore I challenged him, even to single combat," said Ataulf boldly.

"It is even so, my lord," cried several voices.

A dark frown overspread the chieftain's face and his eyes began to gleam fiercely.

"Beware!" cried he, "lest you play with fire. Who asserts that the maid protected this man, a Roman?"

"At least so it is said, for, coming from the forest wrapped in a wolfskin he was received here and has remained for four days," Ataulf began to explain.

But the chieftain interrupted him so fiercely that he got no farther.

"Bring before me this man, and the maid also. If you have overstepped the truth, even by the breadth of a hair, you shall answer to me for it," said Harling sternly.

Some of the attendants began to push Decius forward, but before they could accomplish their purpose those gathered near the door of the house became agitated, and from their midst appeared the girl, Alesia. And her brother, noting her coming, and his eyes being fixed upon her, he gave no attention either to the man he had demanded to see or to any one present in the courtyard.

And the maid, looking neither to the right nor left, advanced across the snow and came to the horse's side; and looking up into her brother's face she touched gently his right arm and said in a quiet voice, though so clearly that all heard her.

"You have returned—and wounded my lord?"

Some indeed had noticed, and others it had escaped, that Harling carried his sword-arm in a sling and that it was tightly bound from wrist to elbow. And they understood then the meaning of his unexpected coming, and why he had left the field of action when the Romans were pushing forward into the country of the Bituriges.

The master of Trevera at first replied nothing; only gazed down upon his sister's face, and into his own came something of softness.

"As to the wound, it is nothing, except it enforces idleness for a short season and to remain in idleness at such a time is more galling than a broken link in one's harness. I take it all is well with you and with Trevera, though I come upon tumult at the very threshold," he said soberly.

"All is well with me and with Trevera; how could it be otherwise?" she answered.

Harling patted the horse's neck for

the animal, anxious to get to the stable, was becoming impatient.

"A strange thing has reached my ears, even in this very courtyard; that being a Biturige, you have received into your house an enemy and have fed and protected him. Tell me that this is not so."

He spoke quietly, but in a manner which betokened a rising storm behind the outward calmness.

And though the girl saw this, and knew how terrible was his anger once unloosed, the expression of her face did not change; only she drew herself up a little and dropped her hand from his arm.

"And who has told you this thing—that I have protected and housed an enemy, even in Trevera?" she demanded.

"Ataulf of Elmet, who thus justifies himself," replied the chieftain sternly.

"And has he also told you that he rode hither, he and three companions, and coming to this house they created much tumult, even offering violence to one of the serving-men? And that, insulting beyond endurance a guest of this house he compelled him, against his will, to combat on trampled snow; and being wounded would also have been slain but for your unexpected coming? Has he told you that also, my lord?" answered the girl coldly.

Then, as when the threatening lightning breaks from dark overhanging clouds, the fierce anger of the Biturige chieftain burst forth. With his left hand he whipped out his sword and turned his gaze full upon Ataulf of Elmet.

"You are wounded in the right shoulder and my sword-arm is useless, therefore may we fight on equal terms; even within this hour," he cried loudly.

Ataulf's face flushed hotly and he began to feel for the handle of his weapon, when one of the three who had ridden with him approached and said calmly:

"If such things did happen it may be possible that this noble may offer sufficient excuse, my Lord Harling. Being upon the road hither we heard frequently that a Roman was, in truth, a guest at Trevera; even certain gossip concerning the maid, your sister, in that she protected him from the anger of Bituriges. And she has not answered you what you demanded, for it is even possible that she would protect him even against the just anger of her brother. Knowing these things, Ataulf of Elmet, and we with him, were carried away by passion and resolved to end the matter by slaying the Roman."

It was plain the fellow did not know the master of Trevera and how terrible he was in anger; or having heard of it, the fumes of the drink he had taken had befuddled his brain and he spoke as one devoid of reason: in that he cast suspicion upon the Lady Alesia in the presence of her brother and so many assembled in the courtyard.

Little opportunity was given him to understand that he had overstepped the bounds of prudence.

During his recital the teeth of Harling began to gleam beneath his yellow mustache and the muscles of his face worked convulsively. And as the last words passed the man's lips, and he glanced about seeking approbation, the chieftain arose suddenly and in fierce anger struck downward with his heavy sword; so the blade split the fellow's head and he fell at full length upon the snow.

And at that moment the rage of Harling leaped up like a mighty flame fanned by the wind; so he glared about him threateningly as if seeking another whom he might send after the first. As for Ataulf of Elmet, he remained standing where he was; but the two companions of the man who lay upon the snow sprang forward with drawn swords as though they would in that moment avenge him.

More bloodshed would surely have followed had not half a dozen serving-men, at a gesture from Alesia, rushed between their lord and the others with crossed lances. But Harling cried in a terrible voice.

"Stand back, for this matter is not ended. I have slain this one, indeed, because he has publicly spoken ill of the mistress of Trevera, but there is yet that other thing awaiting judgment. Bring hither the man as I have demanded, and let the girl answer me."

Then for the second time Alesia spoke, though her face was pale and knowing

what her brother was when in anger she held Decius as surely lost. And in a firm voice she related just what had occurred; even from the moment when the barking of the dogs awakened her, and the waiting-woman reported that a stranger, wrapped in a wolf-skin, stood in the courtyard.

"That this man is not an enemy, but has come to us suffering from grievous wrong; and that he is courageous beyond most men, having passed the night in the forest almost naked and afterward presented himself boldly at the door, I am convinced. And though it may be that he has served among the Romans yet entire blame cannot be his for that, having been reared among them even from infancy. But having served loyally he was condemned to die in dishonor, and knowing not what lay before him; whether in the forest he would be attacked and eaten by wolves, or whether becoming a prisoner he would be tortured, he yet made his way to us remembering that in his veins was the blood of the Belgæ, who are helping us wage this war against the invader," she concluded, raising her head proudly.

Harling heard her through without sign or comment, though it was plain his anger had not abated and he glared fiercely around him; and when she had finished, he said harshly:

"Bring me the man."

For the life of Decius at that moment no one present would have wagered a broken lance-head; for it was believed by every one that it would either be ordered he be slain, or Harling himself would act the executioner. For though the maid had spoken her mind freely, and praised him, yet she acknowledged he served Cæsar and had remained under her protection at Trevera for four days.

And knowing her brother's hatred of all that was Roman, and that he had sworn to kill all such as fell into his hands, there appeared to be but one conclusion to the matter.

Some of the attendants began to push the youth forward, but Decius brushed them aside and advanced with uplifted head into the space in front of the chieftain. And it was noted that he had laid aside his sword, so he stood defenseless if any one offered him violence.

Harling, sitting upon his horse, the blood-stained sword yet in his hand, looked sternly at the approaching man, and for the second time his teeth began to show under his mustache. But Decius came nearer and stopped only at the horse's head.

"I am the man!" said he calmly.

Then all held their breath and some noticed that the girl turned her face away, for in another moment the youth, too, might be clutching at the snow as had done the other. But a great silence filled the courtyard, except for the restless moving of the horses.

And though the sword trembled in Harling's grasp his teeth were no longer visible, and another expression than fierce passion overspread his face. For several moments he gazed silently upon the young man, then spoke harshly, bending a little forward:

"It is indeed not as I expected, for I thought to see before me one who bore the appearance of a Roman; nor yet again did I think to stand face to face in such a place with one who might have slain, but spared."

Then great amazement filled the onlookers, and each gazed at one another in astonishment. Harling stretched out the hand which held the sword.

"And is it the truth that, being condemned to die, you have foresworn this Cæsar and have come among us seeking service? And if that is so, why were you condemned; for I myself was a witness that among all the Romans no one exhibited more courage than you?" he demanded sternly.

And Decius replied:

"It is true, my lord, for I hold it no dishonor, having been cast out by Cæsar, to seek service elsewhere. And as to the reason—it was because you were permitted to leave the field of battle only wounded. For that, I was adjudged a traitor before the army, though at the time no disloyalty was in my heart."

"And of that I can bear witness," said Harling gruffly, "for having spared me you straightway began to cut terribly among my followers."

Then, while all remained rooted to the earth with amazement, he raised his voice so it could be heard even by those within the house.

"It is as this man says, for having wounded me he did not kill, but passed on to other business. And that he is courageous above most men I know, and I remember what he has done and that he came among us of his own accord. But whether he is to be received among us is not yet certain, though, because I owe him a debt, none shall do him violence until the matter is decided."

He turned to the horseman who had accompanied him; an old man who, while all these things were occurring, had sat motionless in the saddle.

"It is for you, Getorix, Priest of Hesus, to determine this thing; therefore, having refreshed ourselves, you will question this man and we will abide by your decision." *

Then he turned and would have spoken to his sister, but she had returned unnoticed into the house; but whether before or after he had addressed the priest no one was prepared to say.

Attendants rushed forward to take the horses, assisting the aged soothsayer to dismount and delivering him over to the old men, who straightway conducted him into the dwelling. And at a word from one of them Decius followed; and as he passed no one frowned darkly, or drew aside: first, because their lord had publicly acknowledged that to him he owed life, and again, all admired his courage and even in the heat of anger Harling had not slain him.

The chieftain, having dismounted and turned toward the door came face to face with Ataulf of Elmet. Now there was in this noble's heart great anger and bitterness, but he dared not show either too openly in such a place; yet his face was not pleasant to look upon. Harling noted this and spoke sternly:

"That you challenged this man, thinking him a Roman and an enemy, I understand, and so much of this matter is ended between us. But that you came to Trevera and created tumult is to your discredit, being a Biturige noble, though of lesser degree. And if you are angered because I have slain one who rode with you I am ready to settle what difference lies between us at the proper time; and I would do likewise to the other two and to you also had you given cause. But now, being wounded, and having come to this house you are welcome to enter and your wants will be attended to."

But Ataulf scowled darkly and answered:

"Neither now nor at any time, until the insult is wiped away, will I enter this house; and I do not fear you, Harling of Trevera."

Turning, he bade some of the attendants to bring the horses, and commanded that the dead body of his companion be laid upon one of them. And when this was done he and the other two rode out of the courtyard.

* A Gaul undertook no important act without first consulting a soothsayer, who among the Druids divined the future, and their prophecies were undisputed.

CHAPTER V.

AN OATH BEFORE WITNESSES.

DURING that day Getorix, the priest, came to no decision for, being an old man and the cold having gripped his bones, he sat long before the fire and afterward rested some hours upon a bed of skins. But after nightfall he asked for Decius to be brought before him and that they be left alone.

And he questioned the young man cunningly, making him repeat many of his answers in one form and another, so had there been any deceit it must have come to the surface.

After that he remained for a time alone and then sent for Harling.

"It will be to our advantage," said he, "to admit this young man among us, for he may be of great use in the conflict which is raging. This Cæsar has insulted him terribly and he will not soon forget it, but desires only to avenge himself upon the Romans. Besides, he has good blood in his veins, and his grandfather was at one time a noble among the Belgæ. Truly, he was brought up in Italy, but that has been cast aside and we shall lose nothing because he is familiar with the customs of that country."

Harling gazed for some little time into the fire; then he replied:

"Because of the debt I owe this man your decision pleases me, but upon one point I am uncertain."

"And what is that?" demanded the priest. "Surely my words were plain enough."

"It is this," replied the chieftain: "You tell me he is of noble descent, therefore, how can he serve among the more common soldiers, for he would probably object to doing so? On the other hand, there will be many, and not the least that Ataulf, who will not receive him as an equal. You understand what I mean?"

The priest considered for a moment.

"To thrust him at once into a place of honor might truly cause bitter feeling, yet he will have powerful backing. Not only I myself will show friendliness but you also, and then there is the maid, Alesia: her opinion will count for something in such matters," said he.

Harling began to frown, then raised his eyes to those of the old man and laughed softly.

"By Ogmius! there are many I fancy of the same mind, for it was she who first gave him protection and spoke out boldly in the courtyard. Such favor as we can give him will be proffered, but to count on the maid will be to build a house on melting snow. But an hour ago I hinted that something such as we contemplate might happen and she was likely to obtain a new champion, and what answer did she give me? Why, that having taken up the matter, I might carry it as I chose, and whether he served in our army or the Romans did not interest her, justice having been done.

The priest smiled faintly.

"Ataulf of Elmet would forget much if such words were carried to him, for I fancy it was not wholly because the man came from the Romans, wearing a wolf-skin, that he challenged him. Now he has ridden away in anger against you and the girl, thinking the man was to remain in this house under her favor."

Harling shrugged his shoulders.

"In what manner he rode away concerns me little, nor will I trouble myself concerning him further; only this thing I shall lay before the man we have received among us. Having conquered a Biturgi noble in fair fight he may claim the arms which he wore and his horse; even something more if he so desire, having given him his life," said he.

"I had thought of that also," the priest replied, "but in this case I should advise otherwise. The law requires that Ataulf deliver his arms to his conqueror, but it is not always wise to enforce the law rigidly. To put this upon the noble of Elmet will enrage him only further, both against your house and against the young man Decius."

The chieftain began to scowl ominously and his eyes gleamed in the firelight.

"I have told you that what is in the man's mind concerns me little, and to me his anger is nothing. As to this Decius, his courage has been tested and he will welcome gladly the enmity of such a one."

"It is not a question of courage but of expediency," replied the old man quietly. "If nothing more is done in this matter the bitterness in Ataulf's heart may cool somewhat; but, on the other hand he has a certain following, and these may be excited to vengeance: not through arms but in spreading evil reports concerning one who has served the Romans. Many will believe such tales and this young man may easily fall under suspicion. It is wise to avoid such things."

Harling continued to scowl, but that he recognized the other spoke with wisdom was evident, for he replied:

"And after all why should he need such arms as this Ataulf might give him? There is every sort at Trevera, and he may make his own selection. We will have nothing more to do with this little noble."

"It is wise," answered the priest, "for at such times as these, neighbors should not quarrel. Have we not enough to do, with these Romans pressing forward, without wasting the hours in needless bickering? When you again meet this Ataulf greet him as though nothing had happened."

"That I will not do, for he has come here and created tumult; but I will not challenge him as I intended. As you say, there is plenty to be done and each sword is needed. I shall not greet the man, but neither will I refer to what has occurred," said Harling gruffly.

But though he had decided in this manner, it was different with the noble of Elmet. Even at that moment, when

Harling and the priest, Getorix, conversed before the fire and it was decided to accept the services of Decius, Ataulf was nursing the bitterness which filled his breast.

Having departed from Trevera, with the body of their comrade lashed upon the back of a horse, the trio rode over the same way which they had traversed early that morning. And as first one, and then another, turned their eyes upon the body, deep rage and black thoughts surged up within them; and this anger was directed not only against the chieftain Harling, but against his sister also, and against the man who had come out of the forest covered by a wolfskin.

For some time they rode in silence, brooding deeply, but none ventured to put hand to sword-hilt or to ride back and challenge Harling to single combat. To have done so must have meant sure destruction, for, even with his left hand, the Lord of Trevera was skilful beyond most men with the sword; therefore, each shrank from exposing life recklessly, and because each dared not bring the affair to such an issue, hatred grew the deeper.

And finally, coming to an inn, they dismounted and tarried for a time—and this was repeated often while they remained upon the road.

When, therefore, toward nightfall, they reached the house of Ataulf of Elmet and the attendants rushed out to care for the horses, each possessed terrible courage and would have fought Harling even with bare hands. And entering the dwelling, leaving the body to the care of the attendants, they gathered about the fire, glancing at each other darkly and rattling their swords threateningly.

And after a time certain lesser nobles of the neighborhood, hearing rumor that something had occurred, rode up and dismounting entered the house also; and when these were seated before the fire they demanded to know just what had taken place at Trevera.

Now, had Ataulf been less stupid with the fumes of the drink he had taken, or had the heat from the fire not dulled his wits still further, he would have related everything briefly and dismissed his friends, at least until morning. But as it was he thought only of the insults which had been put upon him, both by Harling of Trevera, his sister, and the man whom he had challenged and who had beaten him in the presence of old men and attendants.

And because he cherished great bitterness, and his wounded shoulder pained him beyond measure, he began to frown darkly and to grind his teeth together.

"By Hesus!" cried he, raising his voice so it could be heard even in the courtyard without, "to insult a noble is no light thing, though this Harling seems to think so. But there are more days than one, and one thing is sure to follow another."

"Of what are you speaking?" asked one of the visitors, for it delighted all to see the fellow beside himself with passion.

"And you ask me of what I am speaking," shouted Ataulf shrilly. "Surely you have been drinking or you would understand more clearly. But as you are stupid I will tell you. To-day that Harling put insult upon me, and before serving-men his sister taunted me; I took it calmly for I was a guest at their house, and I trust I know how to behave myself. But now I am not there and owe them no courtesy."

"Truly you do not," said several voices.

Ataulf began to rattle his sword, looking from one to the other fiercely.

"I might even ride back there and cut the man in pieces, but I am wiser than that, for it would be quickly over; insults such as I have borne are not so lightly settled."

"Ride back by all means," cried several, "and we will ride with you."

"Not only to witness you slay Harling, but also the other, who cut your shoulder," added another.

Ataulf began to tremble violently and a thin froth appeared upon his lips. Unconsciously he reached for his sword-hilt with his right hand and a twinge of pain racked his body. He began to whine like a cub wolf and stamped violently upon the floor.

"And you recall that to me? Had I not slipped upon the snow and, obeying the word of Harling, lowered my arm the thing would not have happened. It

was at that instant the fellow struck and thus proved himself a coward."

Those present had heard otherwise, but were pleased to accept this version of the affair.

"Being such a one, surely you will not consent to meet him for the second time?" one demanded.

"I will not," answered Ataulf, "but he is as good as dead already. It is almost certain he will be received among Harling's followers, and what do you think will happen then? Just this: He will betray us to the Romans at the first opportunity."

Several among those present began to scowl, for in this they believed Ataulf spoke the truth. One nodded at his nearest neighbor and remarked cunningly.

"And I doubt not he will not return to this Cæsar alone. I have heard what happened at Trevera and I understand that girl, Alesia, perfectly. To her we are nothing, though Biturige nobles, but with this other one it is different. And they say it is pleasant in Italy."

Ataulf began to gnaw his lips.

"What are you saying?" he asked fiercely.

"Only that we are fools," replied the other.

For a moment silence reigned in the room. Then a voice was heard.

"At least she thinks so—this Alesia. We understand."

Ataulf arose, steadying himself by the table.

"Before Ogmius, such a thing shall not happen. I will show her," he cried hoarsely.

"That is likely," one replied; "she knows how to calm your anger."

Ataulf glared about him; his lips trembled with passion.

"And you think that? If such a thing should happen I swear before witnesses that I will divide Elmet among you, even to the last acre. Against this Harling there is an account to be settled, but before all will I make this girl beg for mercy."

The nobles glanced at one another; the affair had gone farther than they had counted upon. Desirous only of baiting their companion and witnessing his violent anger, they had taunted him beyond endurance. An oath made before witnesses could not be lightly broken.

First one and then another began to pass the thing lightly, but the noble of Elmet was not to be turned from his purpose.

"By Hesus, and before witnesses I have spoken," cried he hoarsely, "if it turn out otherwise Elmet is forfeited."

After that the guests began to take their departure, with serious faces; some even hurried with undignified haste, for they did not wish to be accounted as mixed up in such an affair. After a time only Ataulf and his two companions remained; the latter snored before the fire, but the Lord of Elmet called loudly for drink, and even the second time.

When morning broke he stirred uneasily and opened his eyes. The attendants had covered him with skins, and one had taken care that logs were kept on the fire. Ataulf sat up stiffly and looked around him, and, at that moment one of his companions entered the room.

"Is it late, or have you arisen early, and why was I left to sleep here before the fire?" demanded the noble crossly.

"It is neither late nor early though the sun has been some time risen; as to why you were left seated in that chair you must not inquire of me, but of the attendants," replied the Biturige, and began to yawn.

Ataulf arose, pushed back his hair from his forehead and looked out into the courtyard. An attendant was drawing a bucket of water from a well near by; the ground around this well was covered thickly with glistening ice and the man's breath arose, like a cloud of steam as he labored.

Ataulf walked over to the well, ordered the man to hold up the bucket, and stooping over, plunged his head into the icy water. When he reentered the house his hair and mustache glistened wonderfully with frost, but clearness of reason had returned to him.

Now both of his companions were leaning over the fire; he looked first at one, then at the other, and asked:

"Were not certain of the neighbors here last night, even till a late hour?"

The two men glanced at each other, and one replied:

"It was even so, though we must have

fallen asleep early, the heat from the fire being great."

"They came to inquire about the killing of Aellis, and perhaps to look at the body?" went on Ataulf.

"It may be possible, but also to ask concerning what had happened at Trevera."

"And you heard everything?"

"Not everything, for, as we said, we fell asleep. But this morning we heard the servants talking."

"So the servants were talking; it is then evident that they did not fall asleep," replied Ataulf gruffly.

He went to the door and summoned one of the attendants; the man came reluctantly.

"What do you fear?" demanded the Lord of Elmet. "You were in this room last night, even until those who came departed?"

"It was even so, my lord," the man answered, "and afterward I covered you with a bear-skin."

"And there was talk concerning Trevera, among those who were here?"

"That is the truth, my lord; and among those who dwell there."

"Yes, I remember something, but not everything, for the heat of the room made me very drowsy. Did I relate just what had occurred and how it came about that I was wounded?" demanded Ataulf.

"That and more, but, as you say, the room was very warm and you had been upon the road for many hours," the man answered.

The noble pushed back his wet hair, and for several moments remained silent.

"And what *more?*" he asked sharply.

The man hesitated, then moistened his lips with his tongue.

"They drove you to anger, my lord, against those who dwell at Trevera—and especially the Lady Alesia."

"The girl? What have I to do with her?"

"That I do not know, but it is clear that she has wronged you terribly."

"And why?"

"Because you have sworn to take vengeance upon her, most of all those at Trevera."

"And I swore to do that—upon the sister of the Lord Harling?" asked Ataulf hoarsely.

"Even that," replied the man, "and so great was your anger that, before witnesses, you have agreed to divide up Elmet, even to the last acre, if it prove otherwise."

Ataulf turned and looked at his companions.

"It is so," said one; "all are agreed on that!"

"Before witnesses?"

"Before witnesses, and by Hesus. To wipe out the insults in such a manner that in all Gaul no one has beheld such vengeance."

"And I am to divide up Elmet, otherwise?" asked Ataulf in a choked, hoarse voice.

"Even so you swore, before several witnesses."

The Lord of Elmet stared into the fire for several moments. When he looked up there was blood upon his lips, where he had bitten them.

"A noble among the Biturgi does not swear lightly, neither will I give up Elmet," said he gravely.

(To be continued.)

ONE DAY.

Up the empurpled east behold
The royal squadron of the sun,
O'er ocean skies of blue and gold,
The daily pilgrimage begun.

Across the noon, and far away,
Asail on an imperial quest,
Until the fleets at anchor lay
In some still harbor down the west.

Robert Loveman.

ONE OF THE FINEST.

By JEAN ELGINBROD.

The love-affair of a policeman who carried out his sweetheart's behest with a vengeance.

DANNY SULLIVAN was in love.

At first he thought it was indigestion, and tried seven different patent medicines, but without relief. Then he decided it must be malaria and went on a quinin and vegetable diet. At the same time, upon advice from his mother, who was much worried, he tried two doctors of local fame. One said his blood was much too thick; the other was equally positive that it was much too thin.

Danny became bewildered. He was feeling more unlike himself every day, when a sudden encounter with pretty Maggie Dooley walking home from work one night with Tom Donovan brought him up standing.

He saw red for a minute, and caught hold of a convenient lamp-post after they had passed, to keep him from going back and knocking out Tom's gold tooth. In that illuminating moment he diagnosed his condition correctly where two doctors had failed—and it didn't cost him a cent.

"The blitherin' idiot!" he snapped to the patient lamp-post. "How did he know what toime she quits work? A sicond more an' I'd got in ahead of him. I'll fight him an' spoil his map."

Even while he raged he knew that he wouldn't injure Tom—at least, not if he could help it; for Danny Sullivan, although he had been a policeman for seven months, still hated a fight.

Loving peace as he did, it was strange that he had ever donned the blue. Only the combined influence of Mother Sullivan and the shining brass buttons had persuaded him to try it. He had been on night duty, of course, ever since, and already he hated it like poison. Just walking around, looking for trouble, which he dreaded to find!

He was a big, strong fellow, with the blackest of hair, the bluest of Irish eyes, and a face as round and smooth and good-natured as a baby's. In fact, he had not yet grown up—which was undoubtedly Mother Sullivan's fault. In spite of his twenty-seven years he was still her baby.

Perhaps she would have thought differently if she had seen him dogging the footsteps of Tom and Maggie on this April night. He followed them almost two blocks, until he saw Maggie take Tom's arm as they picked their way over a muddy cross-walk.

That was too much! Danny groaned and turned back. Girls were all alike, after all. They were all fickle, even Maggie, and he had thought her so different.

He stalked home in moody disgust, and could not be persuaded to tell his troubles to Mother Sullivan. He even disdained supper, and climbing to his small back bedroom, sat down by the small open window to plan his desolate future.

He had been calling on Maggie two nights a week for about six months, had kept her supplied with candy and violets and perfumery, and had still failed to realize that his condition was serious.

He knew now just where he stood, but it was a shock. He wondered just how much she cared for him, and how much she cared for Tom. Every time he thought of Tom he grew short of breath and hot around the collar. These were new and alarming symptoms.

"I'll, I'll—I don't know what I will do," he spluttered hotly to himself.

He asked himself in the first place whether he should or should not try to win her. A tiny bit of combativeness grew within him like a weed. Yes, by thunder, he would! He'd cut Tom Donovan out, if he had to disfigure him for life.

"He's bow-legged, annyhow," he re-

flected with some comfort. "Looks jist loike a wish-bone."

He lighted his pipe and smoked gloomily. He would go to see Maggie and have it out. Maybe she thought he was easy—that he didn't mind Tom's hanging around her. Maybe she was just trying him to see if he meant business. Well, he would get up his courage and ask her to have him, plump and plain.

If she said "No!"— He shut his lips tight together.

She was a jewel, Maggie was. She'd had a hard time, too—she and her mother—with the old man, and the boy, her elder brother. Danny didn't think that they were worth the room they took up. And—my, but she was pretty!

The more he reflected upon it the better he felt.

He dressed himself, after a while, with great care, and smiled at himself sheepishly in the looking-glass as he fixed his tie.

"I'm after hopin' Maggie loikes yer looks," he said to his own reflection.

"It's the only face I've got an' I've got ter wear it three hundred and sixty-five days a year, so yez wants ter loike it, Maggie, or it's hard luck fer yez, 'cause I'm gittin' me Sullivan up, an' I think I'll marry yez now jist fer spite an'—love."

He met Mother Sullivan at the foot of the stairs as he went down, and blushed furiously as he met her wise old eyes.

"Courtin'," she announced in a matter-of-fact way.

"Oh, no," denied Danny.

Mother Sullivan laughed good-naturedly.

"Go on wid yez!" she said. "Think I got the pink-eye? I've just arrived at the conclusion that yez are in love, an' that's what bin a upsettin' yez an' givin' yez eclipse of the liver, an' so on, fer a month or two. Ef it's Maggie Dooley, git a move on yez an' fetch her home. I'm achin' fer a nice daughter-in-law."

Danny smiled foolishly.

"I'll see what she sez about it," he agreed, and bolted for the door.

Once outside he breathed easier.

His courage rose as he swung along. The manhood that had lain hidden within him so long seemed suddenly to have come to life. His easy boyish indifference was taking on a tinge of assertiveness that was very new and very surprising. He felt that if he suddenly met Tom Donovan face to face, it might mean trouble for Tom.

He doubled up one big fist and felt admiringly of the hard knuckles. He hated fights—they were messy things, all dirt and gore. His friendly soul loved peace and good-will. But if he really had to fight, he decided that he could do it just now with a will.

He reached that decision and Maggie Dooley's house at the same time. It was a shabby wooden block on a shabby side street, and she lived in a shabby little flat on the second floor.

II.

DANNY rang the bell, his courage still high. By the time he heard her footsteps on the stairs his knees caved inward and clung together, and he had to pry them hastily apart by main force twice before the door opened.

He held the railing as he raised his hat, one eye on Maggie, the other watching the treacherous slant of his shaking limbs.

"Why, it's Danny! Good evening," said Maggie, just as surprised as if she hadn't seen him every Wednesday and Sunday evening for the last six months.

"How did yez guess it?" asked Danny foolishly.

"Yez look so natural," laughed Maggie.

Danny walked in and climbed the stairs. He felt better again, after he had hung up his hat and met Mrs. Dooley's friendly greeting. Mr. Sam Dooley, Sr., and Mr. Sam Dooley, Jr., were nowhere to be seen. They seldom were.

He had never seen either one of them more than twice, and didn't know them when he met them face to face. He had his suspicions about the pair, though Maggie never complained a word. But it was very evident that both she and her mother made slaves of themselves to keep the home together and a veil of respectability about the ungodly men of the family.

Mrs. Dooley was very sociable, and Danny soon felt at ease and almost forgot to be nervous about the momentous errand on which he had come.

Maggie had baked a wonderful cake, and she brought it out proudly for his inspection. He had meant to show his wounded feelings at her sudden friendship with Tom, but he forgot about that as well, for the time being, and exclaimed over her baking with reckless enthusiasm.

"Hivins!" he said admiringly. "An' it's got raisins in it."

"Sure," Maggie nodded. "Whole raisins."

"Um," sighed Danny. "It smells jist grand. How do yez suppose it would taste?"

Mrs. Dooley produced a knife.

"I knew it, Maggie," tragically. "Cut him a piece. It may kill him, but annyhow, he'll die happy, an 'that's worth a great deal."

Danny took his portion, smiling rapturously.

"I'm so glad I come. Ain't this jist a grand party?"

They had a merry time, tasting and teasing and laughing. Danny beamed with boyish mischief until Mrs. Dooley bade him good night and left them to themselves.

After that conversation lagged. Danny remembered the question he was going to ask and his tongue cleaved to the roof of his mouth. He also remembered Tom Donovan and the slight on the street corner, and he wondered how best to broach the subject. He wondered if she really liked Tom.

Maggie grew silent, too—but who ever knows what a girl thinks?

Danny kept on wondering, and grew more and more tongue-tied until at last Maggie rushed in and broke the ice.

"I saw Tom Donovan to-night," she said.

"So did I," grimly.

Maggie looked up in gentle surprise.

"Oh, did yez?" innocently.

"I did, an' it's the last toime I want ter see him walkin' home wid yez."

"Oh," said Maggie. "By what right, may I ask?"

Danny already had cold feet, but he set his teeth and kept on.

"I want yez to be my girl an' nobody else's. I got a good position, an' I kin give yez a good home. I love yez, Maggie, though I didn't know it fer sure till I seen Tom a makin' up ter yez. Yer a jewel, Maggie, darlint. Will yez have me?"

He didn't look like Mother Sullivan's baby as he bent over Maggie's drooped head. He looked every inch a man who wanted what he wanted when he wanted it.

Maggie flushed a rosy pink, and then grew pale. Her long lashes dropped over the deep Irish blue of her eyes. Her breath came quickly under her dainty white waist.

"Oh," she said, "I didn't think yez cared much—about me, Danny."

Danny leaned lower.

"Is thot all yez kin say, Maggie? I'm waitin' fer me answer."

Maggie didn't speak, but their eyes met after an instant, and then their lips.

Danny seized her boldly with a sigh of content. It wasn't so hard, after all. If he had only asked her two months ago and saved all his worries. Poor Tom Donovan—it was all up with him!

"Oh, Maggie, darlint," he whispered. "Yez mean it fer sure, don't yez?"

Maggie drew a long breath, and then suddenly pulled away and stood up in front of him.

"No, I don't," she said deliberately.

Danny stared. His heart went down in sudden helpless silence. His elation all vanished. His honest boyish eyes clouded over.

"No, I don't," repeated Maggie.

Her voice was steady, but there was a tremor in her firm little chin.

"I think ye're awful good, Danny, an' I like yez lots, but ye're too much of a baby ter marry anny one, an' ye're a great big coward, too."

"I ain't," retorted Danny.

"Oh, yes, yez are. Ye're scared stiff of a fight. Now, ye've said so yerself lots of times, an' yez hain't made a single record-mark fer yerself since ye've bin on the force; now, have yez?"

Danny's head drooped.

"Well, there hain't bin nothin' doin'. I wouldn't go huntin' fer trouble, would I?"

"No danger," she exclaimed. "Ye'd

let a burglar walk all over ye before ye'd use the pistol, or yer fists, either. I'm jist ashamed of ye."

Danny squared his shoulders.

"Oh, Maggie," he said.

"Yes, I know it's true, and so do yez. I want a man, not a baby. I want some one ter fight me battles fer me. I've had ter fight 'em myself fer nineteen years, an' I'm tired of it. I want a man—the kind that would ride up on a horse, like *Lochinvar,* an' dash off with me, an' shoot iviry sowl in sight that tried to stop him."

She stopped, hot and breathless.

Danny blinked at her in bewilderment.

"An' ef I was thot kind af a feller, ye'd marry me—ef I was loike—what did yez say his name was?"

"*Lochinvar.* Yes, I would that, Danny."

They faced each other, she spent and flushed in righteous indignation, he startled and wide awake with the sting of her scorn.

Ah, but she was pretty! Such big blue eyes, such dusky, blue-black hair, such soft red lips!

Danny moved heavily toward the door.

"Well, whin I git ter be a man, as yez call it, an' do somethin' big, I kin come back, an' yez'll have me ef ye're still free?"

"Yes," she said, "I'll marry yez thin."

Something new and strange flashed over Danny for an instant. He caught her and held her fast.

"Wait fer me, Maggie," he said, and kissed her soft round cheeks and tumbled hair.

Then he felt blindly for his hat and went down the stairs.

III.

THE cool night air felt good on his flushed face as he opened the outer door. He shut it softly after him and felt his way down the dark outer steps.

His hands shook as he took out his watch. It was fifteen minutes of ten. He was due at the station at ten for his night-beat. He headed that way mechanically.

He felt numb all over. The shock of Maggie's scorn seemed to deaden, temporarily, both love and jealousy. He was seeing himself as others saw him for the first time in all his twenty-seven years, and the effect was far from pleasant.

He reported on time, and went out on duty as usual, but he walked in a maze.

He wondered, after a little, if Tom was her ideal of a man. Yet she said she liked him, Danny, and would marry him if he could prove himself a man and not a coward.

And he had kissed her! Danny thrilled as he remembered it. That was worth a dozen fights—yes, even a black eye and fourteen cracked ribs.

It was a long night. Quiet respectability lay over the silent houses and empty yards. That end of town was always peaceful—a condition for which he had been devoutly thankful until now. He had never yet made an arrest, had never yet been obliged to even think of the six-shooter at his service. How he hated that six-shooter! The mere sight of it gave him goose-flesh.

Occasionally a night-prowling cat skulked by into the shadows or a belated clubman sang out a cheery greeting.

For the first time since he had been on the force Danny felt of the six-shooter voluntarily and wished for trouble. Anything that would give him a chance to play *Lochinvar,* he prayed—anything!

But nothing came, either that night or the next. A gloomy week slipped by—two weeks—and peace and good-will apparently reigned everywhere except in Danny's turbulent soul.

He watched Maggie from distant street-corners with an ache in his heart as big as a soup-plate. Sometimes she went alone. More often Tom Donovan was her escort.

Danny dared not face her. Her taunts still rang in his ear. He grew thin brooding over them, for he knew that she would not wait forever. Tom might win her, after all.

Danny lost his title of "Mother Sullivan's Baby" with the men and became "Gloomy Gus."

So May dragged by and June came, with sweet, lingering days.

Danny, pacing the long avenues one of the first nights of perfect June weather, smelled honeysuckles and syringa-blos-

soms and heaved a sigh that almost broke his shoe-lacings.

It was nearly two o'clock. The streets were very still.

Danny noted a big star just above him, and stopping in the shadow of a big elm on the edge of the walk, wished on it, half in jest, half in earnest. That was a trick of Maggie's. He stood still a minute or two thinking of her.

Then, suddenly, he roused himself and listened. A shadow moved on the lawn ahead of him. It made no sound as it melted into the shadow of the house.

Slowly, carefully, Danny dropped down to the grass and rested on his knees.

A second shadow followed the first swiftly across the lawn to the small side balcony of the big house. Then all was still.

Danny looked sharply about. His keen eyes spied a figure crouching by the gate not two yards from him. Evidently that was the man on guard. He must have been stupid with drink, or he would have heard Danny approach.

Danny sized him up as well as he could. Here was where he must use the club. A revolver-shot would scare the other two birds away, and he wanted to catch them red-handed, if possible.

Perhaps his chance had come at last.

The man at the gate collapsed silently and suddenly as Danny struck with his stick. If he uttered any cry it was smothered in the thick folds of Danny's coat as it went over his head.

To be sure that he would not interfere later on, Danny tied him to the post where he had crouched, coat and all, with a piece of rope he found in the man's own pocket.

Evidently the other two men were busy inside the house, for he heard nothing, saw nothing. He crept along in the shadow of the hedge until he reached the side of the house. Then, with a tight grasp on his stick, he went boldly up to the side balcony and in at the open window, as they had done before him. He landed softly on the carpet.

IV.

FROM the room to his right came the faint clink of silver. He stole to the heavily curtained doorway and peered through. Two men were standing before a massive sideboard. Their backs were toward him, but he could see that one was piling the silver into a big sack. The other was prying open an under cupboard in search of more plunder.

The light from a small lantern cast a flickering gleam over their bent figures as they hastily worked. They were making the most of their time, and trusting entirely to the man without to give warning of danger from the street, and to their own sharp ears to tell them of trouble from within.

Danny hesitated. He might summon help first and then easily capture the two before they had a suspicion of it. If he tried it alone—he was well armed, but there were two against one—they might finish him. There might be another one, also, somewhere else in the house, for all he knew.

Then he put up his head like a young war-horse.

"I'm a cowardly calf, am I?" said he to himself, and swung aside the curtain.

"Hands up!" he shouted, and covered them both with the hated six-shooter.

There was a second's deadly pause. After that things happened.

The two men sprang toward him with a single instinct.

He fired. One fell, but the other came on.

They grappled in the doorway, and the velvet curtain came down upon them. Its heavy pole struck Danny a stunning blow, but he shut his eyes and fired again through the clumsy velvet folds that enveloped them both.

As they struggled he saw the other man raise himself and crawl toward the open window. He got half-way over the sill, and Danny fired again. The burglar dropped outside. Danny heard the heavy thud of his inert body.

Then he felt a sudden sharp thrust in his arm, and realized that his antagonist had a knife.

Danny shut his teeth and fought desperately. It seemed to him that he had been swinging and struggling about the room for hours, when suddenly the gas blazed up in the next room and he heard

footsteps. The family had been aroused at last.

"In here!" he called loudly.

Then a heavy roar stopped his ears, and everything grew black, and he went down, down, down.

V.

HE awoke some time the next afternoon. He was bandaged and tied like a turkey ready for serving. The room was his own, but there was a nurse in a blue dress and a white apron and cap standing about three miles away from him, at the foot of the bed.

She asked him how he felt.

Danny tried to smile, and was faintly surprised to find that he couldn't. His face didn't feel natural, and he wondered vaguely if he had got some one else's by some peculiar mistake.

"Foine," he said, or thought he did, and went back to sleep.

He knew it was morning when he awoke again, because the sunshine was pouring in at the window, and it only came into his room in the early morning. The nurse was trying to feed him with a spoon, and Mother Sullivan stood beside her.

Danny looked at them both stupidly. Then suddenly he remembered. His chance had come, and he had made good at last.

It all came back to him in a flash now. The man at the gate—the fight within. And he had met them alone, two against one—and had triumphed. He had used both the stick and the six-shooter. He had proved at last that he was no coward.

He gave a sigh of infinite content. What could Maggie say now but "Yes"?

"Did they pinch the three of thim?" he asked faintly.

Mother Sullivan nodded proudly.

"They did. Wan of thim is jist after dyin' now up to the horspital. The other two ain't so bad, but they're black an' blue an' purple an' rid. I seen 'em. One's got his jaw cracked. The dead wan was an owld rounder. The other two, yez know, ain't so bad, but they're bad enough. They'll git tin years apiece, sure, an' mebbe more."

Danny sighed happily.

"Thot's foine. Did the chief say annythin'?"

"Tickled to death. Ye'll git shoulder-straps fer this, an' the mon of the house 's bin here iviry day in his auto ter see how yez was."

Danny moved impatiently.

"Anny one else?" he queried slyly.

"Oh, lots. An'- Maggie Dooley's down-stairs now. She stopped on her way to work. I didn't know ef yez would see her or not."

Danny thrilled.

"I will," he said.

Mother Sullivan hesitated a bit.

"Don't yez let her say annythin' mean ter yez. Yez jist did yer duty loike a hero, an' that's all."

Danny looked at his mother, mystified, but she went hurriedly from the room, and the nurse with her.

What under heaven could Maggie blame him for? Hadn't he risen to the occasion just as she wanted him to do? Then he forgot words and mysteries, and everything else, for Maggie stood there before him.

He reached out a shaking hand, and she laid one of hers shyly in it. He feasted his eyes on her flushing face and neat gray suit.

"It's hivin ter see yez, Maggie," said Danny.

"I'm glad," said Maggie, and her eyes filled. "I'm sorry ye're thot hurt. I hope yez'll git betther quick. The doctor sez yez will. An' I don't want yez ter be frettin' about annythin'."

"How could I?" laughed Danny happily. "Yez know what yez told me two months ago?"

Maggie looked startled and bewildered.

"Oh, but it's so different now, an' mother blames yez, of course, some, an' think of the disgrace on her an' me, now—"

Danny, all amazement, tried to rise up on his elbow.

"Disgrace on yez—an' her—an' she blames me—fer what?"

"Why, fer hurtin' them both so—the two burglars, yez know."

"Fer why, in Hivin's name?"

"Why, Danny, didn't yez know?"

"Know what?"

"The two yez hurt so were—papa—an' brother Sam!"

VI.

DANNY fell back, as white as his pillow. An unearthly sense of blackness came over him.

He fought his way through it inch by inch until he was himself again. Then he swore under his breath. Then he shut his eyes convulsively, and a big tear, born of weakness and lost hopes, came rolling down one cheek.

Maggie could have withstood swearing, or even pleading. But that tear! Danny crying! She watched him a second, racked in mind.

Then she drew a long breath and dropped on to her knees beside the bed and laid her rosy face against his white one.

"Danny, Danny, nivir mind. Oh, don't cry. I'm glad they are in jail. They deserve it. I don't care a bit. An' mama kin say jist what she likes. I don't care about thot, aither. If yez kin stand our disgrace I'll marry yez, anny time yez say."

Danny lay very still for a minute. His eyes searched hers. Then he hugged her tight with his well arm and drew a deep breath.

"Mother," he called softly.

Mother Sullivan came in on a run.

"Go git Father McElroy," he said calmly. "Maggie an' me want ter git hitched roight now."

On the Brink of the Precipice.

By FRED V. GREENE, Jr.

What it is like to be accused of an awful crime and find oneself helpless in the meshes of the law.

CHAPTER I.

THE NIGHT BEFORE.

"BOYS, it isn't necessary for me to tell you why we're gathered here to-night—so I'll not do so. But before we sit down I want to ask a favor. I want you all to drink a silent toast to the little woman who this time to-morrow night will be"—and he hesitated a moment before he added, his voice lowered a trifle—"Mrs. Robert Stedman."

With one motion the glasses were raised and quickly emptied of their contents. There was not a sound; in fact, it seemed almost a solemnity, as they were put down on the table again, and the diners, following the lead of their host, seated themselves.

The occasion was the bachelor dinner given, in one of the private dining-rooms of New York's most exclusive hotel, by Robert Stedman to his closest friends—some his friends of early school life, others of his short college career, and the rest, the minority, his business associates.

Robert Stedman was one of two sons—strong, athletic, and fine looking. His brother, George, was the direct opposite in every way—a hunchback and an invalid since birth. Two greater contrasts could not be found in a day's travel.

Yet, with it all, they were the most devoted of brothers. Robert's love was akin to pity for the misfortunes of ill health and a misshapen body.

From their earliest youth the two had been inseparable, Robert carefully watching over George during their school life, fighting for him whenever the occasion demanded, and often when the occasion really did not require, but he thought it did; helping him with his studies and endeavoring in every way to make George forget his handicap.

Their father, the Rev. Asa Stedman, was one of the old school of Methodist ministers, never bewailing his lack of the luxuries of life.

There were times, though, when he would remark, with just a trace of regret in his voice: "Wife, I know we have a great deal to be thankful for, but if we only had a little more money we might

get some great specialist to help little Georgie."

So things went on, year after year. The family were never located long in one place—a Methodist minister is kept on the move. And when Robert was nearly eighteen and George a year younger, plans were made for their future.

Try as the old folks could, it seemed impossible to send both the boys to college—a fact that worried the parents greatly. But the failing health of George soon decided the question—it was impossible for him to leave home.

They could, by stinting themselves, send Robert to a university, and as he had shown a natural bent for mineralogy, it was decided to place him at the Yale Scientific School.

For the first time in their lives, Robert and George were to be separated—a fact over which George brooded greatly. But it had to be.

The day Robert left the little home all the strength that George in his invalid state possessed seemed to leave him.

It was some days later before he became himself again, and this was not until he had received letters from Robert telling how happy he was upon the beginning of his college life. Such was the great love George had for his elder brother.

Time passed swiftly to Robert. He had already entered upon the third year of his course when the telegram came.

At first he could not understand it. He read it over and over. It was from one of the deacons of his father's church, and ran as follows:

Accident. Return home immediately.
THOMAS DICKINSON.

Robert packed his bag hurriedly, and started on the first train. Although he imagined all kinds of dreadful things that could happen, they were nothing compared to what he found when he arrived.

His father and mother had driven to visit a sick member of their church, living a few miles from town. On their return the carriage had been struck by a railroad train, which, hidden by a deep cut, they had not seen, and both were killed instantly.

George was completely prostrated. Robert, indeed, had before him a dismal prospect—one that taxed his manhood to the utmost. The tragedy put a sudden end to his college career, and, furthermore, made him absolutely dependent upon himself, with George also to care for.

After the funeral he wrote a long letter to his college roommate, telling of the terrible catastrophe and asking him to send the trifles he had left behind. Then he forced himself to a quick decision as to the future.

There was only one thing he could do—mining. But he could not take George with him. This was the one great objection to going West. But as it had to be, he looked around for a place to leave his brother, and was fortunate to find a good family who were willing to take him at a very nominal figure.

This point settled, Robert started for the West with the few dollars he had left from the sale of household effects, after the funeral expenses had been paid.

Just before his hurried departure from college, the finding of gold was reported at Big Tooth Gap, with the resultant rush of prospectors, miners, and riff-raff that follow such rumors.

Little dreaming of what was ahead of him, Stedman made direct for the newly discovered property, and after long, tedious train travel, followed by a ride across the mountains in a prairie-wagon, he arrived at the mining-camp.

That there is the greatest difference between theory and practise Robert quickly learned the next day.

It seemed there was absolutely no place for him at the mines. There was a chance for hardened, tough, unprincipled men, but for a young man—a tenderfoot—just out of college, there seemed absolutely nothing to do except to stand the gibes and attempted jokes of the hangers-on who turn up with every mining stampede.

Then the price of provisions and lodging was exorbitant—so much so that his little capital was fast being depleted. When hope had almost left him he secured a position as waiter in a restaurant, and by absorbing everything he heard was soon well versed in the rough ways of the camp.

Robert carefully avoided everything that would cost money, and hoarded his salary. His meals and lodging were furnished him, so he saved every cent he earned.

One day the news came that the other side of Big Thunder Mountain a prospector had made a lucky strike. This was enough to start almost the entire camp, and before an hour had passed a steady stream was heading toward the new find.

Among the very first to arrive was Robert Stedman, who quickly staked out his claim.

At first, it seemed a useless task—there was nothing in sight but the clay. He was becoming disheartened, because already he owed three weeks' board for George, and was without the money to pay it.

Then his luck turned, and in six months he was a wealthy man. Six months later he was the richest mine-owner in the district, hiring others to do the labor, his time being entirely taken up with superintending his many interests.

This had all happened ten years before the night of his bachelor dinner. When wealth had come to him he had provided handsomely for George, even going so far as to make him his sole heir. He went East often just to see him, as the doctor advised against George going out to Robert.

Then fate had thrown Helen Whitlock in Robert's path. It seemed a case of love at first sight, and the dinner was to celebrate his last night as a bachelor.

Everything had gone along perfectly, and the occasion was a grand success. Old friendships were renewed and new ones formed. After the cigars had been lighted, the many well-wishes given, and the last toast drunk, Stedman rose.

"Boys, I want to thank you all for your kind words," he said. "Some of us have not met in ten years. Yes, I see one over there — Doc Pierson. I don't believe I 've seen you since we left public school, and that's easily fifteen years ago. But I hope to see you all very often now. I have closed out all my active interests in the West, and am going to live among you again. And for Miss Whitlock, as well as myself, I wish to say that there will always be a place for any and all of you at our table."

With three cheers for their host and three more for the prospective Mrs. Stedman, the party broke up. As the last guest left and the waiters were already beginning to clear away the débris, Stedman linked his arm through his brother's.

"Come, George," he said, "let us go to my rooms. I am tired, and I know you must be."

Arriving there—they were in the same hotel—they talked a while, when Robert suddenly spoke up: "George, you know you are my sole heir. But my duty is now to Helen. I am going to change that will to-morrow morning. I should have done so before, but have been too busy with other matters. But you shall always have an allowance of two hundred dollars a month, as long as you live, and if you want more, you have but to say so."

"Oh, Rob," was the reply, "you are too good to me. It's more than enough."

"Bosh, boy!" Robert objected. "Why, do you know what I am worth to-day?"

In reply to George's questioning look, he continued carelessly: "About five millions, in round figures. But come, now, we must go to bed. If you awake before I do, call me, as I want to get down to my attorney's early to get that will business settled. Somehow, I wish I had done so before. Good night, George. I hope you sleep well."

CHAPTER II.

THE DAY AFTER.

WHEN George awoke the next morning there was a feeling of dulness in his whole system, for which he could not account—a feeling that was so entirely new, it worried him. The truth of the matter was, he had partaken of the wines the previous evening, something new for him.

Pulling his watch from under the pillow, he found it was only seven, and, knowing Robert did not rise before eight, turned over, glad of the opportunity for another nap.

For some reason, however, he could not sleep. Thoughts of the forthcoming events of the day that had already dawned, thronged thick upon his mind. The sun was streaming into the room, and with a sigh at the recollection that another was about to usurp the place he had always held in Robert's affections, he murmured aloud: "Well, they have a fine day, at any rate."

"I suppose she is a lovely girl," he continued to reflect. He had as yet not met her, having arrived in town only the night before. "I am awfully anxious to see her. I wonder what she is like. I do hope—but I know Rob's choice would be perfection itself."

Looking at his watch again, he noted that fifteen minutes had passed, and as further sleep seemed out of the question, he decided to get up and dress.

Passing through his brother's room on the way to the bath, he perceived that he was still sleeping soundly. George also noticed a peculiar odor, but in his rather muddled condition, he gave this no particular attention.

After a shave and a cold shower he felt better, and fell again to thinking of the great event that would take place that day. With this upon his mind, he passed through his brother's room on his way back to his own.

"Rob is certainly sleeping soundly," he mused, as he stood watching him. "He said to call him when I awoke. I think I will do so. Rob! Rob! I guess it's time to get up."

The other gave no sign, however.

"He must be very tired," George reflected. "I think I had better let him sleep a little longer. I'll finish dressing, and then wake him. We can talk then, too." And he passed on to his own room.

As he finished dressing, he realized that three quarters of an hour had passed, and it was now eight o'clock—Rob's rising hour. Going into his brother's room, he stood at the foot of the bed.

"Rob! Rob! It's eight o'clock!" he called.

There was no answer, not even a move on Rob's part to intimate that he heard.

"Rob, come! Wake up!" repeated George.

As there was absolutely no sign of Rob's responding, he went around to the side of the bed, and continued: "Rob! Please wake up."

Still no apparent sign of life; and as George looked down and saw the white face of his brother, half hidden in the covers of the bed, he gave a sudden start and, throwing his arms around him, called frantically, "Rob! Rob!"

But the body he touched was cold, and he realized that something was wrong. With terror written all over his face, his eyes fairly bulging, George sprang back from the bed, and rushing to the telephone, frantically screamed: "Help! Help! Quick! A doctor!"

Leaving the receiver dangling at the end of the cord, he threw himself upon the bed, and as he gazed into Robert's face, the full realization of the awful truth burst upon him.

"Rob! Oh, Rob! Tell me you're not dead," he moaned, as he shook the body. "Wake up! Wake up, Rob! You can't —you sha'n't die and leave me."

With an awful paroxysm of grief, he continued to moan pitifully between sobs that shook his entire frame: "You shall not leave me! You shall not!"

CHAPTER III.

STARTING THE WHEELS OF JUSTICE.

How long George lay there, clasping his brother's body, begging him to come back to him, he did not know. But a heavy, commanding rap on the door brought him to his senses.

"Who's there?" he asked, as he straightened out upon the bed.

A voice questioned from the other side of the door: "Anything wrong in there?"

Here was help at last. Perhaps it was the doctor.

With a glad leap, George rushed to the door, and as he frantically turned the knob he exclaimed wildly, "He's not dead, is he? Tell me he is not!"

"Who's not dead?" roughly inquired the hotel detective, as he entered the room.

"Rob—my brother," moaned George, as he pointed toward the bed.

The presence of this cold, commanding

official of the law only made his grief more intense, and burying his face in his hands to shut out the sight of his dead brother, he moaned between sobs that shook his entire body. "He's there—there! He's not dead, is he? Oh! tell me he is not."

Going over to the bed, the officer pulled back the coverings. Turning the body over so that he could see the face, he gave a startled leap back.

"My God! It's Mr. Stedman!" he exclaimed.

"Yes—my brother," groaned George, as he stepped toward the head of the bed.

But the officer put out his hand and roughly pushed him back.

"How'd it happen?" he questioned, staring so fixedly into George's eyes that he again buried his face in his hands as he replied faintly, "I don't know, but please get a doctor."

"There is no use for a doctor in this case—it's the coroner and the police we need," the other declared.

Then, as he sniffed the air, and leaned over close to the body, he suddenly straightened up with the one word: "Chloroform!"

"You mean he is really dead?" George demanded, his face drawn and pinched.

"Yes—dead as a door nail," replied the officer carelessly.

"Oh, it can't be! There's a mistake. Get the doctor," implored George, unwilling to believe the truth, and he pleadingly placed his hand upon the officer's arm.

But that official only shook him off, and proceeded to examine the bed linen carefully. He then stepped to the telephone, still keeping his eyes upon George.

"Miss Whelan?" the officer questioned, as he placed the receiver to his ear. "Send up the manager, or Mr. Conrad, if he is there. Quick, please."

Turning sharply to George, he questioned abruptly: "Who are you?"

"George Stedman, Robert Stedman's brother," was the reply.

"Who else was here in the rooms with you last night?" continued the other.

"No one—only Rob and I," answered George. Then he continued, as his grief came on afresh: "Oh, I can't understand it. He was well and strong last night, and seemed so happy. It's terrible. Tell me, what do you think he died from? Tell me, please."

For a moment the officer made no reply. He seemed to be searching George's face for something he could not find there. Then, with his beady eyes watching every muscle, he announced slowly: "Young man—your brother did not die—"

"He is not dead!" George almost screamed, as he leaped to his feet and rushed to the officer's side.

"Not so fast, young man, and let me finish," the other commanded as he roughly pushed George aside and, seizing his arm in anything but a gentle way, forced him to the bed, where he sank down. "I said your brother did not die." Then he slowly continued, emphasizing every word and carefully watching its effect upon George. "He—was—murdered."

"Oh!—no!" George broke out vehemently. "That can't be. Why—"

"What's this, Hennessy?" questioned a voice behind them, as a man entered and carefully closed the door.

"Mr. Conrad," spoke up the officer, "Mr. Stedman has died in the night. But to me it looks like a chloroform murder."

"Oh! it can't be," broke in George, as he gazed pleadingly into the hotel manager's eyes.

"This is awful—terrible!" gasped Mr. Conrad, realizing what this might mean for him. "But surely—why, I can't believe it."

"He hadn't an enemy in the world," George declared between his sobs.

"Just a moment. Hennessy, we must keep this as quiet as possible. Telephone to the coroner, and notify headquarters to send around detectives. Why, it seems only an hour ago I saw him, well, and apparently happy. I can't realize he is dead," and the landlord passed his hand over his brow mechanically, as if endeavoring to clear away unpleasant realities.

Then, carefully drawing the bed sheet over the face of the dead man, he sank down in a chair.

"We can only await the coming of the coroner," he announced to George, who

was still sobbing quietly. "Mr. Stedman, it's terrible—it's awful. But try to control yourself."

"You can't realize what he was to me," George murmured. "He was more than a brother. No one will ever know—no one could ever understand."

For some moments no one spoke. George's head was buried in his hands—Mr. Conrad's, too, was bowed—and Hennessy was staring vacantly at the door.

For some moments all retained these positions, when they were suddenly aroused by a knock. Hennessy stepped to the door and opened it, admitting a bell-boy, who announced the man at his heels. "The coroner," he said as a business-appearing individual stepped into the room.

"What's the case?" he gruffly demanded.

"A sudden death in the night," answered Mr. Conrad, accompanying the coroner to the edge of the bed.

"H'm!" grunted the doctor as he pulled the sheet from Robert's body and calmly proceeded to examine it carefully. George had straightened up in his chair, and was awaiting eagerly the result of the investigation.

The doctor suddenly wheeled around and exclaimed bluntly:

"Another case for the police. Chloroform murder."

"Are you sure?" questioned George, rushing to the doctor's side, and gazing up pleadingly into his face.

"Sure?" he exclaimed sarcastically. "Why, I ought to be. It's my business to be."

Then turning to Mr. Conrad, he added: "Have you notified the police?"

"Yes," slowly replied the landlord.

"Any witnesses or suspects?"

"No," Mr. Conrad answered. "But—"

"Well, here's the certificate for removal," broke in the doctor. "I'll perform the autopsy later. It seems—"

A knock at the door prevented further remarks, and two men walked in.

"Hello, doc, what's happened here?" gruffly questioned one of the men.

"Chloroform," he replied briefly.

"Know him, Conrad?" the questioner inquired of the hotel manager.

"Certainly," was the response. "He is Robert Stedman, a wealthy mine owner from the West, who always stopped here when in town."

"When are you to perform the autopsy, doc?" was the next question.

"To-day, if I get time. But I must go now and leave you to your job. Good luck."

Turning to Mr. Conrad, the leader of the two detectives started to interrogate him, while the other walked over to the windows and studied the ledges and sills carefully for any trace of footsteps.

"When was he last seen alive?"

"About three o'clock this morning. He was to be married to-day, and gave a dinner here last night."

"Yes," spoke up George, whose presence the detectives had ignored up to this time. "He was in perfect health when we retired—"

"Oh! were you with him?" interrupted the detective, as he turned and studied George carefully.

"Yes, sir. And I know he hadn't an enemy in the world. Why, he even planned—" George had to stop short as the thoughts of his brother brought on his grief afresh.

"There now," the detective observed, trying to speak tenderly. "Go ahead and tell us all."

"Oh, don't ask me to, now," George begged, as his sobs broke out afresh. "I can't say anything now."

Beckoning the other detective to him, he held a whispered conversation for a moment or two. Then the leader of the pair stepped over to George, and placing his hand upon his arm announced, "I am sorry I am forced to ask you to come with me, Mr. Stedman."

George looked up into the man's face, unable to understand the new turn of events. "Where—to?" he stammered, bewildered.

"To the police station. I must hold you as a witness, to await the action of the coroner's jury."

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE HANDS OF FATE.

FOR a moment George stared at the officer, his mouth working convulsively.

Then he suddenly found his voice, and fairly shrieked: "You don't mean to infer—"

"Now, Mr. Stedman, be cool. We infer nothing. It is merely a matter of form, and I really regret that I am forced to take this step."

The officer spoke pleasantly, and his words calmed George somewhat.

"Very well, sir, I am ready to go," he said. Then turning to Mr. Conrad, he added: "I'll be right back, so touch nothing until I return."

Smothering his grief as much as possible, he stepped into the elevator with the detectives, and soon found himself in the street, walking between the two men. As they were both in civilian clothes, no one noticed the three as they boarded a street car, headed toward police headquarters.

Hardly a word was spoken during the ride, George doing his best to conceal his emotions, although an occasional tear would course down his cheeks. The passengers in the car paid no attention to the little hunchback whose face was so pale and drawn.

"Come," quietly commanded the officer, as he signaled for the car to stop.

The three walked slowly down the side street, and entered a large white building, around which a number of people were standing.

George noticed that curious looks were thrown at him, and also that every one seemed to know the men with him. They walked quickly across the room, and stopped before the desk, where a whispered conversation was held between the sergeant and the two detectives.

"Name?" suddenly questioned the sergeant, as he took up his pen.

"George Stedman," George answered, his voice trembling slightly.

"Any middle name?"

"Taunton."

"Address?"

"Highwood, Pennsylvania."

"Age?"

"Twenty-six, but why—"

"Answer the questions," snorted the sergeant. "Occupation?"

"None, sir, I've always—"

Without heeding George, the sergeant turned to the detectives.

"All right, take him up-stairs."

They each took George by the arm and, after climbing one flight of stairs, conducted him into a room littered with papers and files, in the center of which stood a large camera.

"What are they going to do to me now?" demanded George, as two men advanced toward him in a threatening manner.

"It's all right, boy. Don't worry. They merely want to take your picture. Brace up—it'll soon be over."

But the handling he received, as he was photographed for the Rogues' Gallery and measured for the Bertillon system, was anything but gentle. When it was all over, the operator jocularly remarked to one of the detectives: "All right, Dick, chase it out of here. We've got him all right."

"Can I go now?" George inquired anxiously.

"Why—" and for a moment it seemed the other was at a loss just what to say. The sight of this poor, misshapen unfortunate, cringing at every harsh word or look, seemed to touch the hardened officer. "Why—I think the captain may want to see you first," he finally replied.

Still holding George by the arm, the detectives ushered him into a room containing a large, flat desk, behind which was seated a portly man, who glanced up as they entered, then went on with his writing.

The party stood for some moments, when George remarked: "I think Miss Whitlock ought—"

"Silence, you," bawled the captain bringing down his fist with a bang upon the desk.

George shuddered at this display of anger, and his lips trembled as the captain wheeled around in his chair.

"Well, humpy, what's yer name?" he demanded in a loud voice, evidently with the intention of intimidating the prisoner.

"George T. Stedman," was the almost inaudible answer, and the poor fellow cringed closer to the big detective.

"All right—set down," commanded the other in the same coarse voice. Then nodding to the detectives, he added: "Leave him with me."

As the detectives closed the door softly after them, the captain looked up from his papers, and after staring intently at

George an instant, burst out with: "What did ye kill him fer?"

"Kill whom?" George gasped in alarm, unable to grasp the full import of the question.

"Yer brother!" snorted the captain.

"I—kill—my—brother!" exclaimed George, hesitating between each word as the awful accusation burst full upon him. "Why, how could you suspect me of such a thing?" His entire grief was lost, as he realized now why he was being questioned. "Oh! this is awful!" he moaned.

"Don't ye lie to me," the captain bawled, as he raised his hand threateningly.

"I swear—I *did* not," George exclaimed with marked emphasis.

He crouched back tremblingly in his chair, in fear of the uplifted hand.

"Then, who did it?" quickly demanded the official.

"I don't know, sir," George answered meekly.

"Look here, humpy, you were the only person with yer brother last night, weren't ye?"

"Yes, sir," was the almost inaudible reply.

"Then it was yer, and ye'll go to the chair fer it," was the brutal announcement that followed.

George's entire strength seemed to leave him, and he came near sinking to the floor.

"Oh, sir, don't say that," he begged, as he burst into sobs that shook his entire body.

"Cut it out, ye little baby. Up ye go," muttered the captain, as he touched a bell.

An officer quickly entered the room, and the captain addressed him.

"Call the wagon, and take this to court. McCurdy is still sittin' there. Here are the papers."

With a curt, "Come wid me," the officer grasped George's arm, led him to a cell, pushed him in, and, with a grating sound, closed and locked the door after him.

Here he was, a prisoner, accused of the murder of his own brother. It was all so terrible he could scarcely realize that he was not in the midst of a horrible dream. He sank down in a heap upon the stone floor, where he gave full vent to his grief.

For some moments this continued, then suddenly the thought of Miss Whitlock occurred to him.

"How terrible for her!" he moaned through his tears. "What a shock! What have we ever done—"

"Hey there, you, come here," commanded a man at the door of the cell.

George had been so absorbed in his grief that he had not heard approaching footsteps, and at the order he looked up, to see a number of men standing outside his cell.

"Come here, I say," snorted one of them, "or I'll come in there fer ye."

George attempted to rise to his feet, but his legs seemed paralyzed—they refused to bear his weight. With a curse, one of the men unlocked the door, and striding toward the figure huddled in the corner, grasped him by the arm.

"Ye won't come, eh?" he bawled, as he struck George a stinging blow with his hand. "But ye will!" he continued, as he dragged him to the front of the cell.

George had ceased to sob. It seemed all his strength had failed him, leaving him unable to talk, or even cry.

He tried to raise his hands to his head in an attempt to protect himself, but the effort was a failure—they dropped limply to his side.

"Ever see him before?" questioned the officer who was standing over him.

"Not me," the men outside the cell replied in chorus.

"Well, take a good pike at him now, anyway," continued the officer. "Here you, hold yer head up," he commanded, as he grabbed George by the hair and jerked him so that his face could be better seen.

Then, with a disgusted fling, he cast him in a heap on the stone floor, where he lay apparently unconscious.

The footsteps dying away in the distance told him the party had gone.

"Oh, what shall I do! What shall I do!" he moaned. "If I could only die, too."

"Come, young feller," commanded a voice alongside him. "Yer coach is waitin' fer ye."

Mustering all the strength he could

command, George looked up. Leaning over him was another officer, who spoke more kindly.

"Come on, now. Time is valyble."

Grasping him under the arm, he half dragged, half carried George out of the cell.

"Hey, Tom, give me a hand here," the officer called. Another policeman came up, and the two seizing George firmly under each arm, they carried him through the corridor and toward the street.

"Where are you taking me now?" George moaned, as a dry sob escaped him.

"Brace up, sonny. Yer only go'ng to court fer arraignment," volunteered one of the officers.

George glanced up, and before him he saw, drawn alongside the curb, the patrol wagon.

"Not in that," he burst out.

"Yes—that," announced the officer, as he lifted George up in his arms and placed him upon the seat.

With a word to the horses, they started off, leaving the group of idlers assembled upon the sidewalk gazing after them.

CHAPTER V.

THE INNOCENT AND THE GUILTY.

THE stopping of the horses and the buzz of voices told George they had evidently reached their destination. He looked up, to see that they had drawn up before a large white building, in front of which a number of people were standing about.

"Come," ordered the officer he had heard called Jerry.

Mustering all the strength at his command, George obeyed, staggering down the length of the patrol wagon. When he reached the steps, the officer took his arm gently and helped him to the street, where he hurried him past the curious onlookers to the basement entrance and down the steps.

Standing in the outside apartment, barred off from the room which contained the two pens—one for men and one for women—Jerry called: "Hello, John. Here's another for you."

"What have you got—a left-over?" the officer seated in front of the pens questioned, as he rose to unlock the barred door.

"No, not exactly," Jerry replied, handing him a bundle of papers.

"What's the case?" John asked. He was already unlocking the door of the men's pen, and thrusting George in, he walked back to Jerry, and the two held a whispered conversation for some moments.

George shuffled to the extreme rear of the pen, where he threw himself upon the bench, paying no attention to the other occupants.

At his left sat three Hebrews, conversing loudly in their own language. Opposite him was a mason, who bore every evidence of his trade upon his clothing, presumably having been arrested while pursuing his labors.

Pacing the cell, smoking cigarette after cigarette, which he rolled himself, was a young man of about twenty, roughly dressed. At the extreme end of the bench, up close to the barred door, sat a man who, although poorly garbed, looked far more respectable than any other occupant.

All this George noticed as he cast his eyes over the pen, and then buried his head in his hands again.

"By the way, Jerry, here's an old friend of yours," John laughingly remarked, pointing to the woman's pen.

"Well, Mary—are you here again?" Jerry questioned, recognizing the occupant. "What are you here for this time? Been filling up and then fighting it out; eh?"

The woman addressed walked slowly to the front of the pen, a poor, dilapidated specimen in faded black clothes, holding in her hand a bundle wrapped in newspapers, evidently containing her entire worldly belongings.

"No, sor. Believe me, sor, I haven't," she declared with emphasis, then continued in a mild, coaxing tone: "Could ye git me a drink of water, sor? 'Tis near parched to death I am, sor."

"Sure, Mary," the other returned good-naturedly. "John, where's the pail?"

"On the window-sill."

Jerry handed it through the little

square hole in the cell door, and the woman drank heartily of the contents. Setting it down on the bench, she inquired: "Do you know, sor, whose sitting up-stairs to-day?"

"Why, McCurdy, Mary, and he's a hard one, you know. Why, look here, unless I'm terribly mistaken, the last time you were landed you were before him. Am I right?"

"Yes—sor," she slowly replied, hanging her head sheepishly. "But this time it's different." In a burst of confidence, she continued, pressing close to the cell bars. "Ye see, sor, me and the lady what I lives with had a little argument. Jest words, sor, that was all."

"Is that so, Mary?" commented the other, with mock belief.

"Yes, sor," she continued, greatly encouraged to think she had made a favorable impression upon the officer. "And thin she had me locked up, jest because I called her a few names."

"And neither of you struck a blow, I suppose?"

"Not a blow, sor," she asserted positively.

"Then you had sort of a pantomime argument, eh?"

"Yes—sor," was the slow response.

The poor creature was not positive just what she should say.

"Oh—Mary!" the officer laughed heartily. "You can't fool me. Tell me, how did you get that black eye, the scratched forehead, and the cut lip? How did you get 'em, eh?"

All her confidence had fled, and she slunk back to the rear of the pen without a word of reply.

"Well, John, I guess Mary won't bother us for a few months," Jerry remarked, as he walked over to the pen officer, who was still seated in his chair, apparently oblivious of his surroundings. "The last time, McCurdy sent her up for ten days. And she's only been out about two. And back again."

"It'll be the best place for her, Jerry. Tom Morgan took her in, and he told me they were having a terrible fight when he got them. Then Mary refused to go with him—she had been drinking again, and he had to get the wagon for her. He said—"

The opening of the door at the head of the stairs leading to the court-room, caused both officers to turn in that direction, as seven young men, sons of Israel, clattered their way down, laughing and talking loudly.

"Hang it all, this bunch is back," John muttered, as he opened the pen door and locked it after them. "What did he do, hold you over?" he questioned the first one of the group.

The reply was a chorus of "Yes."

"What are they up for, John?" Jerry questioned.

"Oh, they were working on a house the building inspector had found fault with, and were all pinched. The one they ought to have locked up was the boss—those young fellows were only earning their living." Turning from the officer, he called: "Hey there, you bunch, shut up. Don't make such a racket, do you hear?"

But they evidently did not, as they still continued to talk and jabber in their own language.

Just then one of the young fellows caught sight of George, huddled in the corner, and called out to his friends: "Oh, say, fellows! Pipe de humpy. Come on, rub de hump fer good luck."

As they all rushed toward George, he crouched farther back in the corner.

"Hey, humpy, give us a rub," they all called, as they laughed and jabbered among themselves.

George looked appealingly toward the officer he knew was outside the pen, but whom he could not see because of the crowd gathered around him. The toughs already had their hands upon him, and were pulling at him roughly, in their endeavor to get him away from the corner in which he had sought protection.

"Oh, help me! help me!" George called piteously.

"Here, you young toughs," the pen officer called. "Get away from there, or I'll come in after you."

At the first command, the roughs had slunk back from George and gathered together a few feet from him.

"Don't let them hurt me," George implored, as he caught the officer's eye.

"Don't you worry, sonny." Then, addressing the others, the man went on: "Now you get over in that other corner and stay there. Do you hear?"

They showed plainly they did, as they slunk over to the place designated, and conversed in low tones.

"Stedman!" called a voice from the top of the stairs, at the sound of which the pen officer jumped up, walked to the door, and beckoned to George, who came forward.

"What is it now, sir?" he questioned tremblingly, as the door was unlocked.

"Up-stairs to the court-room," was the brief answer.

He took the tottering prisoner's arm and helping him up the stone stairway, handed him to the officer waiting at the top, waiting for George T. Stedman.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ANGEL IN BRASS BUTTONS.

IT was with a new fear, almost taking his breath away, that George reached out his hand to the officer at the top of the stairs, and allowed himself to be led into the court-room. As he stepped out into the bright light, it blinded him, and for a second everything appeared black around him.

He staggered, and would have fallen, had not the officer who was holding him kept a firm grip.

As his eyesight returned, George glanced over the room, which was filled with a motley gathering. But he could not recognize a familiar face—they were all absolute strangers, cold and indifferent to his fate.

As he was led past the reporters seated within the railed enclosure, George noticed that they looked at him searchingly.

"That's the fellow who killed his brother last night," George heard one man say to another. "Wish I had got that assignment. Who covered it for you people?"

It was only a scrap of talk, but it was enough for George. Some one had said that he killed his brother! This was evidently the world's belief, and, his strength failing him, he snatched at the big officer for support, and broke into sobs again.

The officer, half carrying, half dragging, led him up to the bridge, where he held him firmly. George's sobs could be heard plainly all over the court-room, but they did not seem to excite any sympathy. The magistrate continued his reading of the papers before him, and then glanced up.

First George was sworn to "tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," and, with the officer's aid, his right hand was raised.

"Oh! kill me if you wish," George moaned, "but first clear me of this awful accusation. I did not—Oh! believe me! I did not kill Rob."

The magistrate, if he were affected by the sad scene, showed no intimation of it, but rapped with his gavel for order.

"Have you counsel?" he inquired, leaning over the desk to see George more plainly.

George continued sobbing, giving no evidence that he heard the question. People were rising in their seats to get a look at the prisoner, and the buzz of voices could be heard from all parts of the room.

"Order! order!" commanded the magistrate, bringing down his gavel loudly upon his desk, a command which was repeated by the court officer, who slapped the palm of his hand upon the rail. "If this noise cannot be stopped, I will order the court-room cleared."

The noise subsiding, he again leaned over the desk and questioned, "Have you counsel?"

Still George gave no evidence that he heard the question, but continued sobbing softly. The court officer shook him determinedly, repeating the query: "Have you counsel?"

"What do you mean?" George interrogated, a blank look upon his face.

The magistrate spoke more kindly as he continued: "I mean, have you a lawyer?"

"No—sir," replied George, his eyes now opened wide in wonderment.

"Very well. Either get one, or else the court will appoint one." Then glancing over the papers on his desk, the magistrate announced, without looking up: "Remanded for the action of the coroner's jury," and continued his perusal of the documents before him.

George was entirely unfamiliar with judiciary proceedings, and in his wrought-up frame of mind had not the slightest idea of what this meant. So

when the officer led him from the bridge, George looked up and questioned, the tears coursing down his cheeks: "Is that all—may I go now?"

Even the hearts of the court attendants were touched by the pitiful scene, and the hardened officer replied in a choking voice: "Not just yet."

George was taken to the door at the head of the stairs and soon found himself in the pen again, crouched back in the same corner he had left only a few moments before.

"When will it end—how will it end?" he moaned, as his head dropped upon his chest.

The pen officer, whom he had heard called John, stood at the door a moment when he locked it after George, his eyes resting upon him. Then he spoke cheeringly: "There, sonny! I wouldn't cry like that—it won't help matters one bit, and you'll only make yourself ill. Try to brace up."

But George did not seem to hear him. The officer continued watching him for some moments, then, turning suddenly, addressed the man seated on the edge of the bench who seemed so different from the others in the pen: "What are you up for?"

The man, who had been staring into space, jumped at the sound of the officer's voice, and rising, replied: "I'll tell ye how it was. I drives a truck, and last night, on me way home, I met an old frien' and we had a few drinks—de first in six years.

"When I gets on de car, two fresh guys starts to kid me. Den one of dem pokes me in de jaw. I knowed I had no chanct, so I takes it quiet like. Den, when I gets off, I heaves a rock at de car."

"Gee! that's bad," remarked the officer, with a knowing shake of his head. "That's bad business."

"Is dat so?" the prisoner exclaimed. "And de woist is, de old lady and de kids must suffer fer me. If I was only a single guy, I wouldn't care so much. But I've got six kids at home, wot's dependin' on me. And me not takin' a drink fer six years."

"That's pretty tough," the officer commented. "Better make it twenty-six years before you take another."

"Twenty-six!" the man burst out. "Sixty-six would be more like it, if I could only git out of dis. What do ye suppose I'll git?"

"Well, it's hard to tell," the officer slowly replied. "Why, suppose that had hit some one, it might have killed him."

"I never — thought — of dat," the prisoner gasped, the seriousness of the act now presenting itself to him for the first time.

"Washburn!" called the officer at the top of the stairs.

"That's—me," the prisoner stammered, his lips trembling as he walked through the door and up the steps.

The pen officer resumed his seat in the chair. All was quiet now. It was nearly the noon hour, and the prisoners were without dinner, not to mention breakfast.

"Say, boss," spoke up one of the prisoners, "kin we hev some water? We're almost dead wid thoist."

As the officer returned with it, the prisoner who had gone up-stairs a few moments before, came down again.

"What did you get?" the officer inquired, as he unlocked the pen door.

"Ten dollars!" groaned the man despairingly.

Then he continued, as he resumed his seat on the bench: "Dat's a hull lot to me. I only makes twelve a week. I've got two wid me, I'd gladly give, but I ain't got ten to me name. It's to de coop for me, and God only knows what'll happen to de wife an' kids before I gets out."

The officer was evidently impressed with the man's story. He stood still for some moments, his right hand in his pocket. Then he advanced to the door, and unlocking it, beckoned to the prisoner. Leading him to one side, he placed a ten dollar bill in his hand.

"Look here—I believe your story. Go up-stairs again and pay your fine. I'll trust you and lend you the money. You can pay me back some day."

For a moment the man stood, seemingly unable to realize he was not dreaming. Then grasping the officer's hand, the tears rolling down his cheeks, he asked: "Do you mean it?"

"Certainly—go on up," and the officer pushed him toward the stairs.

It may be mentioned right here, that the following morning the man's wife, a sad-faced little woman who showed every evidence of the struggle she had to make ends meet, came to the court and returned the money, which, she explained, she had borrowed from a friend.

The rest of the cases were rapidly called and disposed of—some returning to the pen, and others not being seen again. After the last prisoner had been called to the bar, the court officer went into another room, and quickly returned, dressed in civilian's clothes.

All this time George had not moved from the huddled position he had assumed when he had returned to the pen, his head hanging down upon his chest.

A voice from the outside room suddenly announced: "The van is here, John."

"All right, Sam. Come on, now!" to the prisoners.

Slowly they filed out between the officers that were lined up, but George remained in the same position. Entering the cell, the officer coaxed kindly: "Come now!"

George looked up in terror.

"Where now?" he gasped.

The sight of George's sorrow was too much for even the hardened officer, who answered chokingly, as he turned his head away: "I guess this is the end of it. Come!"

And picking George up in his arms, he hurried out and up the stone stairs to the sidewalk.

Mounting the step on the rear of the prison van, he jumped off, and, as the doors were slammed together and locked, hurried down the street.

CHAPTER VII.

INTO THE WHIRLPOOL.

THE ride in the prison van had hardly begun when the young rowdies who had pestered George while in the pen until ordered to stop by the officer, began their tantalizing.

Here they were free to do as they wished—there was no one to stop them now. In fact, they were urged on by the coarse remarks and laughter of the other occupants.

George begged and pleaded with them, but to no use. Then he implored the other prisoners to help him, but they seemed to enjoy his fear.

At last, from sheer exhaustion and fright, he fell back in the corner, and the prisoners "rubbed the hump" to their hearts' content.

But they at last tired of this, and turned their attention to other things.

The van was bumping over the cobblestones, and swaying from side to side. George realized that the air was getting heavier and heavier, and felt that he was being stifled. Rising up in his seat, he pressed his face to one of the little ventilation spaces so closely latticed.

His attempt was successful, and he felt better, when the wagon turned abruptly and, losing his balance, he fell heavily into the lap of a man sitting opposite. With a curse, he tossed George bodily against the other side of the van, where he lay for a second badly bruised, and moaning softly.

The ruffian, whose anger at the accident seemed without bounds, had already risen, and lifting his big, heavy fist, was in the act of striking George when the van stopped suddenly, and the doors opened, letting in a flood of sunlight and fresh air.

The sudden light blinded the ruffian for an instant, and his arm dropped to his side as he saw the officials drawn up waiting for the captives to alight. Along with the others, George was rushed to the office, where papers were quickly gone over, and each prisoner taken to his cell.

As George was thrust roughly into his, and heard the door slammed and locked after him, he sank down upon the little cot.

His strength seemed absolutely gone. So much so that, although his grief was intense as ever, he could neither moan nor cry. His head fell limply upon his chest, and remained there.

It was some time later when a guard brought George his simple dinner of soup and dry bread, and found him in the same position. He seemed in a stupor, and although he had not eaten anything since the night before, the coarse dinner remained untouched when the guard returned later for the dishes.

In reply to the latter's warning, "Better eat, young fellow," George only stared blankly, apparently not even seeing or hearing him. The guard stood a moment, then seizing the untouched meal, hurried down the corridor. As a matter of fact, George's mind was fully occupied with thoughts of Rob.

Where was his body? When would the funeral take place? Where would it be? Would he be allowed to attend? Had Miss Whitlock heard of the awful calamity?

These were the questions that were being turned over and over in his brain.

Quick footsteps were heard coming down the corridor, but they did not interest George in the least. Even when they stopped in front of his cell, and he saw a guard unlock the door, he remained in the same stupor.

Two men came in and, grasping him firmly by the arms, lifted George to his feet. He was so weak he could hardly walk, but he managed, by leaning heavily on the officers, to shuffle along.

He wondered where he was being taken, but although he tried to question the detectives, the words died in his throat.

Out of the prison gates the trio passed and into the street again. For a second, George felt they were going to release him. But as he was hurried along, he realized that again he was mistaken.

After a short walk they entered the basement of a large white building, and brought up in a room which reminded George of the magistrate's court.

The eyes of all were turned upon him as he entered and was led to a seat, where he fell into the same comatose condition he had been in for the past hour. Then, hearing voices, he looked up, to see the hotel detective sitting in a chair alongside the large desk, and heard him tell of the finding of Rob's body.

As he listened it seemed to George he must be dreaming. He could see plainly, yet nothing seemed perfectly clear. Then he noticed the hotel detective get down from the chair, and presently Mr. Conrad seated himself in it.

George heard it all—the detective reporting of the finding of Rob's body, the position, the smell of chloroform, and that George Stedman was the only man in the apartment that night. Mr. Conrad told practically the same story.

He was followed by the two detectives who had been called, whose testimony was practically the same as that of the previous witnesses, with the exception that they told of having examined the windows and ledges and felt positive that no one had entered that way.

As the last one stepped down from the chair, the coroner's voice rang out clearly: "George T. Stedman."

Two officers stepped to his side, and leading him to the chair, helped him into it. Although only a moment before his voice had seemed entirely gone, the thought that this was probably his trial for the murder of Rob suddenly brought it back to him, as he moaned, "Oh! I didn't do it! Believe me, I didn't!"

"Mr. Stedman," the coroner began, "the law protects you in every way. You are before a coroner's jury, and it is your privilege to refuse to answer any and all questions, on the ground that they would tend to incriminate you. Do you understand me?"

"Yes—sir," George replied faintly, "but I *want* to answer them. Ask me anything, only let me go to Rob's funeral."

"Your home is in—Highwood, Pennsylvania," the coroner went on, as he fingered the documents before him. "When did you arrive in the city?"

"Yesterday afternoon. But I—"

"Simply answer the questions as I put them to you. You came to attend your brother's marriage?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you went to the dinner with him last night?"

"Yes, sir."

"The dinner broke up at what time?"

"I think about two o'clock," was the almost inaudible reply.

"Did you and your brother go right to his apartments?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you both retire immediately?"

"Yes, sir; but Rob—"

"Just answer the questions as I put them to you," the coroner exclaimed, rather sharply. "You had separate rooms?"

George simply nodded his head in reply. It was a terrible ordeal, being

questioned this way before a number of men, but he bore up bravely.

"You heard no one in the room?"

"No, sir."

"And when you woke up you did not know your brother was dead?"

"No, sir. I passed through his room twice, and called him each time, not knowing—" But he did not finish the sentence. His face showed his emotions, but he mastered the grief.

"You did not notice the odor of chloroform in the room?"

"I did — notice — a strange odor," George answered falteringly. "But I felt sick—my head ached, and I—I paid no attention to the odor."

"You had wines with the dinner?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you drink them?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you in the habit of drinking?"

"No, sir," George answered positively, shaking his head. "In fact, I do not ever remember touching it before."

"Do you know chloroform when you smell it?"

"Yes, sir. I have always been a student of drugs. In fact, I bought a bottle of chloroform the day before I left Highwood, to conclude some experiments I was making."

This statement caused all in the room to strain anxiously to catch every word of George's testimony.

"And yet you did not recognize the odor of chloroform in the apartments?"

"No—sir."

The coroner referred to some papers before continuing. Then glancing up quickly, he asked: "Your brother was worth a great deal of money?"

"Yes, sir. About five millions, he told me last night."

"His attorney informs us that his will was made out to you as his sole heir. Do you know that?"

"Yes, sir. That was the last thing we talked about before retiring. He said he was going to change his will this morning to be in Miss Whitlock's favor."

The men assembled were now all attention, absorbing every word.

"And cut you off entirely?" was the next question, as the coroner gazed eagerly into George's face.

"No, sir. He said I should never want. He was going to allow me two hundred dollars a month."

"Quite a difference between five millions and two hundred."

For a moment the coroner turned his attention again to the papers before him; then, glancing up, he announced slowly: "I think that will do, Mr. Stedman."

Two officers stepped up, helped George down from the chair and into his former seat, where he nearly collapsed from the strain.

He fell into the same dazed condition. He saw one of the jurymen rise, and heard him address the coroner with these words: "The verdict of the jury is that Robert Stedman was murdered—"

The rest of the sentence was lost to George, as his body shook with sobs.

The rapping of the coroner's gavel, and the fact that an officer was tapping his arm, brought the poor fellow back to the present situation, and he heard the coroner declare: "Mr. Stedman, you are held without bail to await trial before the grand jury for the murder of your brother, Mr. Robert Stedman!"

(To be continued.)

AN INNING.

"LOVE me little, love me long,"
Doris called "a silly song";
Said "the man who wrote like that
Wasn't worth the looking at."

How my heart leaped when I heard
That unguarded little word!
Then I said, and said it clearly,
"I have loved you *long* and *dearly*."

Mary Dawson.

When the Tenderfoots Scored.

By HOWARD DWIGHT SMILEY.

A case of getting even and then some, with the aid of a bear-trap and a ducking in the creek.

THE primary wherefore and why of Ike, Zeke, and me being in that particular locality just then was that Ike had one day suddenly connected with an idea with money in it. The secondary was that Zeke and I had been chumps enough to mix our piles in with Ike's and go into the idea for general results; with the consequence that inside of twenty-four hours we were sitting out on the sunny side of a freight-car, wondering where in the hotel we were going to raise the price of the next meal. The only result we got out of Ike's idea was the conviction that it had money in it—Zeke and I knew that, because we had put it there.

And so it happened that we had hung up our guns and watches with the storekeeper as security for a grub-stake, and, for what seemed the millionth time in our careers, struck out into the wilderness, to retrieve our busted fortunes by that simple and elusive method of prospecting for gold and finding it—if you can.

We ran onto the shanty about the second week out. It was a well-built, substantial little affair, and had been put up by prospectors, as a rocker and sluice-box on the bank of the creek gave evidence; but it had been deserted for years. We settled down in it, with the intention of prospecting the country thereabout.

The morning following our arrival Topsey and her cub blew into the scenery. Ike and I were fishing off a rock overhanging the creek, and were tossing the fish over our shoulders as fast as we caught them.

The trout were biting like they hadn't had a meal for a week, and we were so busy landing them that we weren't paying much attention to what was going on behind us, until we got a hail from Zeke, who was up to the shanty.

"You fellers better sit up and take notice," he hollered. "You've got company."

I looked around, and there, about ten feet behind us, sat a she-grizzly as big as a barn, and with her a half-grown cub. They had sneaked up and were making a meal off our fish, without saying so much as "good morning" or "go to blazes."

I looked at Ike; he was busy trying to land a fish, which he afterward insisted didn't weigh less than ten pounds, and was in blissful ignorance of the proximity of our "company." He hadn't even heard Zeke holler.

"Say, Ike," says I, with one eye on the bear, "if you'll just cast your gaze over your left shoulder, you'll see something powerful interesting."

"Shut up," growled Ike. "Can't you see I'm busy?"

At the sound of our voices the bear sat up and began to jaw, rumblingly, deep down in her throat.

"Did you say a storm was coming?" inquired Ike, hanging on to his pole with both hands. "I thought I heard it thunder."

"You'll feel it in a minute, if you don't get out of the way," I answered, for the bear was on all-fours and moving toward us. I slid off the rock into the water, and started to swim across.

"Get out of that river, you blame idiot!" yelled Ike. "Do you want to make me lose this fish?"

"You'll lose more than that if you don't get in, too," I answered, as I struck out for the opposite shore.

Scrambling out on the bank, I looked back at my busy partner. The bear had come up behind him, had sat down, and was interestedly watching his efforts to land the fish. Then, as he swung back almost into her face, she put her nose close to his ear and said:

"Woof!"

That fetched him. He gave a jump that nearly sent him into the creek, and he had to drop his pole in his endeavor to recover himself.

"Say, you darn—" he began, and then stopped, as he turned around and found that grizzly's nose within six inches of his own.

In spite of the seriousness of the situation, I couldn't help giggling when I saw the expression of pained surprise that overspread Ike's face; he couldn't have looked more distressed if his wife had caught him in a poker game. They sat there and looked steadily at each other for as much as two minutes, and then the bear suddenly ran her tongue out and tasted of Ike's nose.

He let a yowl out of him, like a Piute Indian with the toothache; toppled over into the creek, just missing the sweep of the bear's paw as she grabbed for him; and in about half a minute he was over on my side of the stream, prancing and cussing round and heaving rocks at the cause of his excitement.

The accuracy of his aim wouldn't have got him a job on a baseball team, but in one of his throws he managed to fetch the cub a clip under the ear that knocked it feet over appetite.

The little devil set up a squeal that would have drawn a salary at a Fourth of July celebration, and its indignant ma flopped right in and started across to clean up on us.

There wasn't any place of safety on that side, so we ran down the shore a ways, and when she had reached the shore we jumped in and crossed over to the other side again. The only place of refuge in sight was a big sycamore that stood in the middle of the clearing, and we made for that.

On the way I glanced over my shoulder and saw that the bear had also recrossed the creek and was sliding over the ground after us like an animated nigger-chaser, and gaining fast.

The lowest limb was ten feet up, and I made a jump for this, caught it, and swung myself up into the tree. Ike missed the first jump, and I reached down and pulled him up just as the bear arrived on the spot. She gave one despairing grab at him, and managed to fetch away about two square feet of trouser-seat as I swung him up out of danger.

Zeke, who had been an excited spectator of this performance, now commenced shouting out congratulations, which drew the bear's attention to him, and with a roar she lit out for his scalp and had him chased up on top of the shanty before he realized that she was on the way.

Well! The way that grizzly rip-snorted around those diggings is worth remembering. She was too big to climb, but she tore around and raged and snorted out bear cuss words at us for a good six hours, while her cub ransacked our belongings and ate up everything it could get its paws on. Then, as we just remained up in the air and didn't do any sassing back, she sort o' tired of the proceedings and went away, with her cub squealing along behind.

That day was only the beginning, for on an average of every other day, Topsey, as Zeke had dubbed her, would happen along and chase one, two, or all of us up into that sycamore. That's how it happened that we put a sackful of rocks up there; being without guns, the only satisfaction we could get was to heave things at our tormentors.

One thing we discovered, and that was that she would always happen along after we had been fishing. Seemed like she could scent a fish ten miles away, and just as sure as we had a mess of them laying around, along she and her cub would come and demand their share—and they most generally got it, too.

Between calls we placer-mined in the sand along the creek, cleaning up on an average of ten cents a day in dust and an occasional nugget, but never striking anything that resembled a bonanza, or even a decent living. We were hoarding our gold in a pill-box, and it wasn't more'n half full when Topsey made us her last call.

"I wish," Zeke would growl, every once in a while, "that some blame tenderfoot would happen along and buy this here claim. That's the only hope we have of ever making a stake out of it. What we've got in that pill-box wouldn't more'n pay a week's board, but there is enough to salt a couple of panfuls of

dirt so it would look like it ran forty thousand to the ton; and if the aforesaid tenderfoot would only happen along, I'd sell out to him, if I didn't get more'n a hundred dollars."

One night, after Topsey had happened along and kept us up in the sycamore for more than half a day, Ike begun to grumble.

"I'm getting dog-gone tired of that grizzly," says he. "Doesn't seem consistent that an onery bear should keep three full-grown men everlasting shinning up a tree like a passel of monkeys, and they not able to do more than heave rocks at her. Wish I had a gun."

"You have," answered Zeke. "When you can raise enough dust to redeem it. If you are getting so tired of our visitors, why don't you get rid of them?"

"How?" inquired Ike sarcastically.

"Why, I've been thinking that mebbe we could make a trap and catch the old one."

"What're you going to make a trap of around here?"

"Oh, I've got a notion that I can do it, if you fellers'll help."

"Sure, we'll help."

Next morning we got busy on Zeke's trap. He selected a hickory-tree, about ten inches in diameter at the base and fifty feet high. This we cut down, trimmed, and carried to the creek.

On the shore was a big rock with a wide crack in it, and we wedged the big end of the tree securely into this, so that it stuck up at an angle of forty-five degrees. Next we rigged up a crude block and tackle, which we fastened to the top of the tree, and by our united efforts we managed to pull the top down to within three feet of the ground, where Zeke secured it with a sort of trigger attachment.

Then he built a three-cornered pen around the top and arranged a running noose on the tree in such a manner that the bear would have to step into it in order to get into the pen. He then fastened one end of a long fish-line to the trigger attachment, and carried the other end up to the shanty.

"There!" says he when he had finished. "Now, all we've got to do is to put some fish into that pen, and then sneak up to the shanty and wait. When Topsey smells the fish, like she always does, along she'll come, hunting for them, and when she sticks her head through that noose, we give the string a jerk, and up goes that tree, with her bearship on the end, and there she'll hang until she dies."

"Great!" cried Ike. "Zeke, you're a winner anywhere they want to put you! Let's catch some fish and get her started, right now."

We got out our poles, but we hadn't any more than baited up, when down the creek comes a canoe with two men in it.

"Hello," says one of them, as they came up, "what's this place?"

"This is 'The Three Fools Gold Mining Company,'" answered Zeke promptly.

"You fellows gold-miners?" asked the man, interested.

"Well, we sort o' make pretensions as such."

"Is that so? We're gold-miners, too; but we don't seem to be having much luck."

I turned around to conceal the snicker that bubbled out of me. Them fellers looked like they hadn't been three weeks away from their mamas, and if two simon-pure, blowed-in-the-glass tenderfoots ever hit Idaho, it was them.

"You fellows had any luck?" asked the man.

"Well — middling, middling," lied Zeke cheerfully. "We ain't got a second 'Pegleg' here, by any means; been here 'most six weeks now, and ain't cleaned up but two mule-loads of gold."

"Two mule-loads!" exclaimed the man in astonishment. "You don't call that middling luck, do you?"

"Well, I've seen better. Still, I'll admit that's doing pretty well—sort o' making a decent living."

"I should say so! Why, we ain't even found a trace of gold yet. You folks any objection to our stopping off here for a spell?"

"Not the slightest. Get right out and make yourself to home."

They accepted the invitation and pulled their canoe out on the shore.

"My name is Brewer," says the man. "And my friend here is Mr. Miller."

"Pleased to meet you," says Zeke, and introduced himself and us. "You folks

better stay over a spell and sort o' get acquainted. Just take your things right up to the shanty, and make yourselves to home."

"Thanks," answered Brewer. "We'll be real pleased to."

"Are those two mule-loads of gold on exhibition?" he inquired, when they had unloaded.

"Sorry," answered Zeke. "We've sent them in to town. Thought we'd better bank it."

"I should think you would! I'd be scared to death if I had that much lying around loose. You haven't dug up all there is around here, have you?"

"Not by a long shot. There's enough gold left in those sands to pay the national debt, if we wanted to take the trouble to dig it out."

"Ain't you going to?"

"We ain't over anxious. You see, we've already cleaned up more than we can use in a lifetime, and we've about decided to close up the diggings and pull out."

"What'll become of your mine if you do that?"

"Oh, we can sell her easy enough. We can find any number of men who would be glad to give us five or six hundred for her."

"Five or six hundred! You don't mean to say that you would sell for that price?"

"Why not?" asked Zeke, looking surprised. "We ain't hogs, and we have all we need. We'd give her away if it wasn't considered unlucky. They say that if you give away a sure 'nough gold-mine you'll die in the poorhouse, you know."

"Never heard it," answered Brewer. "But we'll give you five hundred quick, if you really mean that you will sell for that price."

"Better not be in too much of a hurry to buy, Brewer," broke in Miller. "How do you know that this fellow isn't lying to you?"

"Say!" roared Zeke, swelling up like a hoptoad with a fly on its back, "do you mean to say that you are doubting me? I want to tell you, right now, that Zeke Johnson's word will go just as far as any man's in Idaho! Still, if you have any doubts about it, come along down to the creek and see for yourself. You don't have to take my word."

"That's exactly what I'd like to do," answered Miller coolly. "I am not questioning your integrity, but if I am to put five hundred dollars into a river-bank, you'll have to show me there is something in it first."

"Well, I can do it," snorted Zeke.

"Here you are," says he, when we had reached the creek. "Just dig into these sands anywhere, and if the first panful don't convince you that this is the best little placer diggings you ever laid eyes on, I'll eat the sand."

Miller climbed up on the business end of our bear-trap and sat down, without noticing what it was.

"Now, I want to tell you gentlemen, right on the start, that I've got a pretty good technical knowledge of gold-mining, and know gold when I see it," says he. "If you fellows have really got a good thing here, and want to sell out, why, we've got the money and are willing to buy; but, as I remarked before, you'll have to show me."

"And, as I also remarked before, I can do it," retorted Zeke.

"Boys," says he, turning to Ike and me, "are you willing to sell out?"

"Sure thing," answered Ike promptly.

"You want to remember that you're letting go of a good thing if you do," cautioned Zeke. "Better think it over a little. What do you say, Billy?"

"Well, I dunno," I answered. "This thing needs ruminating on a little. S'pose we step over yonder and have a little confidential talk on it?"

"Certainly. Just excuse us a minute, gents," answered Zeke, and we walked away out of earshot of our prospective customers.

"How in Sam Hill are you going to convince those fellows that this river-bank is worth five hundred dollars?" I demanded. "We ain't got it salted."

"I'll make 'em think it's worth a million, if my plans don't miscarry. We're going to salt the first pan, that's all. You go up to the shanty and get a pan and shovel, and just sneak that pill-box of dust into your pocket at the same time. We'll manage to get it into the pan, somehow, while they are filling it with sand, and the clean-up will make

them think that they've got something like four thousand dollars to the ton, pay-dirt. Then, if we just sort o' change our minds and get a little reluctant to sell, it'll fetch 'em around to buying, all right. You just let me work this racket; I'll bring 'em to time."

"Just as you say. We ain't got anything but our reputations to lose, and five hundred is a heap better than nothing. Go ahead with your skin game."

"All right," answered Zeke, loud enough for the others to hear. "You just slide up to the shanty and get a pan and shovel, and we'll show these gents what we've got."

He turned and walked back toward the others, and I started on a dog-trot for the shanty.

I plumb forgot all about that fish-line that was attached to the trigger of our bear-trap, and the first thing I knew I stumbled over it and sprung the thing, with Miller sitting on top of it.

That hickory straightened up like some one had stuck a pin into it, and Miller went sailing up into space like a human skyrocket. Up, up he went, kicking and grabbing frantically for something to get hold of, until he had reached the height of fifty feet; then he performed a graceful half-circle, and came down—kersplash!—head first in the middle of the creek, and disappeared from sight.

We all made a rush for the bank and waited for him to reappear. The water at that point was ten feet deep and a little murky, so we couldn't see the bottom. I began to think that he'd gone clean to China from the length of time he remained out of sight; but he finally bobbed up about ten feet down the stream, and we hauled him ashore.

Outside of having the wind considerably knocked out of him, he didn't seem to be much hurt, and inside of five minutes he was on his feet, inquiring what the hotel had happened.

Zeke apologetically explained to him about our bear-trap, and assured him that it was all an accident, but I couldn't help but notice that he seemed considerably flustered.

"Well, it's all over," he growled, "and no particular harm done, though I'm lucky that I didn't get my neck broke. Let's get this thing settled up before you spring something on me that does break it. Did you say that you would take five hundred for this claim?"

"Sure thing," answered Zeke. "Come along and try out a pan of the dirt, and see for yourself that it is a good thing."

"Never mind that," answered Miller. "We'll take your word for it. We'll just draw up the papers and get the deal closed in jig-time."

"Why, sure, if you want it that way," answered Zeke, looking some puzzled.

We went up to the shanty and Miller drew up his document of transfer, which we all signed.

"How do you want your pay?" he demanded, when we had finished. "Gold or bills?"

"Why, we ain't particular," answered Zeke. "Either will do."

"All right, we'll pay you in gold. Come on," and he led us back to the creek, where he stripped down to his underclothes and, without any explanation, dived in at the same place he had disappeared some time before.

He was up again in a jiffy and, climbing out on the bank, he extended both his hands to Zeke.

"Here's part of your five hundred," says he.

When we saw what he had we 'most keeled over from amazement. In either hand were two nuggets of pure gold, each of them as big as a walnut!

"What—how—" began Zeke, as he took the nuggets.

"Wait a minute," interrupted Miller, and he took another dive into the creek.

He did it four times, coming up with two handfuls of nuggets each time, until he had a hatful of them.

"There," says he, "I guess that pile will sum up to five hundred, all right."

It summed up considerable more than that amount, but I didn't tell him so.

"Would you mind explaining these here proceedings?" inquired Zeke, who looked like some one had hit him in the stomach with a club.

"Not at all," answered Miller cheerfully. "You see, when that bear-catching contraption of yours launched me into the creek, it sent me clear to the bottom, and while down there I discovered a few things.

"I fetched up against a big log that

is lodged across the stream, right down against the bed-rock, and forms a very substantial dam. I happen to be a pretty good swimmer and diver, and can open my eyes and see while under water. I noticed a considerable glitter on the up-stream side of the log and, being a mining engineer by profession, I took in the situation at a glance.

"There is a pretty swift current in this creek, and during the spring freshets I haven't a doubt but that water moves through the channel at a gait that carries any loose objects on its bottom along with it. It has been washing these nuggets, along with rocks and sand, down-stream for years, until they brought up against the log, and, as the current was not strong enough to lift them over, they have lodged there, while the sand and rocks have been washed on. There's a pretty comfortable pile of gold down there now."

"Would you mind stating how much?" asked Zeke.

"Oh, I should judge that there must be as much as two mule-loads," answered Miller, grinning.

"Well, say," began Zeke, after he had partially recovered himself, "I guess we've sort o' made a mistake. You see, we didn't figure that there was so much gold left here, and—"

"I'll tell you what you were figuring," interrupted Miller, looking Zeke square in the eye. "You were figuring on selling us a wildcat. I sized up your game the minute you commenced talking about two mule-loads of gold, but kept mum, just to see how you'd try to work the racket on us.

"If that bear-trap hadn't sprung me into the creek, you'd have fallen flat on your deal; but as it is, you are a hatful of gold ahead, and we've got a bonanza. Now, I expect that you'll go straight up in the air and make a big noise; but if you do, Brewer and I will just sit around and watch you come down again. We've got the papers showing that we own this property, so it won't do you any good to make a fuss, and the sooner you and your partners toddle along off the reservation, the better it will suit us."

We stood around a few minutes and let it soak in; then, picking up the gold, Zeke started for the shanty.

"Come on, boys," says he. "I ain't going to squeal. Let's pack up and toddle along."

FIRDAUSI AT THE FOUNTAIN.

FIRDAUSI at the palace fountain stood,
Hard by the Court of Song in quiet mood.

The Sultan smiled to see him: "Thy beard shows
Thee nearer to the cypress than the rose,

"Firdausi. Is thy heart warm and blood cold,
Who sing'st of love and beauty, being old?"

Firdausi to the fountain turned his eyes,
Gray-mossed and lichened by the centuries:

"What maketh this sweet music, sayest thou—
The water or the stones?" The Sultan's brow

Was overclouded: "Were the water fled,
There were no music, certainly," he said;

"The water singing through the garden runs.
Nay, but there is no music in dead stones."

Firdausi bowed. "Allah his grace unfold
Upon the Sultan. Is the water old?"

Arthur Willis Colton.

THE PRICE OF SILENCE.*

By EDGAR FRANKLIN,

Author of "The Peril of the Paladin," "In Savage Splendor," "The Chase of the Concession," etc.

A Western tale of an awful alternative presented to a man who has reached the last extremity of despair.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

JIM BEEKMAN, cowboy, who, in a drunken fit, has shot Thad Parker, escapes capture by the "boys" only through the cleverness of one John Wendel. The latter demands that Jim shall obey him *without question* during the next thirty days. Under threat of being given up to the police; Jim agrees to the proposition. He is to have a thousand dollars when it is all over.

The pair arrive in the town of Elderford, where Jim is fitted out in swell clothes at Wendel's expense. He is then introduced to "Mr. Kinsel, Mr. Fendel, and Mr. Cox," as Mr. Laurence Rogers, of Chicago. After the trio have left, Wendel tells Jim that he must do as he is told, or he will hang for the murder of Thad Parker as sure as there is a God above him.

CHAPTER VII.

BREAKFAST AND COURT.

IT lacked some ten minutes to three o'clock that morning when Beekman was at last permitted to retire.

It lacked some eight minutes to three when he dropped into a slumber so dead that it could hardly have been deepened by an anesthetic.

Later, Wendel, pajama clad, gave a final glance at the heavy-breathing figure as he finished bunching up his papers. He nodded his satisfaction; he yawned prodigiously.

And as the lights finally went out, tired as its occupant must be, a softly whistled tune issued from the room next to Beekman's.

The town hall clock was striking off seven when the cowboy once more came to life.

Wendel was shaking him violently. His eyes opened and met those of his temporary owner, and the latter grinned.

Beekman stared at him for a minute.

Slowly he took in the room, the glittering foot of his brass bed, the hangings at the windows swaying slightly in a grateful morning breeze. Slowly he emerged from his trance-like sleep, and things began to return.

Yes, it was all so! Just at that second before dropping asleep, he recalled now, he had concluded that the past two days were part of a horrible dream—that when he turned over on the other side and finished his night's rest he would awake to stare, rested and contented, at the bare boards of the Three-F room.

And now—well, now he knew otherwise. Everything about this apartment, from the brass bed to Wendel's hand, was very real and material.

He had awakened to the day wherein he was to add perjury to murder. That was all. His eyes closed in a wince.

Wendel's shaking was renewed.

"Here! You wake up!" he said, almost jovially. "It's seven o'clock, and Kinsel's waiting there in my room, promptly on schedule time!"

Beekman sat up.

"I—all right," he said dully. "I'll get dressed, Wendel."

Wendel frowned a little.

"What the dickens is the matter with you?" he inquired pleasantly. "You look doped!"

"I'm not all slept out, I guess," Beekman laughed bitterly.

"But—say, do you remember all you learned before you went to bed?" Wendel bent forward to whisper.

*Began November ARGOSY. Single copies 10 cents.

"I think so."

"Well, you don't want to think so—you want to know so!" the whisper continued. "Kinsel's waiting in there to put you through the testimony, and between you and me and the chandelier there, if he dropped to the fact that you were not Rogers there'd be hades to pay here in about thirty seconds. I will say for Kinsel that as a lawyer he's straight as a string and—"

"Jack!" came sharply from the next room.

Wendel started up.

"Yes."

"Sha'n't I come in there and get the ceremony with Mr. Rogers over before he dresses?"

"Well—"

"I've got a session in the barber shop before breakfast, and there isn't going to be any great amount of time to spare afterward. Eh?"

Wendel hesitated. Beekman nodded wearily.

"Tell him to come in. I'll make good," he said.

Wendel sighed in some relief and patted him on the shoulder—and Beekman made a mighty effort and resisted the impulse to plant one fist between his eyes at the touch and send him spinning across the room.

Breakfast came an hour or so later.

It was a silent meal as concerned the cowboy. Without comment, he ate his way through the first real food that had appeared before him in nearly three days, listening the while to the low, busy chatter of the others grouped around the state table of the Elderford House dining-room.

Kinsel was there, and Cox and Fendel, and three or four more whose names Beekman had failed to catch—and in whom he had no very lively interest.

Plainly, they were all of the very prosperous type of big-city lawyer. Their clothes were of the expensive order, utterly quiet; show, indeed, appeared to have no part in this gathering, for the exalted station of each member seemed to be a matter of course.

Here and there heads went together in twos and threes, and the pair of waiters who attended the table withdrew to a discreet distance.

Now they looked up suddenly at one of Wendel's evidently expected jokes, and startled the dining-room with a burst of laughter. Anon, one or another addressed a remark or a query to Beekman—and a curiously marked respect seemed to characterize each word.

Beekman was a person of real importance as Mr. Laurence Rogers; and despite all the remorse at events past and coming, he felt something akin to amusement when he had mastered the third cup of coffee and the last of the remarkably good ham and eggs.

Certainly not less frequently than once in every two minutes Wendel had taken a covert glance at him, and his satisfaction seemed to be growing once more. In the really well-fitting frock-coat last night the remarkable cowboy had been gratifyingly impressive; in the trim brown suit this morning the external manifestations of his personality were making the rest of them look rather insignificant—and more than that Wendel could not desire.

A dozen times during breakfast his wonder rose.

Was it actually possible that the drunken, filthy cow-puncher of yesterday morning had been so transformed by the expenditure of a hundred dollars or so? Was it possible that this dark individual with the trim mustache, the straight black hair, the long, thin hands, and the well-shod feet was the same sot he had stumbled upon, long after dark, snoring in the doorway of "Dan's Golden Palace"?

As they finished, Wendel gave it up with a contented chuckle.

"Mr. Rogers, of Chicago," fulfilled every requirement. What he might be, what he might have been previously to the Three-F days, mattered not at all. He was the man of this morning now, and— Cox was speaking.

"In a civilized community they wouldn't hold court at such an hour," he said. "But the fact remains that at precisely nine-thirty we'll have to be on hand before his honor."

"And that," Kinsel added, "is just seventeen minutes off."

Wendel laughed as he laid the napkin beside his plate.

"Therefore, let us be duly thankful

that the center of justice of this county doesn't lie much more than seventeen feet away. Come on. I'm ready, if the rest of you are."

They rose together. Wendel's affectionate arm linked itself in Beekman's, and they strolled out of the dining-room and into the lobby. They paired off and sauntered lazily toward the courthouse, across the street on the next block, and such of the populace as happened to be about stared almost in awe.

This, plainly, was some of the millionaire crowd concerned in the mooted Red Rock Mine suit! As such they demanded more than passing notice.

At the doorway—the rear one, too—the group massed around Beekman; Wendel chuckled almost nervously.

"Rats! I wish you weren't so infernally tall, Larry," he said. "Get down on your hands and knees—or something—will you?"

"It isn't altogether a laughing matter," Kinsel added seriously. "We want to spring him as a surprise, Jack—and even if nobody knows him, it's likely to kick up some comment if an absolute stranger's spotted with us."

"And our esteemed opponent, Mr. Bentick, has eyes like a lynx," Wendel supplemented further. "The Lord alone knows what he'll do if he suspects that we're ready to spring Mr. Rogers on him!"

"Therefore, Larry — thunderation! Duck, Larry! There's Bentick now! Duck! That's right! Shrink inside yourself—crawl along on your hands if you have to! Do—by George! He never saw us!"

They had gone through the door now, and a sigh came up from all of them—and a little laugh as well.

Wendel led the way up a narrow flight of stairs, and they ended the trip in a little, bare room equipped with a row of inhospitable-looking chairs, and a bare table in the center.

Wendel waved his hand.

"This palatial apartment, Larry," he said, "is the one made and provided by Venner County for the accommodation of witnesses. If you'll pick out whichever divan pleases you best and settle down comfortably, I believe that the rest of this intellectual assemblage will march into the court-room in proper, stately fashion and take their places."

"And—oh, by the way, here's a Chicago paper of day before yesterday," added Kinsel. "That'll keep you from being homesick while you're waiting for the red tape to be cut off, as required."

Beekman accepted it more or less thankfully. The gathering filed out, chatting. Wendel, by an amount of artful dallying, was left behind as the swinging door closed.

He came close to Beekman, and his eyes were hard as steel. The cowboy faced them without great interest.

"Beekman!" said Wendel.

"Yes?"

"We met under rather unusual circumstances."

"Eh? I'm quite aware of that."

"And we don't want to part under even more unusual circumstances."

The cowboy stared.

"What?"

"You don't quite catch my meaning?"

"Not altogether."

"Well, the meaning's this. I found you drunker than the dickens. I don't want to leave you on the road to the scaffold!"

"You—"

Wendel's eyes were transfixing him again.

"Beekman, just as sure as you make a slip in your testimony—just as sure as you fall down on one detail—I'll throw my own case and show you up before the whole bunch. And the sheriff's in court, too!"

"But I—"

Wendel shifted the bundle of papers under his arm and straightened up. He turned toward the door, and his expression changed a little.

"And just as surely as you do things right," he concluded, "just as surely as you carry off the whole affair as you *can*, there's going to be a certified check for at least *ten* thousand dollars in it for you, and all the help I can give to get you out of the country—or wherever you may elect to go!"

The cowboy said nothing. Wendel laid a hand on the knob of the door and took a final squint at him.

"Got that all filed in your mental apparatus?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Then keep it there, and good and tight! I'll come for you when you're wanted, Beekman. Meanwhile, sit back and hold fast."

He nodded and passed through the door. Beekman smiled bitterly after him.

What a self-assured little individual it was, anyway!

From the moment of their meeting, in that ages-ago early morning of only yesterday, Wendel seemed to have dominated matters completely.

Beekman's head sank lower and lower in thought as he considered the cyclonic changes of the past twenty-four hours. First, Wendel had taken charge of his pistols; then he had taken charge of his person; then he had taken the liberty of transforming that person into another one—and all without so much as Beekman's consent.

"And why?" the waiting witness inquired of the opposite wall.

His head shook sadly as he stared through the window at the town hall cupola across the way. For the answer he had not far to seek—the whisky bottle!

And then he straightened up. *That* was done for, and forever. Now, he was merely to follow up his murder by committing a minor crime which could hardly give him more than twenty years in prison at the worst; and having committed it, he was going to make a very abrupt break for new fields.

It was a sorry sort of situation for a man of his years; it could hardly have been much worse. At the same time, he vowed with clenched fists, if he went clear of all of it now something really like a *man* would be born in some remote corner of the universe—and a man who would be as far removed from the alcohol insanity forever as heaven itself!

The transformed cowboy rose abruptly and walked to the door. He put an eye to the crack and peered into the big room outside.

Things were going on there.

The court clerk had just seated himself. The gray-bearded man, evidently the judge, was speaking, but so softly that Beekman could not catch a word. Across the room, twelve rather tired-looking men lolled in the jury-box and listened apathetically.

Yes, and there were all his companions of the breakfast-table, heads together again and whispering animatedly. A complacent grin rested upon Wendel's face; now and again he glanced toward the door at the side of the court, and once, as Kinsel caught him at it, a low laugh ran through the group.

Plainly, it was one of Wendel's happy mornings.

Farther across the room, well beyond the judge, three other very well-clad men were about another little table. Beekman studied them, and something of a chill ran through him. *That* constituted the prosecuting counsel.

And that little man with the eagle eyes and the snow-white vest was Bentick, who headed them and who would presently cross-examine *him!*

The cowboy drew a long breath, almost of terror. He could hardly analyze his own emotions at the sight of that clean-cut, razor-sharp face. Perhaps it was the consciousness of guilt to come; perhaps it was instinct; but Bentick's countenance seemed for him to spell discovery.

The little lawyer rose, and Beekman shook himself together and pressed closer to the crack. Mr. Bentick was about to speak—and the words came to the waiting witness.

"Your honor—gentlemen of the jury!" began Bentick's metallic voice. "I believe you've been assembled here about one dozen times for the purpose of hearing this case and deciding whether the Red Rock Mine belongs to the Red Rock Mining Company or to one William Frand.

"We've shown heretofore, some ten times, that the late Peter Hanford actually did sell the said mine to the incorporated Red Rock Mining Company. We have shown by two witnesses that the money was actually paid—the sum of four millions of dollars—at the time of the transaction. We have shown that the title to the property passed absolutely from Peter Hanford, deceased, to the company."

The little lawyer smiled again at the group which had Wendel for its center.

"We have also endeavored to give the

learned counsel for the defense every possible opportunity to prove that, by prior sale, the Red Rock Mine passed to Mr. William Frand. We have learned that Mr. Frand is in Europe, engaged in regaining his health. We have learned that there was one solitary witness to the alleged transfer of the Red Rock Mine to him—a certain invisible Mr. Laurence Rogers, of Chicago, whose name appears on the papers which have been offered in evidence by the defense. But we *haven't* seen or heard from Mr. Rogers—we *haven't* seen or heard from Mr. Frand—and we beg to submit that not one particle of admissible evidence has been given to this court to sustain the contention of the defense!"

Bentick nodded rather violently at court and jury. His hands went into his pockets.

"Therefore, your honor, we propose to take no more of this court's time in other proceeding than the examination of any new witnesses which the defense may desire to offer."

He directed a grin of positive malevolence toward Kinsel and the rest.

"Barring such an examination, I shall ask only that our testimony in the last trial be read once more to the jury, and that the case go to them!"

He sat down with a final nod. Kinsel rose slowly, almost languidly.

"We shall call only one witness, your honor. A—er—Mr. Laurence Rogers, of Chicago!"

CHAPTER VIII.

UNDER OATH.

BENTICK'S jaw dropped in frank amazement.

He turned involuntarily and stared at his two associates, and a sudden whispering ensued.

In his hiding-place Beekman caught himself together and drew another long breath. He was due to appear and dumfound them!

He licked his lips as he saw Wendel rise suddenly and approach his doorway. Curiously, it occurred to him that should the Thad Parker matter reach its worst ending, he would have much the same sensations when some reluctant keeper arrived at the very last to inform him that his time had come.

No unpleasant thoughts seemed to be worrying Mr. Wendel, however. He advanced with the springy step of a boy and threw open the door. He stepped into the room and laid a hand on the cowboy's arm.

"*Now* for it!" he said cheerily. "Get out and lambaste 'em, my boy!"

He faced the other, then, and his little eyes contracted.

"And remember—I don't want to make you nervous about it, but—remember that Kinsel's examination of you is going to be simple play. Your time will come when that deuced little Bentick begins to get after you and tries to knock your credibility as a witness to smithereens. Hang on to your nerve, and don't let him shake you in one word you've said before. Come on!"

Together they entered the big room.

There was a stir, a rustle, a sudden subdued hum of low voices. Bentick's eyes were wide open and fixed hard upon the altered cowboy; his associates followed the gaze with little less than horror in their faces.

Even the judge turned an extremely interested countenance in Beekman's direction.

The jury leaned forward, open-mouthed. The tightly packed crowd of spectators craned their necks and nodded and whispered to one another—and Beekman walked to the witness-chair.

He was wholly master of himself again. His whole mind was centered on the array of facts which had been drilled into it during the long hours of the night—and upon the absolute necessity of repeating them and sticking to them through thick and thin, if he wished to retain the breath in his body.

He took his oath, calmly and in strong voice, to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, and he leaned forward somewhat and clasped his hands and waited.

Kinsel rose once more.

"Now, sir," he began purringly, "your name is Laurence Edward Rogers?"

"It is."

"You were born—"

"In Chicago."

"And what is your business, please?"

"I am a broker; chiefly in mining stocks."

"You've been in that business for some years, Mr. Rogers?"

"Seven."

"You are also admitted to be an expert metallurgist and assayist, are you not?"

"I think so."

"I object to that!" Bentick was coming around again and his voice rose angrily. "What bearing has it on this case?"

"Well, chiefly," said Kinsel with mild sarcasm, "to show that Mr. Rogers had a very clear idea of this Red Rock property's value, and that he has been trained not to make mistakes."

The court nodded assurance at the defendant's counsel. Kinsel smiled broad satisfaction.

"Now, let's see," he pursued suavely. "You haven't spent much time at your Chicago headquarters during the past year?"

"Very little."

"You have been—where?"

"Investigating various mining properties from Mexico to Oregon, and almost from the Pacific coast to the Mississippi," the witness answered evenly.

"And among others, you investigated this Red Rock Gold Mine, situated in the township of Red Water, on the edge of this—Venner—County?"

"I did."

"At about what date was that, Mr. Rogers?"

"In the early part of March in the present year."

"You looked into the property in your own interest?"

"No."

"For a client, then? Will you give me his name?"

"It was William I. Frand."

"He commissioned you to investigate this specific mine, because he had some idea of purchasing the same?"

"He did."

"Now, you've known Mr. Frand for several years?"

"About four."

"You knew him to be a person of wealth?"

"Of very considerable wealth."

"So that when he asked you to look into this property there was little doubt of his being able to purchase it if your report was satisfactory?"

Beekman essayed, and successfully, an almost scornful smile.

"No doubt whatever, sir."

"And you made your report in writing from the mine?"

"I did."

"Good. Now, sir, to the best of your recollection will you repeat the contents—rather, perhaps, the gist of them—to this court?"

"I stated simply that the Red Rock Mine was in every particular what it had been represented to be; that the ore was of very high grade and considerable extent; that I had sampled the ore in a number of places and assayed the samples; and that, at the figure of three million dollars, I believed that the mine would prove a wise purchase for Mr. Frand to make."

"And did he immediately come on to close the transaction?"

"He did not. He purchased an option on the mine for thirty days—"

Bentick was on his feet.

"At what figure, Mr. Rogers?" he snapped.

Kinsel turned again, with a calm, superior, chiding smile this time.

"It is always pleasant to have opposing counsel interrupt a witness's testimony," he said gently. "Nevertheless, I haven't the slightest objection to your answering the question, Mr. Rogers."

"The amount, I believe, was ten thousand dollars."

Bentick resumed his seat with a grunt.

"I want that very particularly on record, your honor," he announced. "A little later I shall have something to ask on that count."

Kinsel's hands were folded behind his back. He waited with an obviously sweet resignation. Matters having calmed again, he resumed:

"Mr. Frand purchased the option, then. He did not, however, come to Red Water at once?"

"He was detained by business."

"But finally he came?"

"Almost at the end of the thirty days."

"And then?"

"The sale was closed."

"On what date, Mr. Rogers?"

"On the seventh of April of the present year."

"And where?"

"At the mine itself."

"And in whose presence?"

"Mr Hanford, Mr. Frand, and I were alone there."

Bentick was up once more.

"Your honor!" he cried. "I beg to submit that on the face of the matter a document executed as this deed is alleged to have been—"

The gavel drowned his voice.

"Your honor, I—"

Once more the gavel came down with a crash.

"If the complainant's counsel will endeavor to restrain himself for the time being, he will be granted every opportunity for cross-examination later!" issued from the bench.

Kinsel's smile was hard to restrain. For the first time in all the wearisome transactions at Elderford during the past two months he had the eminent Mr. Bentick on the run!

Heretofore, Bentick had been all calm satisfaction—all serene confidence in the merits of his case and his own ability to put them forward. Now, at last, he was growing excited, and Kinsel's heart throbbed gleefully.

He bowed to the bench and went on:

"In short, Mr. Rogers, you witnessed the transfer of the Red Rock Mine to Mr. Frand by Mr. Hanford, and you witnessed the actual paying over of the money?"

"I did."

"And the sum was?"

"Three million dollars."

"Not all in cash?" Kinsel pursued, rather playfully.

"None of it, sir."

"In what form, then, was the payment made?"

"There was a certified check for one million dollars, sir, and promissory notes for the balance."

"The notes were indorsed?"

"Certainly."

"By whom?"

"I have not that knowledge, sir. I know that they were indorsed by several large Chicago and New York financial concerns, and that the indorsements seemed perfectly satisfactory to Mr. Hanford."

"In short, Mr. Frand, having determined to purchase the whole property on the strength of your report, came fully prepared to close the deal at once, and did close it to the satisfaction of all parties concerned?"

"Exactly."

"Very well."

Kinsel turned to the table and took up a rather well-thumbed sheet of paper. There were a dozen lines of writing upon it, and at the bottom three signatures, one of them evidently that of a witness.

He held it forth smilingly.

"This, Mr. Rogers, is something you recognize?"

Beekman smiled as well—a calm smile that sent Bentick to gnashing his teeth again.

"And it is—"

"The deed which Mr. Hanford gave to Mr. Frand."

"But at present metamorphosed into plain 'Exhibit C,'" Kinsel observed facetiously. "Will you kindly look at it closely, Mr. Rogers?"

Beekman accepted the paper. His steady hands held it to the light and he examined it studiously.

"You are quite certain that that is the deed?"

"Entirely."

"And that that is your signature?"

"It is."

"And you are familiar with Mr. Frand's signature?"

"I am."

"And prepared to swear that it is on that paper?"

"I saw him write it, sir," Beekman responded with apparent slight astonishment.

Unintentionally he caught Wendel's eye. That gentleman seemed to be struggling to keep his ecstasy invisible. He winked ever so faintly; he nodded ever so slightly; his hand gave the slightest, gentlest pat over his trousers-pocket—and Beekman understood bitterly.

Let him go on as he was going, and there might be even more money than he expected for his perjury. He bit his lips for an instant and faced his examiner once more.

Kinsel's hands were comfortably located in his pockets now. He was frankly pleased; in all his legal career he had had few better witnesses. If this fellow panned out as well on the cross-examination grill, he deserved a medal!

"Now, Mr. Rogers," he continued, "I believe we'll pass on to a few other people in the case. First of all, Mr. Wendel—at present in court. You know him?"

"I do."

"Have known him for some years?"

"Yes."

"You know also what relation he bears to Mr. Frand?"

"Well, I should call him Mr. Frand's confidential agent—and sometimes business manager—and sometimes junior partner, sir."

"In short, you believe him to be—well, a qualified mouthpiece for Mr. Frand?"

"I know him to be."

"Good. You knew that he had been searching for you in connection with the testimony you are at present giving?"

"I did not. He came upon me only day before yesterday at—"

"Oh, I object to that! I object to that!" rasped suddenly from Bentick's corner. "It certainly isn't material where Mr. Rogers was located, or when, so long as—"

Kinsel submitted with a bow of polite humility.

"We'll withdraw that line of questioning altogether, then," he smiled, "and pass on to another of our friends—Mr. Hanford. You knew Mr. Hanford well, Mr. Rogers?"

"I had never met him before going to the mine."

"But you became well acquainted with him there?"

"Very."

"Old man?"

"About sixty."

"Man of the world—broad-minded, experienced in all the conventions, and so on?"

Beekman's smile broadened again.

"Well, hardly that, Mr. Kinsel," he answered. "Mr. Hanford was a rather rough specimen, all things considered. He had spent many years among the wilder portions of the West, prospecting and so on, and very much alone. He was rather a peculiar character."

"Eccentric?"

"Not eccentric, perhaps, but blunt and elemental."

"So that you would not consider a deed of the character of this one, even where millions are involved, as being extraordinary for a man of Hanford's nature and habits?"

"I was very much surprised when Mr. Hanford insisted upon giving any deed at all," Beekman smiled frankly.

"And just what would you have expected him to do?"

"Well, if I had thought about it at all, I should have expected him to stuff the money and the notes into his pocket, shake hands, pack up his things, and ride off."

"In a word, he wasn't the sort of character calculated to go into fine business details and insist upon strict technicalities?"

"He most certainly was not."

Bentick's lips were working again. Kinsel turned swiftly to the court.

"At the risk of exciting the learned counsel for the prosecution," he said pleasantly, "I am trying only to establish that there is nothing incongruous in a document such as this being executed by such a man."

Mr. Bentick subsided with palpable unwillingness. Kinsel turned back to his witness.

"I wish to ask you only one or two things more, Mr. Rogers," he purred. "This Red Rock Mine was being worked when you visited it?"

"No."

"For what reason?"

"Because of Mr. Hanford's extreme ill-health—of the disease which resulted in his death shortly after."

"Have you any idea how long the mine had remained unworked?"

"For about eight months before I arrived."

"And Mr. Hanford lived absolutely alone?"

"There was a Chinaman who cared for him after a fashion."

"No one else?"

"No one, during my stay."

Kinsel rested a foot on the rung of a chair.

"Mr. Rogers, Hanford was in full possession of his senses when you knew him and were with him?"

"Absolutely."

"A certain Dr. Watterson, of Red Water, called several times while you were there?"

"Yes."

"And stated that Mr. Hanford's death was no more than a matter of months at the most?"

"Yes."

"And did he also state that the last few weeks of his illness," Kinsel went on swiftly—so swiftly, indeed, that the court leaned forward with sudden interest—"would in all probability be characterized by marked lapses of mental responsibility—that at times he would be wholly incapable of managing his affairs?"

"He did!" came as swiftly from Beekman. "And—"

"I object!" issued roaringly from Bentick's province.

Kinsel turned slowly and shrugged his shoulders. The court surveyed Kinsel for a minute.

"Inasmuch as you are seeking only to establish the validity of the document you hold, I shall sustain that objection."

The chief of the defense's legal force bowed.

"I think we are quite through with the witness, your honor. If the learned counsel for the prosecution desires—"

His voice faded away slowly. Something seemed to be occurring in the neighborhood of that same "learned counsel"—something which Kinsel had seen vaguely from the corner of his eye, and which Beekman had watched with the most animated personal interest.

At the rear, some two minutes back, there had been a little excitement. Somebody or other had entered and held an energetic whispered conference with the policeman at the door.

Finally, it seemed to have been settled that somebody was to have his way, and an unimportant-looking man had hurried down the aisle on tiptoe and made straight for Bentick.

His head bent low over that of the prosecution's counsel, while Kinsel watched speechlessly and Beekman felt an instinctive dread.

Bentick brightened astoundingly. He seemed to whisper a few words in return and to receive answers that overjoyed him.

And suddenly his hand was waving at the court.

"Your honor, I wish to make a somewhat unusual request!" he thundered. "In the room from which *Mr. Rogers, of Chicago,* recently emerged, is there a rear entrance?"

"I—I believe so."

"May I ask that that rear entrance be locked securely and the key deposited with the court at once?"

"If you will give the reason—"

"If your honor will be so extremely good as to accede to that request, I believe that we shall show reasons in plenty!"

There was suddenly something strangely convincing about Bentick. The court debated for a minute; a motion of the hand sufficed to send one of the court officers into the little waiting-room. He emerged an instant later and deposited upon the desk before the judge a key.

Mr. Bentick purred aloud.

"And may I further ask that—er—*Mr. Rogers, of Chicago,* be requested to step into that room, your honor, and that an officer be stationed before the door which connects with this court?"

His tone was nothing less than compelling. A slight smile, and the judge spoke a word or two to the clerk.

The latter whispered to Beekman, and the wondering witness arose. Wendel raised a hand in protest, and was quelled by Kinsel, whose breath seemed to be coming with some difficulty.

The cowboy walked steadily into the room at the side—and he had the pleasure of hearing a heavy tread approach and halt before the portal. He glued his eye to the crack once more; he caught a glimpse of a blue uniform within an inch or two.

Beyond it, the view included only Mr. Bentick and the mysterious person who had come in upon him.

Mr. Bentick was standing once more, and his face wore a smile of the Cheshire cat brand.

"Your honor," he declaimed joyfully, "I have to apologize for the request just made. But before undertaking the cross-

examination of the last witness there is one detail—which we shall be most happy to support with evidence—to which the attention of yourself and these twelve gentlemen should be called."

He paused smilingly. He looked over the jury and went on:

"The gentleman who has just favored us with his testimony is, as I believe we shall all admit, at least six feet and two inches in height. He is also broad in build. He has also black hair. He has also black eyes. He has also a very dark skin."

Once more he paused, the better to allow a sinking-in process for the words.

"*Whereas,*" he concluded, and his voice rose with almost every word, "we shall show that *Mr. Laurence Rogers, of Chicago,* is extremely fair of complexion, is sandy of hair, possesses a pair of pale-blue eyes, and is *emphatically not over five feet and seven inches in height!*"

CHAPTER IX.

AN EXIT AND A MEETING.

As concerned Beekman, a blow with a club could hardly have come nearer to stunning him!

As promptly as he had been found out in the murder, he was found out in the perjury!

He reeled away from the door. He caught himself in a pace or two and leaned against the wall. His brain took to racing along wildly; in the tenth part of a second he seemed able to reason out a hundred different things.

And above them all rose one query: What did detection—and such detection as this—mean for him now?

Emphatically, for a beginning, arrest upon the charge of deliberately giving false testimony under oath. After that, at the hands of Mr. Bentick and the district attorney, a thorough airing of himself.

More than likely, through one source or another, the discovery of his name and his recent haunts. And then—

For a moment Beekman grew limp. Newspapers, particularly Elderford newspapers, found their way to the Three-F with some frequency. When the boys read of his latest exploit in crime—well, they'd be over!

They would locate him, and with all the rude, strenuous justice that lay within them they would be more than pleased to add to his present troubles as soon as they arrived!

What should he do?

With that new instinct of the hunted which seemed so suddenly to be quickening within him, he hurried softly to the rear door and tried it. It was locked most securely.

He returned to the portal which led to the court-room and clenched his hands—and relaxed them with a bitter smile. Nobody less than a maniac could have contemplated flight through that packed court.

He was trapped!

He might as well admit that and prepare to take his little dose of medicine with whatever grace might be possible. One hand rubbed his tired head for a second or two; curiosity welled up within him again. He must have another brief glance into that hushed court-room!

His eye found the crack once more. The policeman had shifted and the witness-stand was again within his range now.

In the chair sat the insignificant man who had appeared so suddenly. As the clerk administered the oath, Bentick regarded him with a thoroughly affectionate smile.

Then, when the witness sat twisting his hands covertly, nervous but determined, the knife-edge voice came again:

"Your name, sir?"

"It is—is Richard Brown."

"Where is your home, Mr. Brown?"

"In Elderford."

"And how long have you lived here?"

"All my life, sir."

"In fact, since before the present city was even a village?"

"Yes."

"Have you any friends—even acquaintances—in Elderford?"

The witness's jaw dropped in simple astonishment. From twenty spots in the audience a laugh arose.

The gavel came down and order was restored—but the question had been answered before Mr. Brown's:

"I certainly have, sir."

"See some of your friends in court now?"

"Quite a number of them."

"Presumably, they'd be willing to get up and swear that—er—you were you?"

"I believe they would."

Mr. Bentick turned to the court.

"I shall call for volunteers from the spectators in a moment or two," he remarked with dry sarcasm.

"Your honor, I object to all of this as most absurd and irrelevant!" came suddenly from Kinsel.

The gavel interposed again.

"There is evidently a sort of—er—relevant irrelevancy about this present witness, Mr. Kinsel," he smiled.

"What I want to establish first of all, your honor," Bentick hurled in, "is the fact that whether or not Mr. Laurence Rogers is Mr. Laurence Rogers, Mr. Richard Brown *is* Mr. Richard Brown!"

"Very well, Mr. Bentick. Go on."

Kinsel half rose in his chair. Bentick seemed to catch the motion from the corner of his eye, for his voice quickened.

"Mr. Brown, you are acquainted with Mr. Laurence Rogers?"

"Slightly."

"Well, you have met him several times?"

"Probably ten times in the last year."

"Where?"

"At various points in this county and elsewhere."

"In Elderford?"

"No, I have never seen him in Elderford."

"He is very tall and very dark?"

"He is not, sir!" the witness announced in something closely akin to a nervous shriek. "He is a short, thickset man, very fair and with light-blue eyes!"

Bentick's expression was all plain grin.

"You saw the last witness who occupied that chair, Mr. Brown?".

"Yes! And it was no more—"

Beekman had seen and heard all he desired. With a silent jerk, he left his crack in the door and licked his lips and stared around.

It was, evidently, "all day" for him. Whatever the actual ethical merits of his case, his sins had found him out—and Venner County was highly unlikely to rest on ethical considerations when the genial railroading of a murderer and perjurer to death might raise the district attorney into that beautiful limelight which sometimes leads to better things.

His little day was about over, save for such formalities as a trial and an execution. And it had been a pretty poor day at that, all things considered; it had been the sort of a day of which a man might well feel ashamed and—

Beekman's eye wandered to the painted wall beside him.

Witnesses by the dozen had been lodged there, waiting their turn to take the stand—solemn witnesses and gay ones, taciturn witnesses and voluble ones, witnesses who refrained from lead-pencil writing upon painted walls and witnesses who seemed to dote upon the practise.

There were signatures upon the paint, and pictures and verses of high artistic merit; there were written several devout prayers that the particular case which was detaining the writer might be consigned to some particularly torrid portion of Hades.

But among all of the ruck a single line—surprisingly well executed by some amateur printer of Old English lettering—suddenly glared out from the dingy paint:

"GOD ALMIGHTY HATES A QUITTER!"

The cowboy read it thrice. His eye took on a sudden glitter. He straightened up. His hands were rammed into his pockets and he stared at the solitary line.

"And that's dead *right!*" he muttered.

Whatever he had done, whatever his own idiocy had forced him into, was he going to *quit* now? Was he going to admit himself as something utterly worthless and incapable, and allow himself to be dragged out into court and arraigned as a perjurer?

Wasn't there enough strength and decency left in him to make him more valuable to society out of jail than in?

Emphatically—*yes!*

And what was more, he would stay out of jail!

He looked around swiftly. His brain seemed oddly clearer now. The despair, the horror of the shock had passed. His every sense was vividly alive, his every thought focused compellingly upon the necessity of leaving that room at once—and without being observed.

And there was the window, wide open to the heat of the baking street below. Or—was it the street? He hurried over and looked out, and an excited little chuckle escaped him.

That window gave into a narrow alley between the court-house and the pretentious department store next door! It was a charmingly well-calculated alley, too; shut off from the street at the front by a wooden gate and wholly open at the rear—wherever that might lead. More than all, the good, dry ground lay not more than fifteen feet below.

A drop of fifteen feet is, under all circumstances, a drop of fifteen feet; yet had the cowboy been privileged to design a means of better escape from his waiting-room prison, he could hardly have asked anything better!

An irresistible impulse took him back to the door-jamb for an instant. He saw Kinsel and Cox and the rest of them sitting silent and palpably somewhat wilted.

He saw Bentick standing almost before the judge, one hand on his pocket and the other waving emphatically and triumphantly as he declaimed:

"And having shown by this witness, your honor, that the *Mr. Laurence Rogers* put in evidence by the defense is no more the real Rogers that I am—having shown by Mr. Brown that we are entirely able to call at least eight other people, now well within reach of subpœna, to substantiate the fact—having demonstrated to what an extreme length the counsel for the defense has been driven in the lamentable endeavor to support—"

It was more than enough.

Beekman tiptoed to the window and looked out. There was not a soul in sight. He gave a final glance toward that heavily policed door, and he drew a long breath.

He thrust one long leg over the sill. The other followed swiftly—and the transformed cowboy was hanging by his hands.

Every muscle relaxing, he dropped suddenly. The athletic figure landed in a heap at the bottom of the alley. Some three seconds later Mr. James Beekman was on his feet, not only uninjured, but almost unshaken, by the well-gaged drop.

There was a hurried brushing of his new clothes, and he headed for the rear of the alley. Without a sign of interference, he made his exit into the little back street and turned swiftly to the right.

He would avoid the main thoroughfares—that was certain. He would head straight out of town by the least frequented ways possible. He would get clear of the place before they discovered his escape, and—

And then—what?

The cowboy pondered very strenuously as he plodded swiftly down the hot little street, with its more or less pretentious residences and its gardens prematurely yellowed and dried in the abnormally hot July sun.

First of all, he must get clear. That was the basic principle of the whole business.

He would strike out of town and make due east—for that was the one direction, it seemed, in which he would be expected to travel. He would walk a mile or two beyond the pretty suburban part of Elderford, and turn again and make for the railroad.

Some eight miles south there was a station, he believed. He had forgotten the name of the place, but the salient fact glowed brighter than the blazing sun that he could get a train there which would land him in San Francisco, or somewhere else on the coast.

And after that?

Beekman paused in that deserted little stretch which separates the town proper from the suburbs and took account of his capital.

There were precisely ninety-six dollars in the pocket of those brown trousers. Forty-six of them were his own. The odd fifty—for it happened to be a single bill—had evidently been added by Wendel in case of emergencies.

Beekman laughed bitterly as he thrust the money back. That fifty might not belong to him in the strictest sense, but after murder and perjury the mere theft

of fifty dollars from the man who had forced him to lie under oath could almost be considered no crime at all!

The red-hot sun blistered its way into the higher heavens. Beekman tramped with as natural a swing as could be mustered.

People seemed not to take tremendous account of him. He noticed it, after a little, as he passed man after man and observed no other emotion in them than a marked desire to dash off perspiration and have done with whatever business might be in hand.

They were busy with their own small troubles. He was busy with his larger ones—and he was walking quickly through the suburbs and as yet nobody had appeared to stop him! The thought cheered him wonderfully; he fell to planning anew.

Once let him get aboard a train at—whatever the name of the place might be. Certainly ten dollars would carry him to "Frisco." Then he could spend a day or two looking up the prospect of working his way to China or the Philippines or some other Asiatic spot where youth and energy and brains and muscle would count in the making of a career *worth while!*

Let him once locate in a clime where he was utterly unknown, and he vowed that the rest of his life should be consecrated to living as rightly and doing as much good as might be possible for a solitary human.

He was in no sense maudlin. He was merely himself once more—but now a man with a past that *must* be wiped out; and to save him, he could not see what benefit would accrue to the community by his punishment for the two crimes he had committed.

The suburbs were behind now, and by a curious trick of fate he was making his way along the very trail by which they had entered town yesterday.

He could stick to that, he figured, for about another mile. Then he would turn due south and strike the railroad within some three or four miles and follow it to the next station.

Hat over his eyes, he plodded on through the stinging heat for another half hour, his head down, deep in meditation.

And then he looked up suddenly. Certainly he must have been far from earth, for here, perhaps a hundred yards away, a horse was approaching him at an easy gallop, and even in the loneliness he had been quite unaware of the fact.

The animal was a hardy little beast of the ranch type, the rider a conventional cow-puncher. Beekman paused as the pair came toward him. He would take one long look at that outfit as they passed; afterward, if all went as he planned, it would be many years before he saw another horse and rider of the same type.

He stopped and straightened up with a friendly smile as the bronco loped toward him. He prepared to give a word of greeting and—

"*Thad Parker!*" Beekman shrieked!

The pony was pulled back almost to his haunches. The hard-faced, weather-beaten man on his back emitted one gasp, and the gasp swelled to a roar!

"Well, you bet your life it's Thad Parker!" he thundered. "And—"

Staggered, almost blinded by the sudden, tremendous wave of joy that surged over him, Beekman leaped toward the other with outstretched hands.

"That! I—I—"

"You back right plumb up, you rascal!" came from the saddle.

The pony was side-stepped a pace or two. From one of the big hostlers beside the saddle a big pistol was whipped out and leveled squarely at Beekman's broad forehead.

The cowboy fairly reared in his saddle. For a moment his mouth worked in speechless fury; his eyes blazed with an anger hotter even than the sun, while Beekman, his hands instinctively raised above his head, gasped uncomprehendingly, joyfully at him.

Thad was alive! He himself wasn't a murderer! Whatever stain of forced perjury might be upon him, there was no stain of human blood! He could have shouted aloud in his happiness, but—

"Damn you!" Parker exploded suddenly. "Ye'd catch me without a gun an' shoot me up, would you! You dirty, sneakin', booze-soaked coward! Well, I've come all this way after you, and

now I've got you good! Here! You keep them hands up!"

A prod of the spurs, and the pony all but collided with Beekman. The revolver was trained more carefully. The cowboy's face fairly glowed with an unholy satisfaction.

"I was goin' t' give you time t' say yer prayers before I did it, but—"

His rage seemed to have overcome him suddenly. His thumb brought back the hammer of the pistol, and—the empty prairie echoed very faintly one tremendous crash of a tremendous pistol!

Perhaps three seconds thereafter Mr. James Beekman, neat brown suit, overwhelming joy and all, was stretched motionless upon his face in the dry dirt!

(To be continued.)

A Corner in Christmas Turkeys.

By ALBERT EDWARD ULLMAN.

Wall Street methods applied in a new direction, with dazing, if not exactly dazzling, consequences.

"EVERY time I sit down to a feed like this," remarked Saunders, as he extended his plate for another portion of dark meat, "I think of my first and greatest attempt to lasso a few trifling millions by a corner in Christmas turkey."

"A corner in what?" I queried, knowing from experience that he was about to launch into one of his famous stories of a game of wits in which he was hero, villain, lost child, stolen papers, orchestra, and the whole show.

"In Christmas turkey," he replied. "And say, my boy, when I took that job I was encountering a proposition that J. Cæsar, Napoleon, and Talleyrand would have turned down with pallid features. No one but a little Willie raised in a large city would have butted into a deal connected with the American gobler ever so faintly."

"How did you come to embark in such a novel undertaking?" I asked curiously.

"Undertaking! That's the right word, brother, for it came near being the death of an entire municipality, as the late Mr. Webster would say, and then some obituaries on the side. Do you know there is one fair city in our land which your humble friend dares not invade lest they erect a monument in his honor? I don't object to the marble-shaft game so much, but I dislike daisies growing around the base. Likewise, my horticultural instincts stop short of floral emblems bearing that classic phrase 'Rest in Peace.'"

"Yes," I interjected encouragingly.

"Well, it's a harrowing and tragic tale, as the dollar-and-eight-cent masterpiecers would put it, but all things have a beginning. Mine began with the reading of reliable newspaper accounts of a young millionbucks who was trying to run a corner or two in wheat until an old pig-sticker came along and squeezed him until his alabaster brow was dotted with cold beads of lemon extract.

"This got me to feeling sorry for the poor youth, who was compelled to abandon the stock-market and the chorus and loaf around on a few paltry hundred thousands a year. Thinking of his downfall caused me to investigate the reasons. I discovered he had dilly-dallied with more wheat on paper than nature could produce on earth.

"'Now,' said I to myself, in my Solomon-like wisdom, 'he should only have bought or sold the amount he could put his manicured hooks on.' Having taken this newspaper course in high finance, I began to figure on laundry-paper and the walls of my hall-bedroom until I devised a system of finance I thought according to Hoyle.

"Then I began to look around for something to corner, while I advertised for a partner. I had several hunches, but passed them up. At last came the inspiration—a corner in Christmas turkeys.

"I found my partner, and he got next

to the merits of my gigantic financial plans at the drop of the flag. He had more money than a knitting-mill could turn out stockings to hold, and he liked my descriptions of the newspaper stories to come, in which I always featured him as 'The Turkey King.' The first thing he did was to order several hundred cabinet photos, and the next to organize our force.

"Well, in two weeks we had agents hiking all over the map of North America, buying turkeys of every form and description. Lean or fat, young or old, tough or tender, feeble or strenuous, firm or infirm, they had instructions to get, and get quickly, every feathered member of the turkey tribe scratching gravel in this section of the hemisphere.

"And, say, perhaps they didn't. In one week from the time our merry bunch of turkoliers started out, we began to receive telegrams informing us of the number of turkeys purchased by each man as he toddled about on his little journey. I never counted so many turkeys, even in a nightmare; but when we got through with our census, a week later, we discovered to our horror that we had contracted for more than three million and eighty-seven thousand Christmas turkeys.

"Besides that, the careful agents had purchased every turkey-egg to be found, so that no incubator could step in and puncture our corner.

"You needn't laugh, Bo. We were in an awful stew, with that world-beating population of turkeys coming our way, and no place provided for them in the shape of a home. Your guileless friend spent sleepless nights trying to dope out how to provide meals and lodgings for three million and more live and kicking birdlets due by early freight. His nibs, the backer, began to look pale around the gills and talk about going to a sanitarium.

"But you know I never stay in the same hole long, if I do say it as part of an autobiography, and I woke up the next bright morn, caught an early train, chased up the State, and returned that night with papers signed and renting me a section of the Adirondack Mountains for two months. Before I hit the feathers that night I had made contracts for building a fence around those acres. That was going some, and my moneyed partner began to perk up and talk about the bright future of the country.

"We spent a few days hiring attendants for the turkey convention we were pulling off, and with our two thousand employees we finally set out like a conquering army for the mountain regions. The railroad landed us there in sections, and as fast as we arrived we began to put things in readiness.

"It was a nice ranch, with a pocket-edition of a river running through it. There was a small distillery some miles up at the head of the stream, which made things seem homelike.

"Outside of the house at the entrance there was no other structure. We had purchased all the old tents of a circus, and our regiment of poultry-guards took up their quarters under canvas. Then the gobblers began to arrive.

"Say! Talking about trouble! You will never know how much unadulterated cussedness one fool turkey can display. A peevish and travel-tired bird of that family is almost totally lacking in gentility and the first principles of politeness.

"In fact, it will behave something scandalous if the whole universe has not been arranged to its liking. That's *one* turkey! Now, imagine three million and eighty-seven thousand with the same dispositions. Can you?

"Sure, there's an end to everything, as some philosophical sport has asserted, and we eventually got that little bunch of animated feathers and tribulation inside the ranch and turned it loose on several car-loads of feed. Then we sat down to wait while figuring the price we were going to charge for Christmas turkey.

"Already I had mentally purchased a steam-yacht and a pound of English hothouse grapes with my profits, when something happened, as the fairy books say.

"The something was a bright light in the sky during the nocturnal hours, which we learned was the dinky distillery burning down. Except to bemoan the fate of so much wet goods, we thought little or nothing about it until daybreak, when we meandered out, to find three million and eighty-seven thousand turkeys stiff and prostrate on the ground.

"Believe me, it was an awful blow. I could figure out the cause at a glance.

"Our river had been flowing burning whisky all night, and the turkeys had attempted to drink it or had been killed by the fumes. I could hear my accomplice in finance mumbling brokenly about sanitariums again, but I turned like a general and ordered the two thousand turkey valets to get busy and dry-pick every feathered creature on the ranch.

"The voice of command was all that was needed, and they waded in, and by midnight finished up the job, piling the turkeys in great mounds along the railroad track in front of the ranch, where they were to be crated and shipped broadcast the next day. Thus again little Saunders had proven his genius, and my impulsive backer was weeping on my manly and padded bosom.

"Conversing about shocks, the one we got the next morning was the best imitation of Doomsday ever witnessed by poor, weak men. Never will your humble acquaintance forget that moment when, with his trusting partner, he emerged on the front porch before breakfast.

"His nibs was the first to notice it. I heard a gasping sound from his direction, and saw him drop into a chair.

"I followed the direction of his terror-stricken eyes, and then my knees knocked together, and I dropped, too. Not a word did either of us utter—we were speechless—for where three million and eighty-seven thousand turkeys had rested in mounds the night before not one could now be seen.

"Both of us sat there hour after hour, crushed and speechless. My brain was active, but my tongue refused to wag.

"What had become of the three million and eighty-seven thousand turkeys? They had not been stolen; that much was certain. Not even a transcontinental railroad could commit larceny on such a scale. It was too big a job. It was a mystery, and had me going.

"Everything looked the same as the night before, except for a great gap in the underbrush line to the south.

"I looked at my faithful friend, whose good, hard coin was gone, and felt real mushy. It was tough luck, but all I could do was to blink when he looked at me, and try to whistle.

"Hour after hour passed and we didn't move, we didn't speak.

"I had given up trying to think long before, and was planning a hermit's life in the mountain wilds. I didn't even notice an afternoon paper one of the men had brought from the station and thrust into my hand. It was only when my eye dropped carelessly on the first page that I let out the first sound of the day in a piercing yell.

"'Wake up, pal, and listen to this,' I shouted, as I held the paper up with trembling digits. Then, in a voice like sandpaper, I read:

"UTICA DEVASTATED!

"Special News Despatch.

"UTICA, 9.30 A.M.

"Utica was visited by a terrible and unheard-of catastrophe early this morning. Millions and millions of strange, featherless creatures swept down upon the city during the hours of darkness, and when day dawned, bodies of these strange and unnatural creatures blocked the highways and byways. They lie dead by the hundreds of thousands, mostly frozen, long, featherless, blue-skinned monstrosities.

"The horrible blight came without warning. From the appearance of the first winged thing until the vanguard of millions struck the corporate limits, was but the space of a few moments. They did not fly. They walked in great strides, in a peculiar, staggering way, terrifying to beholders. Even while in the midst of their terrible work many were noticed to turn somersaults and act in other playful ways.

"With the exception of the dead, the terrible horde is supposed to have reached the coast, and directed its movements in a southerly direction. They seem to be making for a warmer climate.

"And, say," continued Saunders, "when I got through reading that I just lay back and laughed. So did my backer. It saved our minds and kept us out of the funny-factory."

"But," I interrupted, "what became of your confiding partner?"

"Oh! He got his money back."

"How?" I asked.

"Trust to little Willie," said Saunders, with a laugh. "We cornered the feather-duster market."

A Great Event for The Argosy.

QUARTER OF A CENTURY OLD WITH THIS ISSUE.

Few Publications, Out of the Many Started, Ever Live to Celebrate Their Twenty-fifth Birthday.

THE ARGOSY THE ONLY ONE OF ITS CLASS TO SURVIVE THE ONSLAUGHT OF THE SUNDAY NEWSPAPER.

A Romantic Story of Its Ups and Downs in Its Early Struggle for Life, and Its Many Hair-Breadth Escapes from Death.

A PERSONAL TALK BY MR. MUNSEY.

QUARTER-CENTURY milestones are important alike in the lives of men and magazines. With men there are rarely more than three such milestones, and few magazines ever reach the first one. THE ARGOSY is one of these few. The present issue completes the twenty-fifth year of its life of continuous publication. There have been no breaks, no missing numbers, and each issue has come out on time.

Not many magazine readers realize that THE ARGOSY, with its quarter century of life, is to-day one of the three oldest magazines of any considerable circulation. The two that antedate it are *Harper's* and *The Century,* and in a way, THE ARGOSY is much older than either of these. That is to say, it is older in the blood that flows in its veins, as it absorbed and amalgamated with itself the two oldest magazines in America—*Godey's* and *Peterson's*—both of which were issued in Philadelphia, and which, in their day, occupied an important place in the periodical literature of the country. *Godey's* was known as *Godey's Lady's Book,* but was in form and substance a magazine, and later on was changed to *Godey's Magazine.* Much that would be interesting might be said of these two publications, but their history, further than that they were absorbed by THE ARGOSY, does not properly belong in this sketch.

To talk of the early days of THE ARGOSY and to say anything worth

the saying, must be to talk of myself, because THE ARGOSY, in its inception and development, grew out of my very life. This statement must serve as an apology for talking of myself as I talk of THE ARGOSY in this reminiscence, for it is a reminiscence—just a fireside talk of the old days, and of some of those in between, that bridge over to the present time.

Many of you who are now readers of THE ARGOSY know nothing of its early history. This is particularly true of the younger generation, as the old ARGOSY, or rather THE ARGOSY in its weekly form, has been so long out of print that few of you have ever seen it.

THE EARLY DAYS OF THE ARGOSY.

THE ARGOSY has not always been a magazine. It was started as an illustrated weekly paper for boys and girls and consisted of eight pages, the size of page being the same as that of the *Youth's Companion*. The first issue came out on Saturday, December 2, 1882, bearing date of December 9—one week ahead of the day of issue. This method of dating ahead was in vogue with the weeklies of that period, and to a modified extent is in vogue with the magazines of to-day.

In the first issue there were two serial stories—one by that delightful writer for boys and girls, Horatio Alger, Jr., and a second by another well-known and popular juvenile author, Edward S. Ellis. Mr. Ellis had recently retired from the editorship of *Golden Days*, which I believe he inspired, and which, under his guidance and the clever handling of its publisher, Mr. James Elverson of Philadelphia, became a great favorite with the boys and girls of that day.

Mr. Alger, who had long been before the public as a popular author, was at that time in his prime, and I want to record here in his memory, for it is now some years since he passed out of life, that he was one of the most human men I have ever known—a man with the simplicity of a child and the sweet, pure soul of God's best type of woman. He left behind him many books, which delighted the youth of our land, and which still delight the boys and girls of the present generation. My own interest in THE ARGOSY was scarcely more than Mr. Alger's, and from the first issue of the publication to the end of his life he gave it the best work of his pen.

This little tribute to Mr. Alger is not in the way of invidious comparison between him and Mr. Ellis, or any of the other writers of the early days of THE ARGOSY, or the writers who have since contributed their best thought to its pages. Mr. Ellis is still in the harness, though he has switched away from the creative work of his earlier days. His Indian stories, in particular, many of which ran in THE ARGOSY, were among the most fascinating tales ever written for boys and girls.

Associated with Alger and Ellis as contributors to THE ARGOSY at that period were Oliver Optic, Harry Castlemon, Frank H. Converse, D. O. S. Lowell, Edgar L. Warren, George H. Coomer, Malcolm Douglas, Annie Ashmore, W. H. W. Campbell, Mary A. Denison, J. L.

Harbour, Richard H. Titherington, and Matthew White, Jr., who for many years has been, and still is, the editor of THE ARGOSY.

So far I have been talking chiefly of THE ARGOSY, to the neglect of myself. It might be well to go back a little farther, however, because the foundation, the germ thought of THE ARGOSY, had its origin with me. And in this little talk we want to get at the beginning of things, the reason why.

It is probable that I never should have found myself in the publishing business but for the fact that the general manager of the Western Union Telegraph Company sent me to Augusta, Maine, to take the management of their office in that city. I was a youngster at that time, with life before me, and with an insatiable ambition. I had picked up telegraphy and was using it as a stepping-stone to something better, as a means to an end. But to get out of one kind of activity and into another, for which one has no special training, is not easy. I learned this fact through bitter disappointment and many heartaches. The four walls of a telegraph-office were to me as a cage to a tiger yearning for the boundless freedom of the jungle.

As Augusta was the capital of the State, and as I lived at the hotel where most of the legislative and other State officers stayed, I very soon acquired a pretty good knowledge of the strong men of the entire commonwealth. Their lives had scope; mine had none. I chafed bitterly under the limited possibilities of my environment, where ambition, and energy, and aspiration, counted for little. My very soul cried out for an opportunity to carve out for myself a bigger life.

TEN YEARS OF MY LIFE FOR A CHANCE.

I lost no chance to make the acquaintance of men prominent in business and in public affairs, through whom I sought the opportunity to throw my life and energy into the work that they had in hand. I KNEW AT THAT TIME, AS WELL AS I KNOW NOW, THAT I COULD DO THINGS. But the opening did not come my way. There were always sons or relatives, or people of political influence, who stood before me in line for the place.

I was pretty nearly as good a business man at that age, even, as I am now, and the tantalizing part of it was, I knew it. It was more than a conviction with me. It was a certainty. I was so sure of myself that I would willingly have given ten years of my life, without compensation, for a chance with some of the big concerns of the country—railroading, steel-manufacturing, shipping, banking, or any of the great staple industries.

The thought of immediate money had no weight with me, no consideration. It was the future I wanted, and with it the big world, where things are done in a big way.

As manager of the Western Union Telegraph Company I was naturally more or less associated with the daily press and with the other publishing interests of Augusta, which at that time was the largest pub-

lishing center in America for a certain kind of rather indifferent, chromo-circulated periodicals. This was the great business of the city, completely overshadowing anything else, and making vastly more money than anything else. Moreover, it had about it an element of romance and picturesqueness that was startlingly and abnormally interesting because of the smallness of the town.

The publishing germ gradually got into my blood, and as visions of railroad management, of steel-manufacturing, of merchandising in a big way, of banking, and of other alluring enterprises receded, my thoughts focused more and more on the publishing business, until at last I lived and breathed in the publishing world. I did my work at the office mechanically, meanwhile dreaming great dreams to the tune of the printing-press.

After locating in Augusta myself, I secured for one of my schoolboy chums a place with the chief publishing-house there. Two or three years later, when he had gained a pretty good knowledge of the business, he obtained a position in New York in a somewhat similar concern, at a very handsome advance in salary. Through him, as well as through my intimate acquaintance with the proprietors of the various publishing establishments in Augusta, I had absorbed a considerable superficial knowledge of publishing. So, in working up plans for a publication of my own, I was able to give them the semblance of practicality. Yet what I knew of actual publishing was just enough to be dangerous.

But to start without capital was a pretty difficult problem, and especially to start in New York, and my ambition was to locate there and to issue a publication of good grade. The capitalists of New England are not wont to take long chances. They are wise in frugality and safety. An enterprise so hazardous as publishing, and managed by a man who had had no practical experience, did not appeal to them. Capitalists of small degree, and some of larger degree listened, however, with polite courtesy to my carefully worked out plans for THE ARGOSY. You see, I had already got as far as a name, and that little bit of crystallization was worth something as a nucleus.

Finally I presented my plans to a man more daring than the rest, who listened to what I had to say with a kind of interest that gave me hope. He was a stock-broker in a small way, necessarily in a small way in a town of that size. But stock-brokerage in its very nature, whether little or big, is so thoroughly a chance game that anything extra-hazardous is apt to appeal to a man engaged in it.

SMALL CAPITAL, GREAT EXPECTATIONS.

The result of this interview, and of many that followed, was the formation of a partnership between the Augusta broker, my friend in New York, and myself, the purpose of which was to begin the publication of THE ARGOSY, precisely as I had planned. The capital of the concern was to consist of FOUR THOUSAND DOLLARS, twenty-five hundred of which he was to put in—five hundred of this amount being in the

shape of a loan to me, to add to five hundred I already had—making my interest in the company one thousand dollars, or one-quarter of the capital stock. The remaining quarter was to be taken by the New York partner.

FOUR THOUSAND DOLLARS! The overwhelming assurance, the audacious hope, the infinite nerve of this proposition astounds me to-day, as I look back upon it and know what real publishing means in a town like New York—publishing that has the pretense to reach out for national support! But on such a slender possibility I threw away a certainty, cut myself off from friends and associates, and plunged into this great whirlpool of strenuous activity, with a confidence and courage that knew no limitations.

WHOLLY WORTHLESS PLANS.

It was pathetic, pitiable even, and the more so because I had barely landed here when I discovered that my plans for THE ARGOSY were hopeless. A day's investigation made it clear that the information which had been furnished me, and on which I had based my calculations, was of a hearsay nature. It was worthless, and the difference between these worthless "facts" and the facts I dug out for myself was sufficient to make the whole proposition impracticable and impossible. All had to be discarded—the plans and figures and fancies of anxious months swept away in an instant.

It didn't take me very long to realize what failure meant to me. It meant just what everybody in Augusta had said it would mean. I had carefully concealed the fact that I was going to leave the city until the very day I started for New York. I gave an interview to a reporter of the *Kennebec Journal,* who was a very good friend of mine, and who was of so optimistic a turn of mind that the picture he drew of my forthcoming enterprise eclipsed even my own over-sanguine fancies. This account served to heighten for the pessimistic community the ridiculous phase of the whole undertaking.

And while I say pessimistic, I don't say it with any sense of reflection on the people of Augusta. On the contrary, their view was sound and normal. After an experience of a quarter century, knowing the business as I know it, and having gone through it as I have gone through it, I doubt if there was more than one chance in a good many millions of my winning out in the publishing business, starting as I started. I was "up against it" good and hard, and I then learned for the first time the meaning of a sleepless night with that indescribable kind of heartache which makes a man feel that the foundations of everything have given way.

There was no turning back. The bridges had been burned behind me, and if they hadn't been, I wouldn't have gone back. Nothing could have induced me to go back. After a day or two of thought—that kind of intense thought which digs deep furrows into a man's soul—I pulled myself together, and worked out new and simplified plans for THE

ARGOSY which showed some margin of profit. The original scheme called for an entirely different shape of publication, with lithographed covers and many illustrations.

With my new plans perfected, I engaged a little room for an office, bought an eight-dollar table and a couple of cheap wooden chairs, paper, pens, and ink. I had a basis to work from now. One cannot do much without a focusing-point.

And now a second jolt that was worse than the first. My arrangement with my Augusta partner was that he would forward the twenty-five hundred dollars as soon as I called for it. I wrote for the remittance, but to my amazement he ignored the whole transaction. He had evidently taken fright at what everybody said would happen to me and my enterprise. Relying with childlike faith on this agreement, I had spent over five hundred dollars of my own money before leaving Augusta in the purchase of manuscripts for THE ARGOSY. So, on landing in New York, I had with me a gripful of manuscripts and about forty dollars in cash.

My failure to get the twenty-five hundred dollars, following hot upon the heels of the first jolt, began to suggest to my inexperienced mind something of the game I had tackled. The money in my trousers pocket wouldn't keep me going very long in New York. The new plans looked hopeful, but without this twenty-five hundred, the thousand dollars of my friend here in New York meant nothing, so we dissolved our fleeting partnership, and he kept his savings.

Being free to make other connections, I took my scheme to a publisher, who became interested in it and who finally suggested that I should turn over my proposed publication to him and let him bring it out in his own name, retaining me as its editor and manager. This arrangement went into effect, and on the 2nd of December, 1882, as I have already said, the first issue of THE ARGOSY appeared, just two months and nine days after I had landed in New York—rather quick work, in view of the kaleidoscopic changes that followed my coming to the metropolis.

As ill luck would have it for THE ARGOSY, however, at the end of five months its publisher became generally involved, and failed. This was a third crisis, and the worst of the three.

My very life was centered in the work I had undertaken. I had been putting eighteen hours a day into it. I had been working with the most intense interest and keenest enthusiasm. The crash came like a bolt from the blue, and again left me pretty nearly high and dry, with but a few dollars in my pocket, as I had drawn only so much of my salary as I needed for my slight expenses.

A TIME OF AWFUL SUSPENSE.

That was a time of awful suspense, while THE ARGOSY was in the hands of the receiver. Once it came pretty near being blotted out when it was offered to a rival publisher, who, if he had taken it over, would

have merged it with his own publication. That was a close call, and it had a good many other close calls at that period.

In the end the situation cleared up in this way: I gave my claim against the house, amounting to something more than one thousand dollars, for the good-will of THE ARGOSY. Then there began such a struggle as no man is justified in undertaking.

I had no capital, and no means of raising any. A bad phase of the matter was that a good many subscriptions had been received, and the money used up. These subscriptions had to be carried out—that is, papers had to be printed and mailed every week to the end of the term paid for. No one had any faith in THE ARGOSY, or believed it possible that I could pull it through. I could get no credit anywhere. The proposition was too risky for the paper-dealer, for the printer, and, in fact, for every one from whom I purchased supplies.

From a friend of mine in Maine I borrowed three hundred dollars, and what a tremendous amount of money it seemed! Not only every dollar, but every cent of that three hundred dollars counted vitally in the continuance, the keeping alive of THE ARGOSY. And keeping it alive was about all I could hope to do, and about all I did do, for a good many months. It was then that I learned the publishing business basically, learned it as I never could have learned it under other circumstances, learned it in all its economies, in all its shadings and delicacies of shadings.

LIFE AT ALL HAZARDS.

It was summer, when the publishing business is at its worst, when few subscriptions are coming in, and reading is at its lowest ebb. I was everything from editor and publisher down to office-boy. And editor with me meant writer and contributor as well. I wrote much of the paper myself—freshened and brought up to date old things that had been published years before. They were not quite so good as new material, but they were a great deal better than nothing. The main thought with me was keeping the paper alive, for so long as there was life there were possibilities, and in possibilities there was to me a kind of sustaining hope.

It would be a long story to tell the details of the awful struggle that ensued during the following months, and, in fact, during the three or four following years. There were many times—hundreds of times, I might almost say—when it seemed as if another number of THE ARGOSY could not be produced. But with a determination to keep it alive at all hazards, a determination that amounted almost to an insane passion, I went on, and on, and on, confronting defeat on every hand, and yet never recognizing it.

The advantage of this purchase, over starting anew, lay in the fact that IT WAS A START—A BEGINNING. It was no longer a matter of discussion whether to make the plunge or not. The plunge had been taken, and now it was a question of swim out or sink. MANY GOOD

THINGS NEVER GET STARTED. THEY DIE IN THE CHRYSALIS STAGE OF DISCUSSION.

But beyond the mere start, coming into possession of THE ARGOSY with the odium of failure attached to it was an emphatic disadvantage. It was years before this disadvantage faded away and was lost in the rosy tints of seeming success. Everything considered, it were far better that I had let THE ARGOSY die then and there and started a new publication later on, if still foolishly wedded to the idea of publishing. Seeing it as I see it now, after years of experience, and knowing the poverty and struggle of it all, I am certain that even as a foundation on which to build it was worse than nothing.

Moreover, I know now that of all the deadly schemes for publishing, that of juvenile publishing is the worst. It is hopeless. There is nothing in it—no foundation to it. One never has a circulation that stays with him, for as the boys and girls mature they take adult periodicals. It is a question of building new all the while. Then again, the advertiser has no use for such mediums. He wants to talk to money-spenders—not dependents, not children.

At the end of a few years I began to get a little credit. The fact that THE ARGOSY had appeared regularly week after week without a break, and that I had managed to keep it alive, began to inspire a mild confidence in the enterprise. And this credit was strengthened by the sincerity and energy I was putting into the work.

No man ever guarded credit more sacredly than did I. I had waited a long time for it. IT WAS CAPITAL AT LAST, and with this capital I began improving THE ARGOSY and reaching out for a wider circulation. And wider circulation, under right conditions, naturally follows improvement in the publication itself.

PUTTING MY FAITH TO THE TEST.

In the winter of 1886 I wrote my second serial story for THE ARGOSY, to which I gave the title "Afloat in a Great City." I have never worked harder on anything than I did on that story, to put into it elements of dramatic interest that would *get a grip on the reader.* I wrote and rewrote the early chapters many times. It was midnight toil—work done by candle-light, after long days of struggle at the office. I wrote that story with a special purpose. I wanted something to advertise, and I put my faith to the test by plunging on it to the extent of ten thousand dollars.

I had never advertised before, because I neither had the means nor the credit with which to do it. I owed at this time something like five thousand dollars, and this advertising increased my indebtedness to fifteen or sixteen thousand dollars. I put out one hundred thousand sample copies containing the first instalment of my story. These I had distributed from house to house in New York, Brooklyn, and near-by sections.

Prior to this time THE ARGOSY had made no permanent headway.

Sometimes it was a little over the paying line, but more frequently on the wrong side, as is evidenced by the fact of my indebtedness. And there is no point in the whole publishing business that is so alluring and so dangerous as BEING ON THE VERGE OF PAYING. It is right here that more blasted hopes and wrecked fortunes are to be found than anywhere else.

The result of this advertising brought new life to THE ARGOSY, so far increasing its circulation that it began netting a profit of one hundred dollars a week. Battered and worn by four years of toil and disappointment, with never a vacation, never a day for play, and rarely a night at the theater, I could with difficulty realize that THE ARGOSY was actually bringing me in a clean hundred dollars a week. But it was not real profit, for the advertising bills were not yet paid.

I say I wrote that story in the winter. I should have said I began it in the winter and went on with it as it was published from week to week during the spring and summer.

The success of the spring advertising pointed the way to a greater success in the fall, and beginning with the reading season I threw myself into a circulation-building campaign that in its intensity and ferocity crowded a life's work into a few months.

WORKING AT AWFUL PRESSURE.

My first move was to enlarge THE ARGOSY from eight pages to sixteen, increasing the price from five cents a copy to six, and from one dollar and seventy-five cents a year to three dollars. The original ARGOSY—or, I should say THE GOLDEN ARGOSY, for that was the name by which it was christened and which it still bore—had had four years of life, without change of make-up. This doubling up in size, and the improvements that went into effect with the fifth volume, were about as daring as the campaign that followed, considering the fact that I was still working without actual capital, and that I had an indebtedness of something like twelve thousand dollars.

I SPENT IN THE FOLLOWING FIVE MONTHS NINETY-FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS IN ADVERTISING THE ARGOSY. I PUT OUT ELEVEN MILLION, FIVE HUNDRED THOUSAND SAMPLE COPIES. I covered the country with traveling men from Maine to Nebraska, and from New Orleans to St. Paul. Beyond Nebraska I used the mails. I kept fifteen to twenty men on the road, and each man employed from one to a dozen helpers in distributing these sample sheets. I had no organization at the time, no trained editorial force, no bookkeeper, and until then I had never had in my office a stenographer and typewriter.

I laid out routes for the men, determined just how many sample sheets should go into each town, and sent every man a daily letter designed to fill him with enthusiasm and ginger. I not only wrote to these men, but I wrote to newsdealers everywhere, and saw that they were amply supplied with the issue containing the continuation of the serial stories begun in the sample copies. In the main I did my own edi-

torial work, I kept my own accounts, I looked after the manufacturing, I bought the paper, I attended to the shipping, and to freight-bills, and, with all this, I did the financiering—NINETY-FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS IN FINANCIERING IN FIVE MONTHS—in addition to the twelve thousand I owed at the start.

The expenses of men on the road, of freights, expressage, shipping, printing, and binding, with office and editorial expenses, literally chewed up money. The circulation was going up at a whirlwind pace, but the more the business grew, the more money it took to operate it.

Of course my income was increasing proportionately with the increase in circulation. But this did not pay for the cost of the eleven and a half million sample copies, nor did it pay the men who were distributing them from house to house all over the country.

I bought paper on time, I bought everything I could get on time. The very audacity of it all gave me credit, and more and more credit all the while. But merciful heavens, how the bills fell due, how the notes fell due! The cry from in town and out of town, from men on the road, and from all the four corners of the earth, and in a thousand voices, was MONEY, MONEY, MONEY! The whole world had gone money mad. We were living over a powder-mine and every minute brought a sensation—brought dozens of them, brought one hot upon another.

Five years of poverty, five years of awful struggle, and now the earth was mine—rich at last, richer than I had ever dreamed of being—a thousand dollars a week net, and every week adding to it by leaps and bounds—fifty thousand dollars a year and all mine—next week sixty thousand, then seventy, and a hundred—a million, maybe—GREAT HEAVENS, AND IT WAS ALL REAL!

Then the powder-mine, the dynamite, the explosion, failure, disgrace, a fortune swept away, and all for the want of ready money to carry on the work. Gambling? No, never for a minute. It was sound to the center; right to the rim. And I had it in hand, on the very tips of my fingers—knew every move in the game—the bounding forward of the circulation proved it, the gold coming in proved it.

But the money to work it out, thousands of dollars every day? Where could I get it? How could I get it? And it meant riches, power, position, the world, the great big world!

With all these thoughts, these feelings, and a thousand others, and the work and the energizing of everybody, the enthusing of everybody, and the tension and intensity of it all, it was one great, dizzy, dazzling, glorious intoxication.

I was never a genius at borrowing money. The extent of my discounts during this period did not at any one time exceed eight thousand dollars at most. But somehow, some way, I always managed to get together the money to keep the wheels moving, to pay my help, and to throttle disaster.

During this campaign any one branch of my business was dramatic enough, and exacting enough on the nerves and physical endurance, to

satisfy any normal man. But every branch was mine. The sensations all focused with me.

And in the very center of this frenzy, when the fight was hottest, I plunged in on another serial story. Night work? Of course it was night work, midnight work, but I HAD TO HAVE IT—I wanted it for advertising.

I called the story "The Boy Broker." It alone added twenty thousand to the circulation. Six thousand words a week dragged out of me—dragged out at night after the awful activities of the day—a complete switch from red-hot actualities to the world of fancy, where by sheer will force I centered my thoughts on creative work and compelled myself to produce the copy. What a winter, what awful chances, and what a strain on vital energy and human endurance!

At the close of this campaign, early in May, 1887, THE ARGOSY had reached the splendid circulation of one hundred and fifteen thousand copies, and was paying me a net income of fifteen hundred dollars a week. But my ambition was TO BUILD BIGGER, AND TO BUILD STRONGER.

UP AGAINST A STONE WALL.

With the opening of the next reading season, in the fall of 1887, I spent twenty thousand dollars, and then abruptly stopped my advertising campaign. Something was wrong. I didn't know what it was. I assumed that the trouble was with juvenile papers, for THE ARGOSY was not alone in its lack of response to the efforts of publishers.

At a loss to know what to do to increase circulation, I bent every energy on trying to hold what we had. I couldn't do it. It was not possible to do it. The tide had set against THE ARGOSY, and was forcing it down the stream, despite all efforts to the contrary.

WHEN ONE IS UP AGAINST IT, THERE IS VIRTUE IN DOING SOMETHING. INACTIVITY—JUST PLAIN, HOPELESS DRIFTING—IS THE LIMIT OF IMBECILITY. IN TRYING SOMETHING NEW ONE HAS A CHANCE. HOWEVER REMOTE THAT CHANCE MAY BE IT IS A LONG WAY BETTER THAN PASSIVE DEATH.

As a possible means of stemming the tide, I made another radical change in THE ARGOSY, this time beginning with the seventh volume. I reduced the size of the page, and increased the number of pages from sixteen to thirty-six, adding a cover—a new phase of dignity THE ARGOSY had not hitherto enjoyed. And, by the way, in this last change THE ARGOSY, strangely enough, pretty nearly resembled the original scheme I had had for it when I came to New York.

The price of this third type of ARGOSY was again advanced, from six cents a copy to ten, and from three dollars a year to four. It was with this change that the word "Golden" in the title of the publication was dropped. But the new form did not give me the sustained patronage I thought it might possibly secure. It showed encouraging vigor at first, but after a while began to sag as before.

However, as THE ARGOSY was still bringing in a good deal of money,

I reasoned that if it would hold out until I could establish an adult weekly, I should be all right, and could afford to see THE ARGOSY fall by the wayside. I wasn't so keen about THE ARGOSY now, as I was about making a success as a publisher. The more I reasoned on the problem, the more I felt convinced that the hand of death had fallen upon the juvenile paper. It did not occur to me that this condition had any bearing on adult publications. So, backing my conclusions, in February, 1889, I brought out an adult weekly which I called MUNSEY'S WEEKLY, and which was the predecessor of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE.

There is a whole story in itself in MUNSEY'S WEEKLY. But it is not germane to THE ARGOSY story, beyond the fact that it is a link in the chain leading up to MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE. It lasted two years and a half, having cost me over one hundred thousand dollars in money and many times this sum in wear and tear, in disappointments, in lost opportunities, and in the pursuit of a blind trail.

MUNSEY'S WEEKLY acted the part of a yellow dog from the first to the last, and it had a good running mate in THE ARGOSY. Beginning with the launching of MUNSEY'S WEEKLY in the spring of 1889, I entered upon one of the most trying periods of my life, which covered five very long years. I had thought myself well out of the woods a year or two before, but as a matter of fact had never actually reached the clearing. WHEN A MAN HASN'T ANYTHING HE IS IN A MORE ENVIABLE POSITION THAN WE ARE WONT TO SUPPOSE. HE IS DOWN TO BED-ROCK, AND THERE IS NO TUMBLE COMING TO HIM.

This is about how it stood with me during the first three or four years of my publishing career here in New York. But later on, when I "got somewhere," got where I had known what a really princely income meant, got what I had worked for so hard, and then saw it all crumble away, and realized that I was unable to stay the process of decay—then it was that I got a new kind of sensation. It was a good deal worse than poverty in the raw. In fact, there are few things that are quite so bad as poverty in opulence.

Often during this wretched period when I was down in the slough I thanked my stars that I hadn't done any splurging, that I hadn't cut out for myself a great big expense to live up to. I hadn't gone beyond living comfortably and well in a good hotel. But when things were at their worst, I used to look back on my eight-dollar-a-week boarding-house with a considerable degree of longing, and I sometimes wished I had never left it.

I now began to realize that, relatively, THE ARGOSY wasn't such a very bad kind of a yellow dog after all. However undesirable a thing may be, it always seems less undesirable when there are others of its kind equally bad.

It was two years after starting MUNSEY'S WEEKLY that the real facts of the situation became clear to me. I think, in justice to myself, I may say that I was one of the first men in the publishing business to

realize that the weekly publication was a "dead cock in the pit." There are always isolated exceptions in all things, and there are a few of these in the case of the weekly paper, even to-day. Most of them, however, can be accounted for by the activity and fertility of the business office, rather than on the assumption that they represent a genuine and spontaneous circulation.

THE DOOM OF THE WEEKLY PUBLICATION.

Up to a quarter of a century ago the weekly paper was a great feature in the publishing business of America, as it is to-day in Europe. But the incoming of the great big Sunday newspaper meant the outgoing of the weekly with us. In England they have nothing like our Sunday papers, consequently the weekly over there still thrives.

Despite my efforts to hold up the circulation of THE ARGOSY, it had dropped, in 1890, to a point where it was no longer profitable. The cost of going to press was too great for the size of the circulation. Some kind of a change was necessary, and this time I simply reduced the number of pages by one-half, and cut the price in two. It had had two years of the four-dollar type without change of form.

Ten months more, and again THE ARGOSY had fallen to the non-paying point. Another turn of the kaleidoscope, and it came out once again in a sixteen-page form, with larger pages, but without a cover. This meant a further saving in going to press and in the production of the paper. The price remained the same—two dollars a year, and five cents a copy.

WHEN ECONOMY COMES IN AT THE DOOR, DEATH FOLLOWS HARD ON ITS HEELS. Publications are made big by a greater and greater and always greater expenditure. But when they are on wrong lines, outlay and thought and energy will not save them. THE ARGOSY was on wrong lines, and nothing could save it, so I molded it to the best purposes of the hour..

It may well be fancied that these many changes injured THE ARGOSY, but such is not the fact. The decline and final extinction of all the strictly juvenile papers of that day, with the exception of THE ARGOSY, sustains my assertion. And THE ARGOSY, in its present strong position, owes its life and its bigness to the changes I put it through, and kept putting it through, until I got it right. WITH ME THERE HAS NEVER BEEN ANYTHING VERY TERRIBLE ABOUT CHANGING A PUBLICATION AS OFTEN AS CONDITIONS WARRANTED, AND IN MAKING THE CHANGE AS RADICAL AS I PLEASED.

THE BIRTH OF MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE.

The history of THE ARGOSY is so interwoven with that of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE that the story of one is not complete without something of the story of the other. Each has been dependent on the other, and each, without the other, would not exist to-day.

MUNSEY'S WEEKLY would not have been started but for the down-

fall of THE ARGOSY, and THE ARGOSY would not have been wrested from death but for MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE.

It was in the fall of 1891 that I changed MUNSEY'S WEEKLY to MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE. There was little to change except the dregs of a wasted fortune. But that little meant a good deal to me. It meant something to work on, something to work out. It had no cash value, yet it served as a nucleus for the beginning of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE, and was the thing that led me into magazine-publishing. But for MUNSEY'S WEEKLY, therefore, there would never have been a MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE, and there would have been no other magazines issued by me. It was MUNSEY'S that blazed the way for THE ARGOSY, and for most of the other magazines of the country as well. It was MUNSEY'S, and the others that came in at its price, which created a vast new army of magazine-readers, making the magazine a leading factor in the publishing business of the day, and furnishing advertisers with a favorite medium for reaching the people—for the magazine reaches a class to which they specially wish to appeal.

I now found myself in a new business, for magazines were about as unlike weeklies as weeklies were unlike dailies. All my experience had been in the weekly field. Nine years had apparently been wasted—nine years with nothing to show for my work but failure and a great big indebtedness—not failure as the world knows it, for I have never "failed" in the sense of going into bankruptcy. The fault was not with my work. It was as intelligently and as faithfully done then as it has been since that time. And these "wasted" years were not really wasted. They were training years—preparatory years for the bigger work that we have since done.

MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE was launched at twenty-five cents, and at this price ran for two years, during which period I learned something about magazine-editing and magazine-publishing. I dug deep down into the problem, studying it in all its phases—the magazine itself, the price, and the method of circulating it. It was clear that there was something radically wrong with the magazine business, when out of a population of eighty millions in the United States and Canada there were not over two hundred and fifty thousand regular magazine-buyers.

Had I struck another quicksand? Was the bottom dropping out from under this branch of publishing also? Was the trouble with the magazines themselves, or with the excessive price at which they were selling—twenty-five and thirty-five cents? Or might it be due to both, or to that young giant, the Sunday newspaper, that had crushed out the weekly publications? Had it called time on the magazine as well?

This was about the way the problem looked to me as I analyzed it. Magazines were in danger of being driven from the field. They were emphatically off the key. They seemed to be made for an anemic constituency—not for young, energetic, red-blooded men and women. Editors edited these magazines for themselves, not for the people. That

is, they gave their readers what they (the editors) thought they ought to have. They were like architects who build a building for the outside rather than the inside—build it for their own glory, rather than to make it serviceable for the uses for which it is designed.

These editors were not men of the world. They didn't mingle with the world—didn't get down to the people and mix with the people. They lived in an artificial literary world, where they saw everything through highly-colored spectacles. There was a woful lack of up-to-dateness about these magazines—a woful lack of human interest.

Meanwhile the Sunday newspapers were becoming absolute monarchs of the situation. They appealed to youth, to middle age, to old age—to the men in the trenches and on the next level above, and up another level and another and another to the very top. Moreover, they had the news interest and the local interest to add to their strength, neither of which was or could be covered by the magazine. Every week the Sunday paper was making marvelous progress with its art features, and every week it added more pages and covered a wider range of subjects. And the price was five cents a copy against twenty-five and thirty-five for the magazines.

There were several attempts to get magazines on their feet at twenty and fifteen cents. But they were weak copies, in the main, of the old magazines, and so made no impression.

A NEW IDEA IN THE MAGAZINE WORLD.

In my study of the problem I became convinced that both the price and the magazines were wrong for wide circulation, and I worked out the idea of reducing the price of my magazine to ten cents, and of accompanying this radical change by an equally radical change in the character of the magazine—making a magazine light, bright, timely—a magazine of the people and for the people, with pictures and art and good cheer and human interest throughout.

I took my idea of a ten-cent magazine to the American News Company, who handled all the periodical business of the country. They were, or were thought to be, absolute dictators of the situation. No one had ever succeeded in an effort to circulate a periodical over their heads. This ten-cent price did not find favor with them. They saw nothing in it. It was so small, they said, that there couldn't be margin enough to justify either them or the newsdealer in handling it if anything worth while were to be paid me for the magazine. The manager of the news company insisted that the condition of trade, and the customs of trade, were all against it. In a word, he considered it an impracticable and impossible scheme.

But I was persistent, and after several interviews I succeeded in getting an offer for the magazine—a price so low that the idea was throttled in its inception, or rather would have been throttled if I had allowed it to drop there. I did not allow it to drop there. Then it was that I decided on a move so dangerous, so impossible, that any other risks

I had ever taken in life were infantile beside it. I decided to go over the heads of the American News Company and deal direct with the newsdealers of the country. But how could it be done—was it possible?

It never had been done. Many hundreds of thousands of dollars—millions, even—had been spent in the attempt, and without making a dent on the bulwarks of this giant monopoly. No one who is not familiar with the facts can fancy what this move meant — the fight that it meant. No human being on earth except myself believed I could win out. I had no doubt about it. I was sure I had the combination to the vaults of success. The other fellows who had gone down in the fight hadn't it. They had the money; I had none.

As in the campaign of 1887, I had no money. I had an indebtedness of well-nigh a hundred thousand dollars. But it wasn't money that was to win this fight, if won at all. IT WAS THE MAGAZINE AND THE PRICE—the theory of GIVING THE PEOPLE WHAT THEY WANTED, AND GIVING IT TO THEM AT THE RIGHT PRICE. Though I had no money, I still had credit, and this credit had to serve in the place of cash.

TAKING THE GREATEST CHANCE OF ALL.

How did I get through, how did I meet my pay-roll, how did I pay for anything? I don't know. God only knows. It was a crisis, an awful span of intensity. I had sent out eight or ten thousand circulars to newsdealers, telling them of the change to ten cents, and telling them that they could not get the magazine through the news company. I asked them to send their orders direct to me. I hoped there would be orders. I expected there would be orders. NONE CAME.

Had my reasoning all been wrong? Wouldn't it stand the test of the plumb-line and the level, after all? At this juncture one of the chief officers of the American News Company came up to see me. He brought the olive-branch with him. He wanted to make terms. When the break came between the company and myself, I advised them that they could have MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE at six and a half cents, if they had an occasion to use any. Two or three weeks later I advanced the price to them to seven cents. The new magazine had not yet come out. It was this new price, and the big orders the company had received from newsdealers, that caused their representative to call on me. He didn't tell me about these orders. He wouldn't have played his part well if he had. I didn't suspect that they had any orders. The deadly silence of the newsdealers—the whole ten thousand of them—made me believe that my announcement had fallen flat.

I had printed an edition of twenty thousand copies, and there was no visible way on earth to get them out. And still I felt I had the situation well in hand. I had no thought of dying passively. The news company representative wanted to fix upon a price on which we could agree—a higher price than they had at first offered. I turned the proposal down. I never knew what figure he had in mind. I had

been forced to go it alone or abandon an idea that I knew to be right. My plan was so thoroughly worked out that notwithstanding the seeming indifference of newsdealers I wanted to see what there was in it. I had written my newspaper advertising—a whole series of advertisements—and had had them set up. They were brief. They said little, but said it big. I was relying on these as well as on the magazine and the price. They were plain talks to the people. I had something to talk about.

I am running over this fearfully dramatic scene with just a scratch of the pen. It is a story in itself, a big volume. The reason why I am touching on it at all is because it is a part of the story of THE ARGOSY. I could not tell THE ARGOSY'S story without it.

An unfortunate phase of the situation was that I had started a serial story for MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE some months before, and had to carry it on through all this great strain, writing several thousand words of constructive work for each issue; and this, as before, was midnight work. In fact, I have never written anything during this quarter of a century, whether article, fiction, editorials, announcements, advertising, or anything of any nature, that has not been written at the point of the pistol—at the demand of the printing-press.

AN EVENTFUL DAY IN MAGAZINE HISTORY.

The day of issue swept in on me. It was a crucial day—a day of awful scope and import. Everything hung in the balance, and the edition hung with me. It didn't move. I didn't expect it would on the instant. The advertisements had not yet got in their work. Suspense and expectancy matched each other. Tension was at the breaking-point. Broadside after broadside of advertisements was hurled out to batter down the solid front of opposition. Ten days, and the edition of twenty thousand was exhausted. Then another of ten, and another of five, and then still another of five, making forty thousand for the month. Sixty thousand the following month, then a hundred, a hundred and fifty, two hundred, and so on at magic pace to seven hundred thousand. The idea had proved itself true to the plumb-line and the level, and fourteen years of experience, since then, have further proved the accuracy of that thinking, the soundness of that analysis, and the care with which the whole plan was worked up and worked out.

It was that work on MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE that saved the day for THE ARGOSY—that work that saved the magazine business generally from being bowled over and bowled under by the impudent and aggressive Sunday newspaper. It was that work, primarily, that has increased the number of magazine-purchasers in a little more than a decade from two hundred and fifty thousand to two million regular monthly buyers, many of whom purchase from two to a dozen magazines.

That fateful day was October 1, 1893—eleven years after my coming to New York. And that day marked the beginning of real success with me. The seeming success of THE ARGOSY when it was bringing me in

a profit of fifteen hundred dollars a week was actually no success at all. If there had been any stability to the circulation, it would have been a great success, and THE ARGOSY would have been a great property. As it was, it barely made good its advertising bills. When they were paid there was not enough circulation left to count for nything.

In the outset of this reminiscence I said that I would gladly have given ten years of my life for a chance to do something. This record shows that I gave eleven years before really getting started right, and, in addition, I was in debt to the extent of over one hundred thousand dollars—one hundred and fifty thousand with the advertising and other expenses of forcing the fight to a successful finish on this new-priced, new type of magazine. But as a matter of fact it was a quarter of a century instead of eleven years, as every day saw more than two days' work done. And in intensity and anxiety and thought and energy burned up on this stupid thing, it was a century.

Six months after MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE blazed the way to the clearing, THE ARGOSY came into the magazine field, and with this move became an adult publication. As a weekly, it had had eleven years and a half of precarious life. This was its fifth change, and was the most radical of all. The last weekly issue was down to nine thousand—a fall from one hundred and fifteen thousand, its high-water mark; the first in magazine form ran up to forty thousand, and there or thereabouts it hung for two and a half years, while it masqueraded as a weak imitation of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE. I was too busy in keeping up with the pace of MUNSEY'S, in installing machinery, in developing my own news company, and in creating an organization, to give any considerable thought to THE ARGOSY. It ran on perfunctorily, practically without loss or gain to the establishment. I was keeping it alive as a matter of sentiment; keeping it alive for the possibilities there might be before it.

THE ARGOSY'S SIXTH AND FINAL CHANGE.

And now another change, the sixth and last. I wanted to get THE ARGOSY wholly in a field by itself. I didn't want it to be a trailer. So I worked out for it the plan of an all-fiction magazine, something brand-new—a type which it created, and which has since become one of the most successful in the magazine field. Holding strictly to the lines then laid down, THE ARGOSY has grown to be the second largest magazine in the world in point of circulation, and the second largest, as well, in point of earning power.

This change occurred with the October number of 1896, and from forty thousand, where it had been lingering, the circulation almost immediately ran up to eighty odd thousand. There it remained for a number of years, when suddenly, and without any conceivable reason, it began to forge ahead. Its progress has been wholly its own. There has never been a dollar spent on it in the way of advertising, or of circulation-building in any of its phases. Its growth has been con-

sistent and persistent in spite of the many other magazines which have come into the field, and which are out-and-out copies of THE ARGOSY.

THE ARGOSY has had eleven peaceful, pleasant years, with never a change of any kind, and in this time has grown to a circulation of five hundred thousand copies, the exact print of the present issue. On its twentieth birthday it had reached three hundred thousand, and in the last five years it has added two hundred thousand more, reaching the half-million mark for the first time in its quarter-century of life, and on its anniversary number. Three or four more years of this ratio of growth in circulation, and MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE will be hard pressed, unless it too forges further forward meanwhile.

I have told you of the small beginning of THE ARGOSY, and of the rocky road it traversed until it landed in the magazine field. I have told you of its poverty, and of its earnings in its proud day as a weekly. And I will now open the books and show you its earnings since it found itself. Here are the figures—absolute net earnings:

1897	$14,587.17
1898	21,252.35
1899	22,269.01
1900	34,400.51
1901	68,693.08
1902	124,903.41
1903	180,634.96
1904	237,328.89
1905	248,729.75
1906	268,845.27
1907*	300,000.00
Total	**$1,521,644.40**

This finishes the story of THE ARGOSY. Long as it is, it is briefly told—merely two or three strokes on the canvas. Of necessity I have had to say a good deal of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE to make this picture of THE ARGOSY accurate in all its facts and shadings.

MUNSEY'S has been the burden-bearer of the house, the pace-maker and the wonder of the world as a popular magazine and as a money-earner. At the present time, besides two daily newspapers, I have six magazines, or practically seven, as one is issued in two sections, making two complete magazines. They are MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE, THE ARGOSY, THE SCRAP BOOK, THE ALL-STORY MAGAZINE, THE RAILROAD MAN'S MAGAZINE, and THE OCEAN. They are all the outgrowth of that analysis of the magazine situation back in 1893, and of the test to which I put my conclusions.

To give substance to this story, to show some of the fruits of the

* These figures for 1907 are estimated, as the year is not yet completed.

work I have done and am still doing—for I work pretty nearly as hard now as I did at that time—I will open another set of books, and show you the net earnings of my whole publishing business from 1894 to the present time, including THE ARGOSY and the daily newspapers. These are the figures—net earnings:

1894	$69,423.71
1895	172,405.58
1896	249,647.91
1897	326,276.32
1898	382,805.70
1899	473,928.98
1900	535,004.81
1901	681,315.90
1902	753,441.18
1903	912,475.23
1904	952,153.55
1905	1,014,008.73
1906	1,058,018.10
1907*	1,200,000.00
Total	$8,780,905.70

If there has been any luck about this development, I cannot tell you where it came in. I have told you of one or two of the fights, out of the many—one or two of the most dramatic scenes—but as a matter of fact it has been a fight all along the line. A business like this requires constant thought, constant watching, constant truing up, and constant energizing. And to do this successfully—to make the wheels go round—one must himself become a kind of human dynamo.

This has been the most difficult story I have ever written—the most difficult in that I have had to condense a million words into ten thousand. It has been especially difficult to put any sort of accuracy into the picture without bringing myself more into the foreground than I have. In its first fourteen years, THE ARGOSY never had a minute of spontaneity, never a minute of self-propulsion. It came through because I came through; it lived because I lived. It was the vehicle merely of what I did. Any kind of a story, therefore, of THE ARGOSY that would be worth the telling could not be told without saying a good deal about the force back of it. If I could have written this story of some one else, and had known it as I know it, and had had the space in which to tell it, I could have made it hum.

The years of sacrifice, of poverty, of hope, of disappointment, of struggle and skirmish and battle and carnage—in these, and in a thousand other phases of it all, there is a dramatic story. In talking of myself and of my efforts I have said as little as I could say to tell this story at all. And the reason for telling it at this time is the quarter centenary of THE ARGOSY.

* These figures for 1907 are estimated, as the year is not yet completed.

THE ISLE OF MYSTERIES.*

By BERTRAM LEBHAR,

Author of "When a Man's Hungry," "King or Counterfeit?" "No Way Out," etc.

The outcome of a shipwreck, with comedy trimmings.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

In company with Boffins, of Bitable Biscuit fame; Mrs. Boffins, social aspirant, and Maude Boffins, beautiful Vassar graduate—not to forget Reginald Van Wade, blue-blooded millionaire, fiancé of the latter—James Armstrong, shoe salesman, finds himself cast away on a desert island. The whole party is scared into a tree by a huge lion, which is valorously put to flight by Reggie. No sooner have they congratulated themselves on their escape than a terrific roar is heard. Reggie makes a dash for the tree, the others remain rooted to the spot, while a gigantic elephant charges down upon them.

Reggie finds a tree handy, and climbs up, but the elephant only bows gravely to Maude. Armstrong and Boffins lose the others and find them again. After the castaways have lived in a cave for one night, Maude and Armstrong climb a hill and discover that they are on an island. While exploring, the party suddenly come upon a sign swinging from a tree; it is an advertisement of Bitable Biscuits. They find a house, in front of which stand two red-coated soldiers. There is something horrible in their appearance.

They are skeletons! In the house are found guns, clothes, and every requisite of civilized life. Armstrong blows a blast on a horn which he finds, and there appear out of the forest several lions and tigers, followed by a dog-faced man. The latter seems to be capable of human speech, and Reggie strongly advises that it should be killed. The next day he insults Armstrong, who knocks him down. Maude rebukes the latter. He goes out in anger, and finds the dog-faced man lying in the woods—shot through the heart!

CHAPTER XIX.

ANOTHER MYSTERY.

FOR a second, Maude and old Boffins looked at me anxiously, as though they believed that I was out of my mind.

Then Maude turned angrily to Van Wade.

"Is this true?" she cried, her eyes flashing with scorn and anger. "Have you done this horrible thing?"

"I swear it is not true," said Reginald excitedly. "The fellow is crazy. He ought to be shut up in a madhouse."

"Silence, you scoundrel!" I shouted. "Miss Maude, I swear that I am telling the truth. If you will come with me, you can see for yourself. That poor wretch is lying at the base of a tree with a bullet hole in his heart. I have seen him. That man there has carried out his dastardly threat."

"It's a lie," cried Van Wade. "The creature may be dead. I won't dispute that. But I swear that if such is the case I had nothing to do with his death. If he is dead, somebody else has killed him—not I.

"We shall see," I retorted. "We shall see what a jury of civilized men will have to say about that. I am going to keep my word, Van Wade, and hand you over to justice as soon as we are rescued from this island. The blood of that poor creature is upon your hands, and you shall answer for it."

"But I tell you that I had nothing whatever to do with his death," insisted Van Wade angrily. "This news is as much a surprise to me as to any one.

"Very likely," I sneered. "I will call all here to bear witness to the threats you made to kill that poor creature at the first opportunity."

"But are you sure that he did it, Armstrong?" interposed Boffins. "After all, somebody else may have shot the poor beggar, you know."

**Began September* ARGOSY. *Single copies* 10 *cents.*

"Who else could have done it?" I demanded. "Did *you* shoot him? Did Miss Maude shoot him? Did I shoot him? One of us four must have done it. None of us except this scoundrel here wished to see that poor creature dead. Depend upon it, he is guilty."

"If he is!" cried Maude Boffins. "Oh, if he is, how I shall hate him! I shall never want to see his face again."

"Now, see here, Maudie," protested Van Wade earnestly. "You're not going to believe this foolish charge. I hardly believe the poor beggar is dead at all. Probably this unprincipled fellow has invented the whole story for the purpose of injuring me."

"Invented the story, eh?" I sneered. "You know full well I have not. That bluff doesn't go with me. Come with me, if you dare, and I will confront you with the body of your poor victim."

"Yes," added Maude; "let us go at once. I must see for myself whether this terrible story is true."

"Very good," said I. "I will lead the way. It isn't far from here. Come, Van Wade, we're waiting for you."

"Pooh!" he exclaimed. "There's no need for all of us to go, you know. Mrs. Boffins and I will stay here and await your return."

I walked over to where he stood and looked him squarely in the eye.

"You're afraid to go," I said sternly. "You're afraid to look upon the body of your victim. You villain! Your cowardice proclaims your guilt."

To my surprise, he met my gaze unflinchingly.

"I'm not afraid, you cheeky beggar," he retorted. "I simply don't care to go."

I turned to Maude Boffins.

"You see," I remarked significantly.

"Reginald Van Wade," said she sternly, "if you wish me to believe in your innocence you will accompany us."

He frowned.

"Really, Maude," he replied, "this is absolutely ridiculous, you know. You talk as if I were actually a criminal, you know. I tell you once more that if the poor wretch is really dead I had nothing to do with it."

"Then prove it by showing that you are not afraid to look upon his dead body," rejoined Maude.

He sighed.

"Very well," he said wearily. "If you insist, I suppose I must go along, but really, it's a horrid bore, you know."

I led the way. Maude followed with her father, and Van Wade gave his arm to Mrs. Boffins, who, by this time, had recovered from her fit of hysterics and, not wishing to be left behind, decided to accompany us.

I conducted them to the spot where I had discovered the body of the unfortunate dog-faced man.

There it lay, at the base of the tree, as I had said, with a bullet hole in the heart and the rough skin garment soaked with blood.

They all cried out with horror. I glanced at Van Wade. His face was ghastly, and he trembled from head to foot.

"You see," I said to him sternly, "I have not invented any story. That's your victim—killed by your wicked hand. Deny that you murdered him, if you dare."

He turned from one to the other of us with an appealing look in his eyes.

His air of cold effrontery had gone now. He appeared to be upon the point of collapse. There was not the slightest doubt in my mind of his guilt.

"Before God," he cried hoarsely, "I swear that I am innocent. Maude! Maude! You believe me, don't you?"

I laughed contemptuously.

"Miss Maude is too sensible to believe anything of the sort," I sneered.

But to my surprise and disgust, she walked over to him and put her hand in his.

"Yes, Reginald," she said softly, "I believe you."

I could almost feel my heart stop beating. So she loved him, after all! Only the love of a woman for a man could enable her to believe in him under such circumstances.

"Miss Maude," I cried desperately, "you are making a great mistake. You are holding the hand of a murderer. He is perjuring himself when he declares his innocence. Surely he must be guilty. There is no doubt that this poor wretch has been murdered. Who else could have done it?"

"I don't know who else could have

done it, Mr. Armstrong," she said coldly. "*Perhaps you did it yourself.*"

And this was the girl I had dared to dream of winning!

"Miss Boffins," I cried hoarsely, "you don't know what you're saying."

She burst into tears.

"That is right," she sobbed hysterically. "I don't know what I am saying. I did not mean to say that, Mr. Armstrong. I ask your pardon. Of course I don't believe that you could have done it. But I am sure that Reginald is innocent."

"Circumstances point clearly to his guilt," I declared.

"I don't care," she said. "I know that he is not guilty. I am sure of it. If he had done this horrible thing, I should feel intuitively that he had done it. I feel that he is innocent."

Verily, a woman's process of reasoning is hard to understand.

I turned in despair to Boffins.

"Mr. Boffins," I inquired, "what have you to say? Do you not believe that this man is guilty of the murder?"

The old man had been bending over the body, closely examining the wound.

"No," he growled, "I don't believe that he did it."

"What!" I exclaimed in surprise. "Have you gone crazy? If he didn't do it, who did?"

"I don't know who did," said the old man, shaking his head. "I know that none of us could have done it. Why, man alive, look at that wound!"

"What about it?" I cried in amazement. "Surely you don't mean to tell me that it isn't a bullet wound?"

"I suppose that without doubt it's a bullet wound," he growled, "but it's another one of those darned mysteries which one comes across every hour on this infernal island. It's a bullet wound that none of our guns could have inflicted. Can't you see that, Armstrong?"

"No," I retorted, "I can't see. What on earth do you mean, Boffins?"

"I mean," went on the old man, "that if you know anything at all about guns, you must know that our bullets are not big enough to make a hole like that. That wound was made by a bullet from a gun of larger caliber."

And when I had examined the wound closely I was forced to admit that he spoke the truth.

It was evident, as old Boffins had said, that none of us could have shot the dog-faced man. Van Wade must be innocent, after all. But in that case, who *had* fired the fatal bullet?

In my perplexity I turned to Boffins.

"By Jove!" I cried. "You're right, Mr. Boffins. I have accused Mr. Van Wade unjustly. But who could have done it? Can it be that there's somebody else on this island, after all?"

"I don't know," growled the old man. "What's the use of trying to puzzle out these things? It's no use trying to find reasons for anything here. Isn't this the 'Isle of Mysteries'?"

CHAPTER XX.

THE GREATEST MYSTERY OF ALL.

THE more I pondered over the matter, the more I became convinced that we were not alone on the island.

The person who had shot the dog-faced man must be in hiding somewhere. But if such was the case, what kind of a man could he be, and why did he keep away from us?

He must have known of our presence there, for during the past few days we had used our firearms frequently, and their reports must have been plainly audible from one end of the island to the other.

The only theory I could suggest was that the fellow was keeping away from us out of fear, believing us to be some band of savage men.

I determined to find him and reassure him in this respect without delay.

Lost in thought, I had just arrived at this determination when I was recalled to myself by the voice of Maude Boffins.

"If you are a gentleman, Mr. Armstrong," she was saying, "you will apologize to Mr. Van Wade for the wrong which you have done him."

"That's right," I responded heartily. "I do apologize. I'm very sorry for my false accusation, Van Wade. Believe me, I am," and I extended my hand.

But he declined the proffered handshake.

"I do not intend to accept any apology

from you," he said stiffly. "If you were worth any money, you know, and we were in a civilized city, instead of on a desert island, I would sue you for defamation of character, as well as for assault and battery. As it is, I don't want anything to do with you. The farther you keep away from me, the better I shall like it. If you feel sorry for your unjust suspicion, you will prove it by inflicting upon me as little of your society as possible."

"Very proper," remarked Mrs. Boffins approvingly. "You are perfectly right, my dear Reginald. I hope this misguided person will have grace enough to respect your wish. I might add that the less he bothers any of us with his company the better."

I shrugged my shoulders disdainfully, and was about to reply to this cordial sentiment when suddenly we heard the voice of a human being in distress cry out in agony:

"Help! Help! For the love of Heaven, help!"

"Good heavens!" gasped old Boffins. "Who was that?"

"Just as I thought," I cried excitedly. "There *is* somebody else on the island. He's in trouble, too."

I started to run, and the rest followed at my heels.

"Perhaps it's the man who shot that dog-faced creature," panted Van Wade.

Again the cry burst upon our ears:

"Help! Help! For the love of Heaven, help. Is there nobody to aid a poor, miserable wretch?"

I made a megaphone of my hands and shouted:

"Yes! Yes! Help is at hand! Have courage! Where are you? Tell us where you are!"

But, as though he had not heard me, the voice continued:

"Oh, dear me! Oh, dear me! What is to become of me? What is to become of me? Help! Help! For the love of Heaven, help!"

"Oh, dear!" cried the tender-hearted Maude Boffins. "The poor fellow must be in pain. Can't we save him, Mr. Armstrong?"

"If only we could find out where he is," I replied. "Judging by the voice, he must be near at hand, and yet I can't see a sign of him."

"See there!" cried the girl. "Isn't that a cave over yonder? It looks like one. Perhaps he's imprisoned in there."

"By Jove, you're right," said I. "It's a cave. That's where he is, too."

And I ran eagerly toward a hole in the rock.

I knelt on the ground and put my head in the hole. It was as dark as pitch inside and I could see nothing.

"Hello! Hello!" I shouted. "Are you in here?"

But there was no response.

"I bet he's in there, all right," I muttered. "Perhaps he's lost consciousness and cannot answer. I'm going inside."

"Oh, no," cried Maude anxiously, "you must not, Mr. Armstrong. Who knows what dangers you may encounter in there? Please do not venture."

"Pooh!" said I. "What dangers can there be inside a cave?"

"Perhaps wild beasts or snakes," went on the girl. "That poor fellow in there has evidently met with some terrible fate or he would not have cried out as he did. You must not venture, Mr. Armstrong."

"I must," I replied. "The poor chap may be still alive. I may be able to rescue him. Loan me your revolver, please, Miss Maude. For safety's sake, I will take it. Have no fear."

"But you may be killed," cried the girl, with a shudder.

"If I were, would you care very much?" I whispered eagerly in her ear.

"Yes," she answered, so softly that I could scarcely hear the word. Then, aloud, she added: "You must not go in there, Mr. Armstrong."

"On the contrary," I said lightly, "I must go. Why, just think, Miss Maude, perhaps the poor fellow inside may turn out to be our absent host—the owner of our log cabin. He may be able to clear up all the mysteries that have perplexed us so much since we landed on this island. It would be a pity to let that information die with him. Have no fear. I shall be in no danger."

I had never felt happier in my life. One little whispered word from Maude Boffins made my heart as light as a feather.

Placing the revolver in my hip-pocket, I crept through the hole on my hands and knees.

As I have said, it was so dark inside that I could not see an inch in front of me, so I continued crawling on my hands and knees for some distance, calling out the while at the top of my voice and urging the man inside to answer if he could.

But no answer came. There was not a sound to denote that there was any living creature beside myself in the cave.

Then suddenly I remembered that I had the box of matches in my pocket. Although we had been on the island several days, we had not used all our matches, for the reason that we had discovered how to obtain a flame from a flint and steel which we had found in the log cabin.

I lit one of the matches, and as it flared up I cried out in horror at the sight the blaze revealed to me.

Only a few inches from where I knelt was the black mouth of a yawning pit. If I had crawled forward another step, I should have plunged headlong downward to certain death.

Shuddering at thought of my narrow escape, I lit another match and crawled to the very brink of the pit, peering downward, under the belief that the man whose cries we had heard had been less fortunate than I and had fallen into the abyss.

But the hole was so dark that I could see nothing. I ran my fingers over the ground and grasped a small piece of rock. I dropped it, and waited to hear it strike the bottom.

But there was no sound, and from this fact, and because there was a rush of air downward as though it were being sucked through the hole, I judged that the pit might be bottomless.

Seized with panic, I abandoned all thought of saving anybody except myself, and determined to leave that horrible cave as quickly as possible.

I turned to flee; but alas! I made one terrible mistake. Instinctively I tried to rise to my feet and run, not looking first to see whether the roof of the cave was high enough to permit of my standing erect.

As a result, my head came in contact with the sharp, jagged rock overhead, and I received a stunning blow.

In vain I tried to steady myself. I felt myself falling, and threw out my hands wildly.

Then, as I felt myself plunging over the brink of the awful abyss, my senses mercifully left me and I knew no more.

Many hours passed before I realized that there was still life in me.

I did not know, at the time, just how long I had been unconscious, although I knew it must have been several hours, because my head had stopped bleeding and the blood had congealed.

Naturally, my first impression was that I was at the bottom of the pit, which I had believed to be bottomless. Fortunately, however, I cautiously put out my hand before attempting to move, and I could feel the rocky edge of a chasm, only a foot in front of me, from which fact I realized that if I had indeed fallen into the pit I had luckily landed on a ledge of rock, and had not dropped all the way to the bottom.

Nevertheless, my position was by no means enviable.

The ledge on which I was lying at full length was evidently very narrow, and if I moved I was in danger of rolling off.

I felt sick and faint, but I had enough presence of mind cautiously to put my hand in my pocket and withdraw the precious box of matches, without moving my body at all.

I struck a match on the rock, and as it flared up I discovered, to my joy, that I was indeed lying on a ledge, and, moreover, that the ledge was only four feet below the top of the pit.

Nevertheless, for five minutes I was afraid to make the attempt to extricate myself from my dangerous perch, lest I lose my balance and fall headlong into the awful gulf below me.

At length, however, I managed to nerve myself sufficiently, and, hanging on to the rocky edge above me with both hands, I carefully got to my feet and stood erect on the ledge.

Then I struck another match, and thereby got my bearings.

I found I could throw my leg over the ledge of the chasm without difficulty, and, plunging my body forward with all my might, I finally managed to roll onto the floor of the cave.

I did not make the mistake this time of trying to stand erect; but, on my hands and knees, I crawled to the entrance of the cave.

With a sigh of relief, I reached the open air, and, jumping to my feet, staggered into the woods.

Petulantly I wondered what had become of the rest of the party and why they had made no effort to rescue me.

I could find no sign of them, so when I had rested myself—for I was very faint and dizzy—I journeyed on toward the log cabin.

And when I reached the house I received the greatest surprise of all.

Instead of a log cabin, I found a charred ruin. The place had been burnt almost to the ground—even the corn-fields had been consumed by flames.

And the Boffins family, together with Van Wade, had disappeared. Not a sign of them could I see.

CHAPTER XXI.

ENTER BULL M'CARTHY.

For a time, I stood there, staring stupidly at the scene of ruin in front of me, scarcely appreciating the magnitude of the disaster.

And then realization came to me with a rush.

We were homeless! The elements had dealt us a terrible blow. We had no longer a roof over our heads.

All our furniture was destroyed. All our crops were consumed. All our effects were gone.

We were indeed in a sorry plight!

We! Why did I say "we"? Where were the rest of the party? Where could they have gone to?

I began to shout their names at the top of my voice.

"Boffins!" I cried. "Maude! Van Wade! Where are you? Answer, one of you, for God's sake! It is I, Armstrong!"

But no reply came to me.

Then an awful thought suggested itself; a thought so terrible that I cried out in horror of it and put both hands to my poor head, which was still aching from the blow I had received in the cave.

Could it be that all of them had been burnt to death in the log-cabin? Had the fire occurred at night, while all were asleep, and had the cruel flames seized them before they could escape?

I shuddered at the thought, and like a madman rushed toward the ruins, searching among the charred débris for what I feared to find.

But all I came upon were the blackened remains of the two skeletons which had stood outside the door. It did not seem possible that my friends could have perished in the flames without leaving even a trace of clothing behind.

With a sigh of relief I rushed out again and once more shouted their names at the top of my voice.

Then I began running aimlessly all over the island, shouting frantically, but all without avail.

Suddenly I remembered the revolver in my hip-pocket, and I fired repeatedly into the air, knowing that if the others were on the island they must hear those shots and would fire in answer. But there was no result.

Then another terrible thought came to me. Was it possible that they had been rescued while I was lying senseless in the cave? Had they left the island without waiting to find out whether I was alive or dead?

"Oh, they couldn't do it; I must be mad to think it," I groaned. "Van Wade might do it, or Mrs. Boffins, but Maude or old Boffins — never! They would never desert me. It would be too cruel. It would be inhuman. No—no! I'll not believe it. They must be on the island still."

But if they *were* on the island still, they were much too still to suit me. Why did they not answer me? What could have happened to them?

Suddenly I remembered the cave near the beach, in which we had spent our first night.

To be sure! Why had I not thought of that before?

Doubtless that was where I should find them.

It was very simple. The log-cabin being destroyed by fire, they had naturally sought shelter elsewhere. And where else could they find shelter except in the cave?

So I hurried thither. But they were not there. The cave was unoccupied.

It really did seem as if they must have left the island. Perhaps some ship had passed and they had signaled it. Eagerly

I scanned the sea, but there was no sign of a vessel.

No sign of a ship, but in the distance I discerned a rowboat heading for the shore. In the rowboat sat a solitary man, working strenuously at the oars.

My heart beat with joy as I watched him rapidly approaching.

The mystery was all explained now. A ship had providentially passed and taken off the rest of the party. In the excitement of being rescued they had forgotten all about me.

But once on board they remembered—probably Maude had remembered—they had told the captain, and he had sent this sturdy oarsman back to the island to find me.

Pretty soon the man in the rowboat landed.

He was a big, brawny, red-faced fellow clad in a sailor's uniform. He carried a rifle on his shoulder. I ran toward him and seized his hand as he sprang ashore.

"Thank heaven, you've come back!" I cried rapturously.

"Eh!" he exclaimed, his eyes wide open with evident surprise. "Who in hades are you, anyway, and how did you get here?"

"It's all right," I said with a smile "I'm the man you're in search of, you know. The man the captain sent you back for. I'm ready to go with you immediately. I've got no trunks to pack. I suppose the others are all quite safe. Miss Maude is all right, my good fellow, I hope?"

He looked at me sympathetically. "Nutty, eh?" he muttered, more to himself than to me. "Poor fellow. He's gone off his head through despair."

His words sent a cold chill through me.

"You don't mean to say you haven't come from the ship, do you?" I cried.

"What ship?" he asked. "The last ship I had the pleasure of seeing was the ship that went to pieces on this coast, confound her. What are you talking about, my hearty?"

For a second my heart stood still.

"Then you don't know what has become of Maude, and Boffins, and the rest?" I managed to stammer.

He shook his head.

"I never heard of them," he said. "Keep calm, my friend. You're nutty from worrying, I reckon. It'll pass away in time. I felt pretty bad myself when I first landed here. You'll get used to the situation by and by."

"When you first landed here!" I cried in amazement. "You don't mean to say that you've been here before!"

"I rather guess I have," said he. "I've been on this infernal island for over eighteen months."

"Ah!" I cried with a sudden enlightenment. "Now I know who you are. You're our absent host. You're the man who shot the dog-faced man."

"What!" he shouted. "What's that you're saying young feller? Shot the dog-faced man, eh? You don't mean to tell me that Ki-Ki is shot."

"Ki-Ki!" I exclaimed in amazement. "Who on earth is Ki-Ki?"

"Why, Ki-Ki is the dog-faced man, of course. Didn't I understand you to say just now that he'd been shot?"

"Certainly," said I. "He's lying in the woods, at this minute—shot through the heart. Didn't you shoot him?"

"Me shoot him!" he cried angrily. "I should say not. Do you think I'm a fool? Why, Ki-Ki was worth thousands of dollars. So he's dead, eh? I'd like to find the man who did it. He shall suffer for it when I lay hands on him."

"Who—who are you?" I stammered. "Where on earth did you come from?"

"Tell me first who *you* are and where *you* came from," he answered. "Little did I think that I'd find visitors awaiting me when I got back."

"My name is Armstrong," I said. "James Armstrong, of New York. I'm a shoe salesman. I was wrecked on this island about a week ago with a party consisting of Mr. and Mrs. Boffins, Miss Maude Boffins, and Reginald Van Wade—Boffins of Bitable Biscuit fame, you know."

"The deuce you say!" he ejaculated. "And where are the rest of the party? Are they making themselves free with my log-cabin?"

"*Your* log-cabin! Eh?" I cried. "So you are our absent host," and I began to laugh insanely.

"What the deuce are you laughing at?" he growled.

"Excuse me," I roared. "I can't

help it. So you're the owner of the log-cabin, eh—the log-cabin that was? I've got a surprise in store for you, old man—such a surprise! You haven't got a log-cabin any more."

"I haven't, eh?" he snorted. "What's happened to it, young feller? Did anybody steal it?"

"The fire did!" I shouted hysterically. "Don't you know that it's destroyed by fire? Every stick of it is consumed."

"What's that?" he roared. "My log-cabin burnt! D'ye mean it, or are you joking? You don't mean to say that my log-cabin's really gone, do you? Why, hang it all, man, it took me months to build it."

"It's burnt to the ground," said I, more soberly.

He uttered a savage oath.

"Then you or one of your confounded picnickers has set it afire!" he shouted. "I'll hold you responsible, I warn you, as sure as my name is Bull McCarthy! How dare you come trespassing here, burning my log-cabin, and killing my dog-faced man? I'll show you what's what before I get through with you. Where's the rest of your party?"

"I don't know," I replied. "I thought that you had brought me news of them. They've vanished. Either they have been burnt to death in the log-cabin or they've been killed by wild beasts."

"Wild beasts!" he snorted. "There ain't no wild beasts on this island."

"Oh, yes, there are," I retorted, with an air of superiority. "There's lions and tigers and elephants. I've seen them with my own eyes."

"Pshaw!" said he contemptuously. "They ain't wild. Them's my trained animals, you mean. Why, bless you, they wouldn't hurt a fly."

"Your trained animals!" I gasped. "Who the deuce are you, anyway?"

"I'm Bull McCarthy — the Circus King," said he proudly. "I was wrecked on this infernal island eighteen months ago, when our ship went down, and all hands but me was lost."

"And the lions and the tigers and the elephants—how did they get here? Did you find them on the island and tame them?"

"Find them on the island? I should say not. Why, bless you, man, ain't you got any knowledge of geography? Lions and tigers and elephants don't grow in this part of the world."

"Then how on earth did they get here?"

"They swam ashore, of course—when the ship went down. They were part of my show. I was bringing them to the United States to exhibit them. They'd have made the folks at home sit up some and take notice, I reckon, if we hadn't had the bad fortune to be wrecked here."

"Ha!" I exclaimed. "That explains that mystery. And the dog-faced man—was he part of your show, too?"

"Part of my show! I rather guess he was. He was the best part of it. He was worth a fortune. I discovered him in Africa. He was the only genuine dog-faced man in captivity. Why, he was almost human. He could do everything but talk."

"He could do that, too," said I. "I heard him talk."

"Bah!" said Bull McCarthy scornfully. "You're nutty, young feller. You heard nothing of the kind. He couldn't talk. If he could have talked he'd have been worth twice what I paid for him."

CHAPTER XXII.

BULL M'CARTHY EXPLAINS.

"BUT what d'yer mean by questioning me?" went on Bull McCarthy angrily. "It's I that intends to do some questioning. You tell me that Ki-Ki is dead and the log-cabin destroyed by fire. Who did it, eh? Speak quick, or it will be the worse for you. I don't intend to stand no trifling."

He pointed the rifle threateningly toward me, and I quickly put my hand to the pocket which contained my revolver, or, rather, his revolver—for I had no doubt now that he was indeed our absent host.

But as he did not shoot, I took courage, and breathlessly told him the whole story from the time of our leaving the steamship, telling everything hurriedly, but leaving out no details.

As I proceeded with my narrative, his mood softened, and he put aside his gun.

"Well, messmate," he remarked, "you've had your share of troubles, too, I can see. And you had ladies with you, did you? Poor things, it must have been a trying experience for them. And so you called this island the 'Isle of Mysteries,' eh?"

He laughed uproariously, evidently deeming the thing a great joke.

"Don't you think that our experiences justified the title?" said I.

"Yes. I reckon they did. I guess I can explain most of those mysteries to your satisfaction, however. Some of them, of course, I've already explained. You no longer wonder why them lions and tigers and elephants acted as they did? You know better now, eh?"

"Yes," said I. "But the Boffins's Biscuit sign—how did that get on the tree?"

"I put it there," he grinned. "It was on the ship, and when we were wrecked it floated ashore with some of the wreckage. I hung it on the tree for a joke, little dreaming that the manufacturer of them biscuits would visit here and discover it. That's a mighty rum go, when you come to think of it, isn't it? This world is a mighty small place, after all, I guess."

"And those ghastly skeletons with the nodding heads and the military uniforms?" said I. "Who were they?"

"Reckon they scared you and your picnicking party some, eh?" he exclaimed. "Them was a bargain I picked up in London. I used to exhibit them as part of my show."

He put his hands to his mouth and suddenly shouted, addressing an imaginary audience: "Walk up, ladies and gentlemen, and see the genuine skeletons of the two famous British Grenadier Guards who starved to death in the Black Hole of Calcutta during the terrible Indian mutiny. These poor fellows was in that dark hole for forty days and nights, including Sundays, without food, drink, or air. And in the end they was worn away to skeletons. Step up, ladies and gentlemen, and see the actual skeletons they was wore to. Guaranteed to be absolutely genuine or your money cheerfully refunded."

"That always used to fetch the crowds," he added in his natural voice, smiling at the recollection. "Them skeletons was a mighty good attraction. They was worth much more than their weight in gold, for they don't weigh very much, being made of *papier-mâché*, you see. When I was wrecked on the island, them skeletons floated ashore, and I picked them up, dried them in the sun, and when I'd built my log-cabin, placed them outside the door for an ornament."

"I see," I said grimly.

It was a blow to my vanity to think that those *papier-mâché* imitations had scared me almost out of my wits.

"Anything else you want me to explain?" went on Bull McCarthy, grinning good-naturedly.

"I suppose that strange assortment of clothes in the closet of the log-cabin and those pictures of the woman and the snake were part of the show, too, eh?" I inquired.

"Certainly," said he. "Those clothes were all used in the circus. Even this sailor-suit I've got on is one of the show costumes, although, for that matter, I've been a sailor in my time and have a right to sport these togs. That woman with the snake in the picture is Papinta, the world's champion snake-charmer. In private life she's my own particular charmer, being Mrs. Bull McCarthy, you see."

"Ah!" I exclaimed sympathetically. "That accounts for your having so many pictures of her in your log-cabin?"

"Yes. I was bringing over a bunch of them pictures to display in the store windows, you know. Naturally, when I got stranded here I made use of them on my walls. Handsome woman, ain't she?"

"And did Papinta—I mean Mrs. McCarthy—go down with the ship?" I inquired anxiously.

"No," he said, with a sigh. "She wasn't on the ship. If she had been, she wouldn't have drowned, bless her, for she could swim like a fish. If only I had her with me on this island, I don't think I'd ever want to leave it. But, alas! the captain of the ship I sailed on wouldn't stand for the snakes. You see, he was a drinking man, and the thought of snakes gave him the creeps.

"So Mrs. Bull stayed behind to come over with the snakes on another ship."

He sighed again. His devotion to the red-haired woman, with the snakes entwined around her, touched me to the heart. Somehow or other, it made me think of Maude Boffins, and I sighed also.

"And now, Mr. McCarthy," said I, "perhaps you can explain to me the greatest mystery of all. What's become of my friends, the Boffins, and Van Wade?"

"No," said he, shaking his head in bewilderment, "I'll be hanged if I can explain that. Neither can I tell you who it was shot my dog-faced man. Them mysteries we must solve immediately. Perhaps the same guy who shot Ki-Ki is responsible for the disappearance of your friends and the burning of my log-cabin.

"Drat him! I'll make it hot for him when I come across him, no matter who he is. It's a mystery to me how he got here, if he didn't come with you. There wasn't a soul on the island except Ki-Ki when I left. Let's go and take a look at Ki-Ki. Perhaps, by looking at his poor body, I may get a clue."

"By the way," I remarked, as we walked swiftly toward the scene of the murder, "you haven't told me yet where you've been these last few days. Where did you come from just now?"

"From the land I saw through my telescope," said he.

"Land!" cried I excitedly. "Do you mean to tell me there's land near here? Speak, man! For God's sake, speak quick!"

"Certainly," said he calmly. "There's land near here. You can't see it with the naked eye, but with the telescope it can be seen quite plainly. Now, don't get excited, my lad. The land I've been to is an island, much smaller than this and almost barren."

I uttered an oath.

"Don't cuss," said he. "It ain't polite and it does no good. Yes, my boy, the only piece of land within several hundred miles of us in any direction is that other island. It's a little bit of an island, about one-half the size of this one. I've spent the past week on it, and I'm going back there again pretty soon. I merely came back here, in fact, to pay a visit to Ki-Ki and the animals, not knowing that Ki-Ki was dead, poor fellow!"

"But why," I asked in bewilderment, "if this other island is so small and barren, why do you choose to spend your time there instead of here?"

"Because it's got a mountain on it."

"A mountain!" I cried. "What on earth has that got to do with it?"

He chuckled.

"Oh, a great deal," said he. "There's nothing like a mountain under some circumstances. Perhaps my lungs are affected, and my physician has ordered me to move to a higher altitude. Then, again, perhaps my lungs are as sound as a bell, and I've got another reason to go to the top of a mountain."

"But what is this other reason?" I asked with great interest.

"Ah! That's a secret. Perhaps I may let you in on the ground floor a bit later on."

(To be continued.)

AFTER THE SONG.

THE liquid music of her voice
Hath so bewitched the strings,
They seem to play, from very choice,
The melody she sings.

And as the pressure of my bow
Awakes the tuneless wood,
So doth she set my heart aglow
With her sweet womanhood!

Harry Romaine.

A DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH.

By F. RAYMOND BREWSTER.

A story of Christmas-time in which a risk is taken and a loss sustained.

"GOOD-BY!" I shouted to a number of my classmates, who were standing on the steps of the University of Pennsylvania library building.

"So long, Prex," they answered. "We'll see you in New York to-night."

"Remember me to her," one of them added teasingly.

I paid no attention to this last remark, but picked up my suit-case and started for the railroad station.

This was the last day of college work before the Christmas holidays, and it was also that proverbial unlucky day—Friday. A number of the fellows had planned a trip to New York before scattering for their homes, and I was leaving earlier than the rest to keep an appointment with Grace, who had written, arranging to meet me at the Cortlandt Street ferry.

I was in my senior year, and Grace had promised me a definite answer on this trip to New York. By the tone of her last few letters, I had every reason to be in high spirits, and in my suit-case I had placed securely between the folds of my pajamas a little plush case containing—a diamond ring.

What a spell of indecision I had in finding a place to put the precious gem while *en route* to New York! A dozen times I had placed it in my pocket, and a dozen times I had taken it out.

The case made my pocket bulge out in a manner too inviting to pickpockets. So I finally decided to put it in my suit-case.

The old suit-case—my best friend—had served me well in my college days; it had started a useful career with me as a freshman, and now I was in my senior year and still using it. The valise had, in fact, been ready to graduate a year ago, and I had vowed many times to get a new one, but never thought of it until the time came to use it again. The only thing that held it together was the mass of labels plastered all over its many sides.

New York was reached safely, and Grace, apparently as much pleased as myself, met me at the ferry. I hailed a hansom, and, helping her into it, reached for my suit-case.

It was somewhat heavy, and, as the floor of the hansom was quite high, I gave the case an awful jerk. I had almost landed it safely when, with a rip and a tear and a final crash, the thing fell to the pavement.

My heart seemed to drop with it.

Like the wonderful old one-hoss shay, the old suit-case had worn out all over at the same time. I was afraid to look down.

Another ferry-boat was now pouring a seemingly endless stream of people into the street—there to witness my discomfiture and add to my embarrassment. Grace tried hard not to laugh, but when she saw the fearful mess on the pavement, she covered her crimson face with a big muff and gave free vent to her feelings.

Why had I acquired a taste for gay colors? Why, oh, why had I brought those gaudy pink-and-black-striped pajamas? Why had I selected that suit of baby-blue underwear? And my socks! Every color in and out of the rainbow was represented.

My precious pajamas—my delicate underwear—my fancy socks and scarfs—all spread out in shocking confusion on the eternally muddy New York streets, exposed to the vulgar stare of the passing crowd!

I never felt more embarrassed than I did at that moment.

The old suit-case—my best friend—seemed to have burst like a toy balloon. Everything in it touched the miry stones.

A colored porter rushed to my assistance, but I waved him away in an ungrateful manner. I know my face was crimson. Grace, too, was beginning to feel the embarrassment of the situation.

The holiday crowd was content with a passing glimpse and laugh; but several

newsboys had gathered around me, and their remarks were anything but soothing.

"Pipe de rags," one of them exclaimed.

"Looks like a crowd o' stage-clothes," ventured another.

Hastily I stooped over, gathered up some of my muddy clothes and threw them shamelessly into the bottom of the hansom before the furiously blushing Grace. I had just deposited the first handful in the hansom when a sharp cry of warning and alarm from Grace drew my attention to the remaining pile of clothes in the street.

The diamond ring!

The thought struck me like a flash of lightning. The embarrassment created by the collapsing case had caused me to forget this portion of its precious contents. One of the newsboys, attracted by the plush box, darted at the pile, snatched up the gem, and ran at top speed up Cortlandt Street.

I dashed out after him. The little urchin, more familiar with the crowded thoroughfare than I, soon obtained a good lead; but I kept him in sight, taking to the middle of the street so as to better mark his course. His companions followed closely at my heels, shouting encouragement to their fleeing pal.

"Git in de bunch, Jimmy—git in de bunch," one of them shouted.

"Ye kin beat him in a walk," another yelled encouragingly.

Across Washington Street we sped, Jimmy half a block ahead, still winding his way with surprising rapidity through the crowd, a large gray patch in the seat of his dark trousers distinguishing him from everybody else. The cars and wagons impeded my progress so much that I found it necessary to take to the sidewalk again.

Jimmy rounded the corner of Greenwich Street at top speed, and I momentarily lost sight of him. I redoubled my efforts. A darting form on the Elevated stairs drew my attention, and I immediately recognized the little culprit. He was taking the steps two at a time.

I fairly flew around the corner of Greenwich Street and up the stairs. I felt sure I would catch him now; he could not get by the ticket-chopper, and, besides, there was no train in the station. He was surely cornered.

Reaching the top of the steps, I rushed frantically into the small waiting-room. The place was empty!

I searched every nook and corner of the station, but in vain. He was not to be found. It suddenly dawned upon me that he had not stopped in the place at all—he had simply run down the other stairs.

The diamond ring was gone—hopelessly lost!

Slowly I made my way down the steps I had so hopefully climbed, and turned down Cortlandt Street toward the ferry.

What could I say to Grace? How could I explain the chase? She would surely want to know what had been stolen, and I didn't care to tell her just then. She would certainly think me conceited and overconfident. I decided to be governed by her questions.

Why had I been so anxious to purchase the ring? I could have waited until I reached New York before getting it. And, above all, why had I so foolishly placed anything I valued so highly in that old suit-case? I had only myself to blame for the loss of the ring.

When I reached the hansom again, my clothes were all piled up neatly on the seat beside Grace—the work of the colored porter, whom I thanked substantially.

"Did you catch him?" she asked anxiously.

"No; he dodged me in the Elevated station," I answered.

"What did he steal?" she went on.

This was the question I dreaded.

"Something I valued very much," I replied evasively.

Grace perceived my reluctance to enlighten her, and did not press the question just then.

"Drive to the nearest trunk-store," I commanded the driver, jumping into the hansom, eager to get away from the spot.

We soon drew up in front of a shop, where I hurriedly purchased a stout case and packed my muddy clothes in it, after which we continued on our way up-town.

The ride was an exceptionally quiet one. I was disgusted with myself for being so careless, and Grace was evidently disgusted with me for not frankly

answering her question. She had once told me that frankness was one of my redeeming traits.

"Perhaps if you care to confide in the police, you will recover your valuable article," she remarked presently, with a touch of sarcasm.

"But the police couldn't do anything," I protested. "The boy will probably not be seen again in this neighborhood for weeks."

"There is a chance," she persisted.

"I don't think so," I answered decisively. "The thing is gone, and that's all there is to it. It was my own fault for putting it in the old suit-case."

"I think you're horrid!" Grace exclaimed.

"So would you if you had been made to feel as foolish as I have, and then lost a di—a valuable article, too," I answered. I had nearly made a fatal break.

There was very little said during the rest of the trip, but I succeeded in making an appointment to drive the next afternoon. The hansom drew up in front of her home, and, helping her out, I for once thankfully bade Grace good-by.

It was four-thirty when I reached my hotel, and I was to meet the fellows at six. This was Friday, as I have said, and we had decided to go to the Eighth Avenue Theater, where, on this night, amateurs have a chance to revel in the glare of the footlights and "the hook" reigns supreme.

I certainly felt more like a funeral than a theater party, for I had incurred Grace's displeasure, I knew, and lost a diamond ring into the bargain. But as president of the class of '08, I couldn't very well back out.

On account of my early arrival in New York, the fellows had delegated me to purchase the seats. Hastily getting into some fresh linen, I went to the theater and secured a box. It was just six o'clock when I arrived at the Cortlandt Street ferry, but the fellows were not there; the train must be late.

I occupied my time scrutinizing every newsboy in the vicinity, but my search was in vain. I could find no trace of the little culprit who had stolen the ring.

"Do you know where Jimmy is?" I asked one of the newsies.

"Ain't seen 'im since dis afternoon."

"Doesn't he sell papers down here?" I asked.

"In de daytime he does, but, 'most every night he sells 'em up-town somewhere," the kid answered.

"Where up-town?" I asked.

"Up near one of the theaters," the boy replied.

"Where does he live?" I boldly persisted.

"Don't know," he replied cautiously. "What's yer game?"

"No game at all," was my retort. "I might want him to work for me."

"Come around to-morrow," the little diplomat said, and he scampered off, calling his papers for the benefit of the hurrying passengers who now poured from the gates.

I decided to follow his advice.

My classmates were on this boat, and no doubt about it. The noise they made was deafening. They disembarked lock-step, and the sight of me was the signal for an ear-splitting Pennsylvania yell.

I was placed—not unwillingly, I admit—at the head of the line, and we filed up the street to the Elevated station still in lock-step.

We had a college boys' "eat, drink, and be merry" supper, and then hurried to the theater. By this time I had almost forgotten the lost ring, the high spirits of my classmates and the holiday freedom causing me to join in the fun with as much vim as though I had sustained no loss.

At the theater, every song, every dance, every sketch was applauded by our fellows in the box. When the regular show was over, the amateurs were brought on.

"Tony Angelo, a dancer!" the manager shouted by way of introducing the first performer.

The orchestra struck up a lively jig, and a short, stocky Italian made his way to the center of the stage. He had inflicted only a few awkward steps on us, when a crate of lemons, one at a time, were showered on him.

"You whop!" the gallery shouted.

"Git de hook!" they yelled next.

The place was in an uproar. A bevy of the young Italian's friends occupied a part of the gallery, and endeavored to drown out the shouts of the others.

"Bravo, Tony!" they shouted.

"Good-da-boy, Tony!"

For a while it looked as though a free fight was imminent, but a long hook was shoved out from the wings, which landed the cause of the disturbance unceremoniously out of sight and quieted things somewhat. We were enjoying it all immensely.

"Mike Hogan, a monologist!" was the next announcement.

A long, lanky individual appeared, wearing a painful effort to look pleasant, and, after an uproariously adverse reception, retired with the aid of a forceful hook.

"J. Fisher; he sings!" the manager proclaimed next.

The orchestra swung into one of the pretty popular ballads of the day, and a young boy appeared amid a whistling greeting of approval from the gallery. When he took up the melody, filling the house with his rich, sweet voice, not another sound could be heard.

There were no cries of "Git de hook," no lemons were hurled to the stage; only a breathless silence. The place was like a church at midnight. My classmates, too, were still.

The first verse was finished, and it was fully a quarter of a minute before the house came out of the spell the little singer had cast over them. Then they broke into a hurricane of applause. Coins were showered on the stage, and the little singer, first bowing and smiling his appreciation, began to pick up the money nearest him.

As he turned and stooped over to gather up some silver at the back of the stage, something caught my eye that caused me to start from my chair.

It was a big gray patch on the seat of his trousers! I had paid no attention to the name—it was the patch that claimed my attention.

The gallery was whistling and shouting its appreciation, but I was totally unconscious of the tumult. I had unexpectedly come across the little thief, and the sight of him caused me to forget everything else.

The orchestra was now playing the introduction to the second verse. As I jumped from my chair, well in the back of the box, I called to the boy on the stage:

"Where's that ring? You've got my diamond ring!"

Several of the fellows grabbed me and forced me back into my chair again.

"Be quiet, Prex," they whispered, evidently thinking me intoxicated. "Be quiet; don't disgrace yourself here."

"He's got my diamond ring!" I exclaimed loudly, at the same time making another break for the stage.

"T'row him out!" the gallery shouted, resenting the interruption.

"Give him de bums' rush!" called some one else.

The boy on the stage had made a big hit with the audience, and they were loud in their protests against the interruption.

I had lost all control of myself by this time.

"Let me go!" I shouted, tugging and pulling to get out of the restraining arms of my classmates.

"Be quiet, Prex—be quiet," they told me. "You'll wind up in a cell if you start any rough house here."

The gallery was clamoring loudly for my ejection. A big, burly bouncer made his appearance in the box, and, grabbing me roughly by the collar, drew me out.

I fought vigorously, adding to the uproar, but I was like a pygmy in the fellow's grasp.

"Go out quietly," advised my companions. "We'll meet you after the show."

"You're a nice lot of chaps!" I exclaimed wrathfully. "Why don't you help a fellow out? The kid on the stage has my diamond ring."

But the bouncer only held me more firmly and hustled me down the aisle to the entrance. Out I went, still protesting physically and vocally.

In the lobby the price of my ticket was placed in my hands, and I was pushed out on the sidewalk. But the cold, crisp air did not cool the boiling rage within me.

Once more the ring had been almost within my grasp, and once more it had been snatched away. I stood in front of the theater, disconsolately muttering to myself and trying to collect my wits enough to find some way of recovering the thing.

The policeman on duty in front of the house—whom I had overlooked in my hasty exit—came up and roughly ordered me to move on.

"What kind of a place is this, anyway?" I demanded angrily. "Just because a fellow tries to get back his stolen property he is thrown out of the place and then ordered away from it. I want to wait for some of my friends."

"What did you lose?" the policeman asked.

"A diamond ring," I replied. I then told the cop how I had lost the ring and how I had discovered the thief.

"Why don't you go around to the stage-door and wait for the kid?" he suggested.

"He's gone by this time," I said gloomily, showing my ignorance of amateur nights.

"Gone nothing," the cop answered. "He'll wait for the line-up. Maybe he'll win the prize."

This was indeed welcome information. There was still a chance of recovering the ring.

"Where's the stage-door?" I asked eagerly.

"I'll go around with you," the officer volunteered, and together we made our way around to the rear.

"Has the little singer gone yet?" I asked the doorkeeper.

"Vot is dot leetle zinger? I don't know noddings of anypody vot zings," he replied.

"The little boy who has just been singing," I explained. "Has he gone yet?"

"You dink I keeps track of all de poys vot goes in und oud? I know noddings aboud it," the man answered.

"Come, now," spoke up the policeman, "open that door, and we'll see for ourselves. The boy must be in there."

I wondered whether he had recognized me when I created the disturbance in the box. If so, he would surely be gone by this time. The apparent lack of knowledge on the part of the old German, I argued, was only feigned in order to give the boy a good start.

The policeman's command had the desired effect on the doorkeeper, and he immediately complied. How slowly he seemed to move! I could hardly wait for him to open the door. When it finally did swing ajar I rushed in.

In the center of the stage, amid deafening applause, the boy was still picking up the coins showered upon him. That big gray patch on his trousers seemed brighter than ever in the glare of the footlights. I could restrain myself no longer and made a rush for him.

The manager was standing in the wings and stopped me.

"Where are you going?" he demanded. "Get out of here."

The policeman took hold of my arm and drew me back.

"Don't be foolish," he advised. "Give the kid a chance to get his money. He'll be off in a few minutes."

Like a spider watching a fly, I kept my eyes riveted upon the boy on the stage. The applause continued as he bowed his way into the wings. When he saw me his face lighted up in a manner which puzzled me not a little.

"Come here, you little thief!" I commanded. "Where's my diamond ring?"

"I ain't got any ring, mister," he protested, his look of pleasure changing suddenly to one of alarm.

"Then come along with me and tell the sergeant what you did with it," I said angrily.

"I don't know what you mean," he replied. "I never had any ring."

"Never had any ring!" I exclaimed. "Don't make it any harder for yourself; you're caught red-handed this time."

"But I never—" the boy began.

"That's enough!" I interrupted. "Here, officer," turning to the policeman, "take this boy. He stole my diamond ring this afternoon and refuses to give it up."

"Don't take me now," the boy pleaded. "Let me stay for the line-up. I'm sure I got the prize cinched."

"No, you don't," I insisted. "You come now, while I have you in reach. You'll go out of some other door if I let you go back on the stage again, just the same as you did on the Elevated station this afternoon."

"Not so fast there," the manager put in. "There isn't any other door. Anyhow, that boy wouldn't do anything like that. He never stole anything in his life. How do you know it was he, anyway?"

He glowered at me in a threatening manner—his set jaw and clenched fists telling me only too plainly that the boy had a worthy champion. I would have to make some explanation to avoid further trouble.

"How do I know?" I repeated. "Why, I'd recognize that big gray patch on his trousers anywhere."

The look of blank amazement passed from the boy's face instantly. In its place spread a broad smile and into his eyes leaped a light of knowledge.

"These ain't mine!" he exclaimed eagerly. "These belong to—" and he stopped suddenly, covering his mouth with his hands.

"Who?" I questioned.

The boy hesitated.

"Well, they belong to one o' the fellows," he explained. "Mine was all full o' holes, so I got these to wear to-night."

"Who did you get them from?" I asked.

If I could only get him to answer that question I would not be long without the ring.

"I don't want to squeal on him," he protested. "He's my best friend. He always lends me 'most anything I want."

"Don't make the kid do anything so mean," the policeman broke in. "Can't you see he don't want to squeal?

"Say, kid," he continued, turning to the boy, "do you think you can get the sparkler for this man? He'll give you something for your trouble, I guess."

The policeman looked at me inquiringly.

"Yes," I added, "I'll make it worth your while."

Johnny's—that was his name, not Jimmy at all—well, his big brown eyes brightened, and he looked at me in a peculiar way. When he spoke there was a trace of emotion in his voice.

"I don't want anything if I get the ring," he said. "When I saw you standing back here I thought you was some big manager come to hear me sing and maybe give me a chance to act in a show. If you come home with me to-night, maybe I can get the ring."

"You can?" I cried. "If you do that, perhaps you *will* get a chance to sing."

After the amateur-performers had been lined up and Johnny had easily captured the ten-dollar prize, we started for his home. On arriving there, he introduced me to his widowed mother, and, after explaining the object of my visit, departed, bidding me wait until he came back.

It was fully an hour before he returned. In spite of my interesting talk with his mother, that hour seemed to drag along interminably.

"Did you get it?" I asked eagerly.

"Yes," he answered, digging down deep into his pocket. "I scared Jimmy so much he won't pinch anything else, I guess."

I offered him a reward, which he at first refused, but when I insisted that he take it partly as a Christmas present, he relented. Assuring mother and son that they would hear from me again, I bade them good night.

The next day I took Grace driving, as I had promised, and told her the whole story. She agreed with me when I suggested that the ring would be safe on the third finger of her left hand, and she is now wearing it there.

Grace was very much interested in Johnny, so the day before Christmas we drove to his home with a basket of holiday cheer. His mother was tearfully thankful and invited us to tea, but I told her that Johnny and I had an important engagement to fill.

He, too, was puzzled, but I winked at him, and he discreetly kept quiet.

Taking the boy with me, I bade his mother good-by. We drove to a well-known studio, and I took my little protégé in. The professor was delighted with the boy's voice.

"It is a gem," he said—"a diamond in the rough."

Completing arrangements for his musical and academic education, I took Johnny home, the happiest and most grateful kid to be found anywhere that Christmas Eve.

CROSSED PATHWAYS.

Oh, grief, thou hast blessings, when sorest!
Oh, joy, thou hast dangers, when won!
Your pathways are crossed in the forest;
But all may lead out to the sun.

Jeanie Peet.

NOBODY'S FOOL.*

By ELBERT D. WIGGIN.

A railroad story of pitfalls and perils galore and a determination not to be daunted.

CHAPTER XII.

ONE GOOD TURN DESERVES ANOTHER.

DAN had given himself up for lost when suddenly he heard a quick, friendly yap, and the soft whining of a dog. A moment later a rough tongue was rapturously licking his face.

It was Jack, Hilda's bulldog. A favorite game between himself and the dog was to let the latter seize between his teeth a stout leather watch-bracelet which Dan wore upon his wrist, and then to lift the animal bodily from the ground, thereby proving his own strength of arm and Jack's tenacity of jaw.

Oh, if he could only get the beast to do it now, perhaps he could loosen up the strap a bit which bound him to the rails, and thus free an arm.

He was gagged and could not speak; but he drove the dog away from his face by sharply shifting his head, and at the same moment, snapped the fingers of his right hand.

Jack turned, saw the binding strap so like the familiar bracelet, and to Dan's great delight, made a dive for it, worrying it, and tearing at it with his strong teeth.

Meanwhile the man pulled and twisted with all his might. He could feel the leather give under the combined assault. Slowly, it was loosening.

It was but a matter of time now—But just then he felt a faint vibration in the rails, the first quivering herald of a coming train.

Jack heard it with his sharper ears, and ceasing his exertions, raised his head quickly to listen.

Was his four-footed rescuer going to desert him in such a crisis? Almost frenziedly, the captive snapped his fingers, and Jack, with a snort, returned to the game.

Still, it was terribly slow work. Each second seemed a century to the prostrate victim, as he heard the faint, far-away rumble grow louder and louder until it was literally thunder in his ears.

And then when the headlight was fairly blinding him, and it seemed that the wheels could not be a foot away, the fastening suddenly gave, and his arm was free.

Under other circumstances, it might have been too stiff and sore for use; but this was an emergency which demanded action. Whipping his hand into his pocket, he drew out his knife, and somehow—try as he would, he could never repeat the trick again—opened the blade.

A slash and his other wrist was free; two more slashes, and the straps were gone from his ankles. He rolled off the track, and to safety, with the pilot of the oncoming engine not twenty feet away from his head.

For a second Dan lay there dazed, almost stupefied by the realization that he was safe; then he heard the dog give a low growl of warning, and quickly turning his eyes, saw several dark forms running toward him from the cover of the woods.

His cowardly assailants, watching for the end, must have seen his almost miraculous deliverance as he rolled from the track in the full glare of the headlight. They were now hastening up to prevent his reaping the reward of Jack's friendly efforts.

Weak and unnerved as he was by the ordeal through which he had passed, what chance did he have against such a superior force? There was but one hope for him, and that in his present condition was a desperate hazard.

The extremity of his peril, however, gave him an inspiration, and at the same time lent strength and agility to his flagging limbs. There was no use to stay and fight; outside of the disparity of

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numbers, his foes were fully armed, while he, his revolvers having been taken away from him, had no weapon save his pocket-knife. Flight, therefore, was his only salvation.

Springing to his feet, he gaged with practised eye the speed of the long freight-train which had so narrowly missed snuffing out his life, and which was still jarring past. It was going at a lively clip with the impetus acquired from the long descent down the mountain; and although it was now slowing up somewhat for a road crossing just ahead, its gait was still such as to dissuade even a daredevil railroader from attempting to board it.

Dan hesitated while two cars went whirling by. There were but three more "flats," and then came the swinging caboose with its tail-lights on the rear.

It was a case of take the risk, or fall once more into the hands of the yeggmen; so, clenching his teeth and nerving himself to the effort, he ran forward a few steps with the moving train, and as the next car passed, leaped up and clutched out blindly for the hand-hold.

For a brief, despairing instant he thought that he had missed it; then his fingers closed around the iron bar, and, with a jerk which almost tore his arm from his socket, he felt himself being carried onward by the train.

Well was it for him, then, that those long months of toil had hardened biceps, for anything less irresistible must have given way under that strain. But his grip of iron, backed up by the nervous force of his determination, held; and in a moment, when the first tension eased, he was able to draw himself up to the footboard, and at last heaved a long sigh of relief.

Thirty seconds in all had probably passed since the dog had given warning of the enemy's approach, until he was aboard the train, and could congratulate himself on having safely escaped their clutches.

Jack, however, less prudent than his two-legged associate, had scorned retreat, and while the man was getting away from danger, had valorously, but rashly, charged the hostile forces.

The short bristles on his neck stiff and erect, his eyes gleaming defiance, uttering his crisp, sharp battle-cry, he was now dashing fiercely down the embankment and toward them.

As Dan hung panting and breathless on his precarious support, he heard a sudden shot ring out, and almost instantly following a yelp of pain from the bulldog. He could not let Hilda's pet and his own good genius be sacrificed in such an unequal combat.

Wildly he tore at the gag which still muffled his speech, for he had not yet had time to remove it; but even when he got it loose, he found it almost impossible to frame his bruised and swollen lips to the proper pucker for a whistle.

At last he did it, though. Not much of a whistle, it must be confessed, but sufficient to carry its message to the dog, even above the roar of the train, and to stay him in his whirling onset, for the bullet, merely creasing the animal's neck, had rather inflamed than cooled his ardor for the fray.

Jack stopped, hesitated; then the instinct of obedience proving even stronger than his lust for battle, he turned and came tearing back.

The railroad curved here, and since the train, as already stated, was slowing down for the crossing, the swift-footed brute, by cutting across lots, was able to catch up, and came leaping along beside the shelf where Roane was perched.

His white body made a distinct target even in the night, and as the hoboes were still pursuing, firing as they ran, Dan grew fearful that he might be struck, or else, in his excited jumpings, be caught under the grinding wheels.

Seizing a firm grip upon the hand-hold, therefore, he leaned far out, and essayed to grasp the curveting animal by the collar.

The yeggmen, seeing him, let fly a perfect fusillade of shots, which spattered against the side of the car and sang all about his ears; but he persisted stubbornly in his attempt, until at last his free hand closed over the leather collar, and, with a strong pull, he was able to yank the struggling Jack up to his own secure retreat between the bumpers.

The grade-crossing passed, the train gathered headway at that moment, quickly leaving its pursuers behind, and ten

minutes later steamed into the yards at Millwood.

Before it had fully stopped, Dan hopped off with the dog in his arms, and made a bee-line up to the station and toward the superintendent's office. Ere he could begin upon his story, however, the door opened and the conductor of the freight came bustling excitedly in, followed by the members of his crew.

"Hi, chief," jerked out the trainman, forgetful of regulations in his eagerness, "we want an order right away to send the switcher and a caboose out, so that we can get a gang and go down to clean out that hobo camp."

"Clean out that hobo camp?" questioned Mr. Rance sharply. "Why do you want to do that?"

"Why?" ejaculated the other, staring in astonishment.

Then he caught himself together.

"Oh, I forgot that you wouldn't know yet," he explained. "Well, to make a long story short, the bunch down there has got guns, and they're raisin' Cain. They opened up on us when we came past, and let us have it to a fare-ye-well. You can see for yourself how near they came to getting me," jerking off his cap and pointing to a round hole in the top of it. "Oh, I tell you, bullets was whizzing around there like bees for a little while."

"And had you done nothing to provoke this demonstration?" searchingly. "No throwing of coal, or taunting them from the top of the cars?"

"Not a thing, sir. 'Batty' Morgan says that, looking out of the cab window just as we struck the level, he seen one of 'em lying on the track—drunk, probably—and thought sure he was going to hit him, but that before he could reach the 'reverse,' the fellow rolled off to one side. The fireman says, though, that 'Batty must a' got dust in his eye. For his part, he saw nothing of the kind.

"Still," vengefully, "even if the chap was there, and did come pretty near gettin' hit, that wasn't our fault, nor was it any reason for them to open a bombardment."

"No, indeed," agreed the superintendent heartily; "nor is this the first complaint that has come in about that rats' nest down there. I guess you're right about it, Myers; it ought to be cleaned out. Muster up your 'gang,' and I'll order out the switcher, and telephone to the sheriff. It's better that you should have him along with you, and should act as his posse, so that there may be no question of the legality of your foray."

Dan waited until these arrangements had been perfected, and the agitated trainmen had trooped out, when he stepped up to the desk with a smile.

"I dropped in to return Miss Hilda's dog," he said; "but while I am here, I suppose I may as well confess that I am once more the culprit. That trouble down the line is all due to me."

Then he sat down, and told the story of the eventful night.

"And are these hoboes the enemies of whom you spoke to me?" inquired Mr. Rance when he had finished.

"Oh, dear, no. They were merely paid for the job, just as you might hire a man to kill a dog. I am going to wait here, though, until the boys get back to see whether any of them are brought in. It may be possible, by questioning them, to find out the 'man higher up.'"

"By George, I'll wait, too," assented the official. "I was just about to close up and go home; but you've got me interested now, and I am going to see the thing through, if it takes until morning."

While they passed the time, smoking and chatting together, however, Clifford Deane hurriedly entered. There was an air of animation about him, a gleam of satisfaction in his eye.

"Oh, Mr. Rance," he exclaimed, "has anything happened down the road? I just saw the sheriff and a bunch starting off on a special."

In his preoccupation, he had not noticed before that the "old man" was not alone; but now his glance fell upon Dan, and with a half gasp of incredulity, he started back, staring at the brakeman.

Mr. Rance, however, either failed to observe his agitation, or else thought it a vagary not worth heeding, for, without raising his eyes, he quietly answered the question.

"It is nothing that would interest you," he said carelessly. "A few drunken tramps created a disturbance, I believe, and fired at one of the trains."

"Oh, is that all?" murmured Deane.

He hesitated a few minutes more, fidgeting from one foot to the other, and staring at Dan as though he still could not quite believe his eyesight. Then, in manifest confusion, he turned and rushed out, slamming the door behind him.

"Acts like he was disappointed about something, doesn't he?" commented Dan dryly.

"Oh, Deane!" contemptuously rejoined the "old man." "We've got so that we don't pay any attention to him any more. This is the first time I have seen him for several days. He doesn't honor the railroad with his presence much now, thank Heaven, but goes off afoot on what he calls exploring expeditions."

Roane didn't say anything, but thought that if he chose to speak, he might give the superintendent a pretty good idea of where those "exploring expeditions" had led to, for the report of his detectives showed that most of them had been to the neighborhood of the hoboes' camp.

Unwilling to indicate yet, however, the trend of his investigations, he dropped the subject of Deane, and drew his companion back to a discussion of indifferent topics.

They had talked so about half an hour longer, perhaps, when the telephone bell tinkled, and announcement was made to Mr. Rance that the sheriff's specials had returned with a party of prisoners.

"Come on, Daniels," exclaimed the official, rising and clapping on his hat. "Let's go down to the jail and see if we can get anything out of them."

Arriving there, the sheriff was drawn aside by Mr. Rance, and having been sworn to secrecy, was informed of the real cause of the outbreak.

"Oh, if that is how the land lies," he declared excitedly, "I'll bring them right out, Mr. Superintendent, and have your man look them over. He'll probably be able to identify some of the rascals."

"No," interposed Dan; "seeing them would do me little good. I couldn't tell a single one of them from Adam's off ox. But put me some place where I can hear their voices, and I'll bet you I will recognize them again in short order."

Accordingly, he was conducted back to the cage, and having had a chance to eavesdrop for a time upon the conversation of the prisoners, announced that he could absolutely identify four of them as members of the band which had so feloniously set upon him.

This quartet—four as villainous-looking scoundrels as could be found unhung—were thereupon brought out, and closely questioned by the sheriff, Mr. Rance, and himself; but they sedulously refused to compromise themselves. They were "old-timers," evidently, and neither threats nor promises of reward could induce them to talk.

Sullen and obstinate, they would say but one thing: that they hadn't "done nothin'," and didn't know why they should be locked up.

Dan, in the presence of the others, did not mention the name of Clifford Deane to them, but reserved that scheme for unsealing their lips until some future occasion when he would have a chance to speak to them alone.

Consequently, as they continued stubbornly obdurate, the sheriff decided that he would give them time for further reflection, and ordered them back to their cells.

"Well," said Mr. Rance, as he rose disappointedly to his feet, "I suppose that ends the evening's performance, and I might as well be heading homeward. Come, Jack," to the dog, who had accompanied them down from the office.

"Oh, I had forgotten Jack," cried Dan penitently. "I mustn't do that, must I, old fellow? You have been too good a friend to me to-night to be overlooked at any stage of the game."

As he leaned over to pat and fondle the fawning creature, he noticed for the first time that there was a wisp of paper attached to Jack's collar by a pin.

"Why, what is this?" he exclaimed, drawing it out, and then seeing that his own name was written on the outside, hastily unfolded it.

Inside he read:

> I didn't really intend to let you go without seeing you to-night, so I am sending Jack post-haste to find you and bring you back to receive my apologies.

The superintendent was at the door

by the time Dan had finished the perusal of this note, but the young man stayed him with an excited call.

"Hey, Mr. Rance," he urged, "hold on just a minute, won't you? There is something wrong about Jack's collar, and I had better fix it before you leave."

And while the other waited impatiently on the steps, he whipped a leaf out of his note-book, and penciled hastily on it: "Your message not received until 2 A.M., too late to comply with your commands. Don't blame the messenger, though. He did his best, and if I could believe his mistress was as sincere a friend, I would be the happiest man alive."

He fastened this in at the same place from which the other note was detached, and announced that the collar was fixed.

Glancing at his watch, then, he saw that he had just time to catch the 2.20 train to Ralston, and so hurried off to the station, Hilda's note in his breast pocket, resting warm upon his heart, and obliterating by the thrills it caused him, all feeling of fatigue or weariness as a result of the perils and adventures through which he had passed.

As he strode up and down the station platform, seeming to himself to be walking on air, his two discarded guardians, haggard and anxious-eyed, hove in sight, and rushed toward him with tumultuous expressions of relieved delight.

"I'd just about as soon guard a flea as you, Jonah," exclaimed one of them petulantly. "Some of these days you are going to shake us this way and trouble is going to happen to you."

"Sh!" warned Dan, raising a cautioning finger to his lips.

But it was too late. Clifford Deane, lounging back in the doorway of the waiting-room, had heard the unfortunate remark, and his shifty, fox-like eyes were studying the features of the two guardians as though to make sure that he would know them again.

CHAPTER XIII.

DAN SEIZES AN OPPORTUNITY.

LATE as it was when Dan arrived home, he was up by ten o'clock the next morning, and off again with a fresh pair of guards for Millwood.

He wanted to quiz those four prisoners at the jail as soon as possible and learn if his knowledge of the fact that Clifford Deane was their employer would not serve to loosen their tongues.

He reached his destination, accordingly, just as the whistles were blowing for twelve o'clock, and was cutting briskly across the station platform when he was halted by a hail from Mr. Rance.

"Hold on," cried the superintendent. "I want to see you a minute."

"Won't half an hour from now do?" begged Dan. "I want to hustle up so as to have a talk with those friends of mine at the lockup. I've thought of two or three new questions which I'd rather like to ask them."

"Well, you might as well save your breath, then," with a smile of grim irony, "for you'll not find the gentlemen at home. That is what I was stopping you to tell."

"Not at home?" ejaculated Dan incredulously.

"Just so. They are gone, vamoosed, departed."

"What do you mean? That they broke jail?"

"Not at all. They walked out at the front door, and in the broad light of day. Oh, it was all strictly regular and legal," with a smile at the other's look of blank astonishment; "only it was about as much of a surprise to every one else as it seems to be to you."

"But I don't understand," faltered the brakeman. "How could such a thing as that happen?"

"Why, it's very easy in one way, when you come to comprehend it, and still not so simple in another. The whole crowd of prisoners was arraigned before Judge Maynard this morning on a charge of shooting at a train—nothing being said about the outrage committed on you, since that was your wish—and pleading not guilty, were remanded for a hearing to-morrow afternoon at three o'clock.

"Maynard fixed the bail in each case at five hundred dollars, supposing that amount as big, to all practical intent, as though he had said a million; but, to the amazement of everybody, the words were scarcely out of his mouth, when

Henry Alderson, the criminal lawyer, pushed up to the clerk's desk, and counting out two thousand dollars in cold cash, demanded the release of four of the gang."

"Four?" repeated Dan significantly. "The ones that I picked out as my assailants, eh?"

"Naturally; and equally naturally, they will never turn up at the court-house again, and their bail will be forfeited. Whoever hired them, either promised to see them through, or else was afraid that they would talk, and wanted to get them out of the way.

"But what gets me," Mr. Rance went on contemplatively, "is how a poor brakeman like yourself came to have an enemy who is willing to stand the gaff to such an extent as that. It simply confirms me in my previous opinion that there is a good deal more in this affair than you are letting on, or has yet come to the surface. Don't you think, my boy, that you would do better by taking me into your confidence?"

"It is not my secret alone," dissented Dan, shaking his head, "or I would do so in a minute, for there is nobody I trust more than you, Mr. Rance. I'll tell you what I will do, though," he added after a moment's thought. "I'll promise to tell you the whole story one week from to-day."

"All right, then," agreed the "super," satisfied with the concession; "it's a bargain. And now, if you've got nothing better to do, come over to the shops with me. I've got something over there which I fancy you would like to see."

"Excuse me just a minute, and I'll be glad to go. I've got a little matter to attend to down the street, but I'll be back before a dog can wag his tail three times."

And with a wave of his hand he hurried off; for he had spied one of his private detectives passing along the other side of the street, and the shadow had given him a signal that he desired to speak with him.

Dan was not in any particularly complacent humor with these gentry, not only was he chagrined at the trick which had been played upon him by the opposition that morning in securing the release of the yeggmen, but he also thought the detectives should have smelled out and forewarned him of the plot which had been attempted on him the previous night.

Therefore, he made no attempt to temper his indignation when at last he was in a secluded corner with the man, and able to talk freely.

"As somebody said, 'The more I see of men, the better I like dogs,'" he remarked severely. "Here I am paying you chaps big wages to find out things for me, and am supposed to be guarded and looked after all the time; yet, if it hadn't been for a bobtailed white bulldog, I'd be down at the undertaker's right now, while they were trying to get enough of me together to make a decent corpse.

"I declare," he added impatiently, "I don't know what you fellows think you are doing to earn my money. A ten-year-old boy could have found out more than you have been able to tell me."

"But I have some important information for you this morning," hurriedly interposed the sleuth, eager to appease his irate employer. "We have found out that Clifford Deane visited Henry Alderson, the lawyer, at his house before breakfast this morning. This would seem to indicate that it was undoubtedly Deane who furnished the two thousand dollars' bail for the prisoners at the court-house this morning."

"Pooh," scoffed the brakeman, "I didn't need you to tell me that. Why don't you dig out something worth while, something that I really want to know?"

"As what, for instance?" somewhat sullenly asked the other.

Dan was chiefly rowing on general principles; but a sudden suggestion came to him at the question.

"Why, for one thing," he said sharply, "you might tell me what became of those hoboes after they walked out of the jail door this morning. I'll bet," triumphantly, as he saw from the other's crestfallen appearance that his surmise was correct, "you dunderheads never thought of such a thing as following them up?"

"No-o," admitted the detective, "but," eagerly, "we'll start to do it now, if you want us to."

"Want you to? Of course I want you to," snapped Dan. "It is of the highest

importance that I should have those men where I can lay my finger on them. And, let me tell you one thing more," he added scathingly, "unless I do have those scoundrelly assassins located for me by this time to-morrow morning, there'll be two so-called detectives out of a job and on their way back to New York."

With which ultimatum he turned on his heel, and swaggered back to the superintendent's office.

Moreover, his ill-temper vented on the luckless agency-man, he was now all smiles and good humor, and this equanimity on his part was still further increased when he learned that Hilda and her mother were to accompany himself and the "old man" on their visit of inspection to the shops.

"What I want to show you all," explained Mr. Rance, as they took their way across the yards, "is a new private car we have just turned out for the president of the road, and which, I think, is a little the finest thing which was ever put on wheels."

"But who is the president of the road, father?" curiously inquired Hilda. "I thought there had been none since old Mr. Roane died?"

"Nor has there," was the reply; "but that is to be rectified at the meeting of the directors next Monday in Baltimore. This car is to signalize the accession of the new chief, and is to be shipped on to-day so as to be ready for his occupancy as soon as he is elected. Some people think that our young friend, Clifford Deane, will be the one to use it."

"Oh, I hope not," cried Hilda with a disgusted toss of her head. "What does a horrid little cad like that know about the running of a great railroad?"

"Yes," assented the "old man" with a sigh, "it will be a sorry day for the M. and I. if he or any one like him comes into control. What we need at this juncture is a strong man who has worked his way up from the ranks; but," and he shook his head, "I'm afraid there is small chance of our getting him."

They had by this time reached the long shed in which the new car was housed, and Mr. Rance, ushering them toward it, waved his hand with a gesture of pride.

"There," he said. "Isn't she a beauty?"

He turned with a bantering expression to the brakeman.

"Ever expect to ride in anything as fine as that, Daniels?" he laughed.

"Oh, I don't know," smiled Dan easily. "Perhaps, by the time I get to be president of a railroad, they will be building them with gold-plated wheels, and diamonds set in the corners of the windows. However," he admitted, "I'm frank to say that, so far as I can tell now, I shall be perfectly satisfied with one like this. But it isn't quite finished yet, is it?" he asked, glancing critically over the ornate decorations. "I see that the name hasn't been printed on."

"Oh, that is not to be added until after she is delivered," explained the official. "The new president will naturally wish to christen her for himself."

They climbed aboard then, and spent some time admiring the tasteful elegance and luxurious comfort of the interior.

Finally, Dan found himself alone with Hilda in a compartment at one end, while the older couple were examining the electrical equipment and switchboard at the other.

It was the opportunity for which the young fellow had long been waiting. Being the noon hour in the shops, none of the workmen were around, he was free for the moment from the too-ardent companionship of his guards. The other pair were engrossed in their own pursuits; and although it was a little disconcerting to tell one's love while the lights were flashing on and off, as Mr. Rance played with the various keys and levers, Dan determined to speak out.

"Hilda," he said simply and straightforwardly, "it can be no secret to you that I love you, that I have loved you for a long, long time; but I want to say it to you, so that you may have no doubts of my feeling, and I want to ask you to marry me."

The girl gazed at him a moment, all her soul in her eyes. Then she drooped slowly toward him, and he gathered her in his arms.

"But it will be a long while before we can be married, won't it, Ronald?" she questioned presently, when the first

transport of their young love was over, and she had lifted herself from his embrace.

"Oh, perhaps not so very long, sweetheart," he smiled. "I am going to resign to-morrow, you see, and take up a new position which has been offered me, which is considerably more lucrative."

"Oh, are you going to leave the road?" she asked.

"Well, not exactly. But don't ask me anything more about it now, dear. I want to be absolutely sure of my new job, you understand, before I do too much bragging. I'll come back to Millwood next Tuesday, and then I'll be in shape to explain everything to you.

"And, say, Hilda," he urged, "do you mind not mentioning anything about our engagement until that time? If you have no objection, I would much rather keep it a secret just between us two, and not have to speak to your parents until this new chance I am after is reasonably secure."

She readily agreed to his desires in this respect, and hence the old folks, watching them sedately leave the car when it came time to go, had not the slightest suspicion of the little interlude which had taken place under their very noses, although Mrs. Rance did observe that her daughter's cheeks were unusually flushed, and inquired anxiously of Hilda if she was sure she did not feel a trifle feverish.

Then, as the party left the shed, Dan turned with an air of mock pomposity, and waved his hand back to the beautiful car.

"Well," he said, "I have finally made up my mind what to name her. She shall be the 'Hilda'!"

At which everybody laughed, thinking it a rare good joke.

CHAPTER XIV.

MAN TO MAN.

RETURNING an hour or so later from the midday dinner of which he had partaken at the Rance's, Dan was a trifle surprised to observe one of his New York detectives indulging in demonstrative efforts to attract his attention on the other side of the street.

So, presently, he crossed over and joined the fellow, expecting, though, to hear nothing more than the usual unexciting report which was ladled out to him every day.

It was evident, however, that the vigorous flea he had put in the ear of one of them that morning had stirred the sleuths up to unprecedented zeal, for the man informed him, with a good deal of impressiveness, that they had carried out his instructions to the letter, and had located the released prisoners at a little camp about four miles out of town.

"Can you lead me to the spot?" demanded Roane, still a trifle skeptical.

"I can," replied the detective in such manner as to leave no doubt of his sincerity. "But I would advise you to be careful," he added. "They are dangerous brutes, remember, and they have no especial love for you."

"Oh, I shall take no chances," answered the brakeman. "I shall want you and your partner to go with me, and my two body-guards, and then I shall go over to the depot and get two or three of the crew who were under fire last night. That ought to be sufficient of an army to subdue them."

Accordingly, the party was made up, and driving out in a big wagon to a spot near the camp, alighted and proceeded the rest of the way on foot, deploying through the woods in such a way as to completely surround the retreat where the yeggmen lay hid.

Never dreaming of such a thing as an invasion, the quarry, amply supplied with grub and whisky, were stretched out upon the ground, and it consequently came to them like a thunderclap out of a clear sky when, at a prearranged signal from Dan, the self-constituted regulators pounced down, speedily disarmed them, and bound them hand and foot.

The cowards thought their time had come, and falling upon their knees, began to whine and beg for mercy.

"Stand up," commanded Dan sternly. "You hounds last night gave me no show for my white alley at all; but I am going to do the square thing and give each one of you an even break. If any one of you can lick me, he is free to go; but if he can't, he'll have to take the punishment that I choose to give him.

Unloose that biggest one," he added, as he threw aside his coat and tightened up his belt, "and let him stand up to me, man to man."

Even a rat will fight when he is cornered, and the hobo put up a vicious defense when the battle was fairly on; but his frame, flabby from idleness and dissipation, was no match for his antagonist's clean, vigorous, young muscles, and in the end, battered and bruised, he had ingloriously to cry "enough," and submit once more to be tied up.

One after another had their chance, until each had received a sound drubbing and were laid back on the shelf.

"Now," said Dan, wiping the sweat from his brow, but still apparently fresh as a daisy, "you are going to get it all over again unless you decide to answer a few questions I intend to ask you. You wouldn't talk to me last night, but a refusal now will constitute contempt of court, and no five hundred dollars' bail will settle the case, either."

Feeling of their bruises, they eagerly assured him that they were only too willing to talk, although there was a tricky gleam in their eyes which might seem to indicate that veracity would not assay any too high in their communications.

"Ah, yes," commented the judge, "I forgot to tell you that lying will be considered an even more serious contempt of court. We want nothing but the truth, and as I happen to know what the truth is, I would advise you not to try on anything else. Now, gentlemen, with that understanding, will you kindly detail the nature of the business transactions you have had with Mr. Clifford Deane?"

They started and gaped at him with open eyes at the mention of the name, but after they had got over their primary amazement that he should know so much, it was almost ludicrous to see the way they fell over each other to be the first to squeal.

Dan skilfully drew them out until he had obtained the whole story, and had it so confirmed and corroborated that it could neither be doubted, nor they be able to back out of it.

Deane, it seemed, was a well-known Chicago crook, recognized among the "powers that prey" as one of the shrewdest and most ruthlessly cold-blooded hold-up men in the country.

Well acquainted with the different bands of yeggmen, he had enlisted these four, and three more whose names and present whereabouts they told, and had brought them on to the Millwood branch for the express purpose of putting "Ronald Daniels" out of the way.

Their instructions at first, they said, had been to "do him up" in such a fashion that it would appear to have been an accident, and they explained in detail how they had maneuvered all the different mischances from which the brakeman had so luckily escaped. Latterly, however, they claimed, Deane had become more desperate, and, demanding results at any cost, had left them free to take what measures they saw fit. It was under this new dispensation that the shot had been fired at him through the car window, and that the stratagem of the night before had been evolved.

It was growing dark when Dan was satisfied that he had pumped them dry, and accordingly the bunch was easily conveyed back to town and turned over to the care of the sheriff again, without any one being the wiser.

"Don't let any one know that you have them," that official was cautioned, "and don't let any of the newspaper reporters back into the cage to-night; but if in any way the news should leak out, and a demand be made that they be admitted to bail, for Heaven's sake, whisper in the judge's ear, and tell him not to fix it at less than one hundred thousand dollars apiece."

These matters concluded. Dan told himself that, on the whole, he had done a pretty good day's work, and might deservedly go out to Ralston and take a good night's sleep.

CHAPTER XV.

TIME'S UP.

THE next morning when Dan woke up, it was to a realization that this was his last day upon the road. At twelve o'clock the two years of his probation would be up, and he free to assume his rightful name and station.

Consequently, when he was called for

duty on a freight just about to pull out of the yards, he accepted the assignment partly from a feeling of sentiment, and partly because he could get to Millwood sooner in this way than by waiting over for the passenger at ten o'clock.

Accordingly, he summoned his guards, the same two, and started out.

"Small use I have for guards to-day, though," he mused with a sense of peaceful security to which he had long been a stranger. "All of Deane's hirelings are in jail, for I suppose the sheriff has rounded up the other three by this time, and I don't think he would dare to try anything himself. Still," he smiled, "the boys are so used to trailing around after me, that I suppose they'd have felt hurt and offended if I had gone off without them.

"I'll have to bid them good-by to-day, though," he went on with his reverie. "I have only to settle up with Clifford Deane, and to connect Thayer certainly with the plot against me, and then my career as brakeman on the branch is over."

It was a light train, and an easy run, and since the day was clear and sunny, he lay out for a long time on the running-board, feasting his eyes on the familiar landscape as it flitted by.

But at last the sun and the wind made him feel sleepy, and he retired to the caboose, where he stretched himself luxuriously out upon the cushions and dropped off into a gentle doze.

Hayley, one of his guards, who had not been called to this crew, but was riding on his pass, volunteered to do his work for him, so he did not have to bother whether the engine whistled or not.

He had been sleeping some little time this way, when he suddenly awoke with a presentiment of danger strong upon him. Yet when he opened his eyes he could see nothing to cause this feeling.

The train was moving easily along, and he was all alone in the caboose save for Hayley, who stood over by the door with his back turned toward him.

He was just about to speak to the man, when something in the other's attitude aroused his suspicion, and he restrained the impulse. Instead, he lay back upon his cushions, breathing deeply, and feigning sleep, but narrowly watching Hayley through half-closed eyes.

And his vigilance was rewarded; for the man presently turned, and throwing back his head as though he had made a decision, crept stealthily up to Roane's bunk, and laid something beneath it.

Carefully he struck a match, bending down a moment as he held the flame between his palms. Then there came the faint, sputtering sound of a lighted fuse, and Hayley rising quickly to his feet, beat a hasty retreat toward the door.

At the same moment Dan's arm dropped quickly but silently underneath the bunk, and he pinched out between thumb and forefinger the sparkling flame. His hand closed over the object, which Hayley had laid there, and brought it up to light.

It was a dynamite cartridge capable of blowing the caboose and all it contained clear over into the next county.

"Stop!"

Dan's voice rang out sharp and imperious, and Hayley just reaching the door, turned at the mandate to look into the muzzle of a loaded revolver.

"How much were you to be paid for this?" demanded Roane contemptuously, holding up the cartridge so the other might see that the full depth of his *perfidy* was known.

The man hesitated a moment, then broke down and buried his head in his hands.

"Five hundred dollars down, and five hundred more when the job was finished," he confessed with a sob. "I held out a long while, Daniels; but he kept after me, and a thousand dollars is a whole lot of money, you know."

"And it was Clifford Deane who made you the offer, of course?"

The man nodded.

"Well, Hayley," decided Dan after a few moments' meditation, "I shall not punish your treachery as it deserves. I shall insist, of course, on your acting as a witness in case I want you; but otherwise I shall make no demands upon you. Your punishment will come next week, I think when you find out that five hundred dollars was the dearest money you ever earned in all your life. Now, go; and don't let me see your face again unless I send for you."

At the next station, a telegram was handed to Dan. It was from one of his agency detectives, and ran as follows:

> Advise you to be on guard against your man Hayley. He has been seen in conferences with Deane, and we fear has succumbed to latter's influence.

The recipient smiled scornfully, and crumpling the message up into a ball, tossed it out on the track.

"As usual, half an hour too late," he commented sarcastically. "And those fellows claim to come from a swift town. What would have happened if I had hired detectives from Philadelphia?"

And so the train swung on, as he took this last ride of his in the humble capacity he had filled so well, and nearly every spot they passed was redolent with memories.

Hilltop was reached, the grade descended down which he and Robert had taken their thrilling "shoot the chutes" ride, the hobo camp passed, and at last they drew up at the Millwood station.

As they ran along beside the platform, Dan saw standing there, in his usual expectant attitude, Mr. Clifford Deane; and it took the brakeman just one jump to reach him and to fasten his fingers where he had long promised them they should one day clutch—about the other's throat.

"Hold on," gurgled and gasped the choking wretch as he writhed in the other's relentless grasp. "I give up. I'll tell everything. Time's up to-day, and you win out; so what's the use of keeping mum. Besides, I heard what you did to those yeggmen of mine, and I don't care for any of the same dose. Let me go, and I'll tell you everything you want to know."

"What, for instance, will you tell?" demanded Dan, giving him one more shake for good luck.

"Why, that Thayer was back of the whole shooting match. I'm no fool, you know, and I've got all the evidence in the world to prove it. Give me a square deal, and I'll fix it so that you can send him up for the rest of his natural life."

It took some time to have the statement of Clifford Deane, *alias* Charley Dickson, *alias* "Bug" Farnsworth, *alias* six or seven other things, taken down by a stenographer, and properly signed and attested, so at length when Dan came out of the jail, where he had turned over his prisoner to the sheriff, the whistles were announcing the hour of noon.

"Ah," and he drew a deep breath. "Time's up at last, and 'Ronald Daniels' and all the rest of it is a thing of the past. It's me now for Baltimore, and the meeting of the directors."

On the following Monday, after the directorate of the M. and I. had adjourned, having unanimously elected Daniel Roane, second, to the vacant presidency, Mr. Anthony Thayer, the general manager, came forward to offer unctuous congratulations.

But the new official sternly disregarded the proffered hand of friendship.

"There's just one thing I want out of you, you dog," he said bruskly, "and that's your resignation, as fast as you can write it. I spare you the punishment you deserve, for the reason that while not intending it, you have been to me the greatest possible benefactor. Grapes sometimes can grow on thorns, and figs on thistles, and out of the evil passions of envy, avarice, and murder, which you have cherished, I was made a man and qualified for the position I now occupy. Chickens always come home to roost, and your wickedness instead of harming me, has only reacted upon yourself."

And with that, Dan stepped inside his private office, slamming the door in the almost apoplectic face of Thayer.

"Is there any further business, you wish to attend to to-day, Mr. Roane?" questioned his private secretary. "I think I understood you to say you were going away."

"Yes. Issue an order appointing Andrew Rance, superintendent of the Millwood division, to the position of general manager *vice* Thayer, resigned. And, then—Watts!"

"Yes, sir?"

"You can telephone down to the station and have them hitch the Hilda to Number Fourteen, going west. I," picking up his hat and gloves, "am off for Millwood!"

THE END.

ON GLORY'S TRAIL.*

By ALBERT PAYSON TERHUNE,

Author of "Their Last Hope," "The Scarlet Scarab," "The Fugitive," etc.

A story of America in the time of the Colonies, involving a desperate journey whose path lay across that of Washington himself.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

CRAIG DRYSDALE, son of Hiram Drysdale, president of the council of the town of New York, comes upon Karl Krauss, a young man of fashion, who is threatening a girl. He learns that the girl is Mlle. Désirée du Fresne, cousin of the fop, Karl Krauss. He escorts her to town, where he is later associated with Krauss in filing papers for the council. Krauss one day receives a letter from Molly Gaines, who until recently has been the object of Craig's adoration. The next day, a set of plans is missing; the council meets in haste; Krauss is accused, and flees the town. While roaming in the forest, Craig hears voices in Dead Man's Hut.

Approaching softly, he sees four persons in the hut. Captain Krauss, father of Karl, and military commandant of New York, together with Lieutenant Carney, one of his aides, is explaining the stolen plans to Simon Rigault, the famous half-breed forest-runner. The interpreter is Désirée du Fresne! Rigault departs for Lacolle, and Craig follows him, but arrives a hundred yards behind the half-breed. In the tavern he recognizes Karl Krauss. That night he takes the plans from Karl's waistcoat and alters them.

He flees into the forest to warn General Braddock of the ambush that has been set for him. He is captured by Canadians, and is about to be burned at the stake for a spy when Désirée turns up and rescues him. Together they come upon Braddock's army, and have their story discredited by him; but a young man named Ben believes, as does one Colonel Washington. In the ambush Braddock is killed, but Washington seems to bear a charmed life. The victorious Indians leave the field with their prisoners; but with the aid of Papa Soult, a crazed old man whom the Indians regard as sacred, Désirée, Ben, and Craig escape. Désirée keeps camp while the others go in search of a canoe. Craig suddenly discovers that he loves the French girl, and returns to camp to tell her so. But Désirée is gone, and on the ground is a piece of bark, bearing the inscription, "You are a good forest-runner, but not good enough—RIGAULT."

CHAPTER XXII.

"HERE THE TRAIL ENDS!"

AND then I went mad.

For surely no sane man would have rushed unarmed on the hastily picked-up trail of so redoubtable a forest-runner as Rigault.

When, long before, I had followed him thus, I had had the advantage of believing he was not aware of my pursuit. Now I knew he would not only be certain of it, but that he would not hesitate to shoot me down at sight whenever we chanced to meet.

My obvious course was to await the arrival of Soult and Ben. Then, armed, the three of us might stand some chance of overhauling him (for, burdened by Désirée, he could not travel fast nor efface his trail), and of putting him to rout.

This, as I say, was my obvious course. And this is just what I did not do. Instead, I ran at full speed in pursuit of them.

I say I was mad—mad with rage and senseless of what I did, so long as I did something. To sit still and plan deliberately what to do while my soul was boiling in rage at what this fiend had done, was expecting more of me—more than I could give.

A child could have followed his trail. I could see but his own footsteps. From their weight it was plain he was going slowly and carrying a burden. And that burden, I knew, was Désirée. The knowledge, I say, maddened me.

His object in an act so mad and so

*Began August ARGOSY. Single copies 10 cents.

readily detected I could not guess. That he had ventured boldly and alone into a hostile country was not unlike him. There were many such exploits to his credit.

But that he should follow us thus far, steal Désirée from our camp and proceed to carry her laboriously off, passed all comprehension.

The trail was fresh. I followed it on the dead run, taking no precaution, planning no maneuver. My one aim was to run down the brute who had laid hands on the girl I loved, and to settle accounts with him, then and there, for all time.

Toward the lake ran his tracks. Wild with the fear lest he might have secured a canoe and have put off from the shore before I could reach him, I redoubled my speed, plunging down the precipitate slope, hurtling through copse and balsam thicket, and at last bringing up, all standing, at the water's edge.

There, on the narrow strip of pebbly beach, stood Rigault. I reeled out of the last waterside thicket, to confront his leveled rifle.

On the ground, behind him, a thong about her arms, a kerchief bound across her mouth, sat Désirée du Fresne.

"Rest tranquil, my dear Mr. Craig Drysdale," observed Rigault, in his best French manner, the gun, steady as a rock, aimed at my chest. "I mean no harm to the daughter of my old commander. The moment you and I have settled our affair I shall release her and either escort her whithersoever she wishes, or let her return to your camp."

The suave tone he forced into that raucous voice of his halted me, more than did the leveled rifle or the actual sense of his words.

I had come prepared to hurl myself bare-handed upon him. But, puzzled at his unlooked-for manner, I paused for the instant, irresolute.

"I have not harmed, nor I believe greatly alarmed, Mlle du Fresne," he went on as before. "I found her sleeping; bound, gagged her, and bore her here. But very gently, believe me. And here I have awaited you several minutes."

"Awaited me?"

The words were wrung from me without volition of my own, so surprised was I by all this.

"For whom else? I heard you three map out your routes this morning. I knew yours was the shortest and that you would return first. It seemed unsafe to wait for you in your own camp, lest the others come back before we finished our talk. So I devised this simple scheme of drawing you here, where we shall be free from interruption."

"You have followed us all the way from—"

"All the way. But I was some days behind, and it was only this morning I reached your camp, just as you were arranging the day's routine. I would have followed you then, but much of the ground is open and I could not risk your seeing me prematurely. You might have escaped me, you see."

"And you followed—"

"Merely to kill you, my dear M. Drysdale. An innocent ambition."

I tightened my muscles for a spring. But he forestalled me.

"All in good time," he said. "The end will come soon enough, I assure you. There are some few words first to be said."

Again, in a curiosity I cannot define, I checked myself.

"On my way to my mission," he resumed, "I met M. Karl Krauss. He had delivered the plans to General Dieskau and was on his way to Champlain's Lake. I told him of your capture by my Ottawa friends and of your knowledge of his part and his father's in the matter of those unfortunate plans.

"The same day, an Illini, also on his way to Champlain's Lake, fell in with us and told us of your escape. The good Karl was quite mad with fear. He wrote a letter to his father, which he sent by a spy, warning him of your approach and of what you knew concerning him. Then he told me something else, which for shame he had not at first revealed.

"He told me that General Dieskau and he had examined the plans together and found that they were so altered as to be useless. That was done by you. You, the first man who could ever boast of it, had tricked me. *Me,* Simon Rigault. Therefore, on my way to New York on a new mission, I cut your trail and followed, to clean up forever the score. That is all."

The mixture of French melodrama, hurt vanity, and the Indian's boundless capacity for hatred, would, at another time, have been amusing. But there is scant humor in the muzzle of a loaded flintlock.

Suddenly dropping his Gallic mannerisms, the half-breed grunted:

"Here the trail ends!"

Then, simultaneously, several things occurred.

As Rigault's forefinger tightened on the trigger I made my futile, desperate leap for his throat. At the same instant, Désirée, despite her bound wrists, twisted to her feet and hurled her whole fragile weight against the half-breed's body.

Crash!

The great rifle boomed out, awakening ten thousand echoes from crag, mountain, and forest. But the impact of even so light a weight as that of Désirée, had thrown the weapon upward.

The bullet that should have found my heart scored my shoulder, cutting the flesh as it passed.

And at that instant I had closed with the powerful half-breed. He dropped his rifle and grappled with me. But, wiry and strong as he was, I was the stronger.

I had secured the fatal under-hold. With arms locked about his waist and chin driven deep into the hollow between his chest and armpit, I threw all my weight and muscle into the task of breaking his back.

To and fro we struggled, our heels driving up clouds of little pebbles, our breath heaving rough and deep.

Into the water ankle-deep and out of it until we crashed into the screen of hemlocks, we swayed and reeled.

Trick after trick of the Indian wrestling, whereof he was a past master, he strove to bring into play. But when once a strong man wins the under-hold, it can only be broken by one far stronger.

And Rigault, powerful as he was, could not tear loose, nor so much as shift my grip.

Against tree-trunks he hurled me in the hope I might be struck on the head and dazed into letting go. He strove to throw us both to earth, that the ever-tightening grip might there prove less effective.

But I braced myself, and each time managed to thwart him. When one has the under-hold, it is difficult to grip him or in any way do him injury. For the legs are out of reach, the face is hidden from the other's blows, and the front of the body, from throat to knee, is similarly protected.

Rigault, it is true, might have showered blows on my back, or might even have sought the knife that hung from his belt. But to do either would have entailed the removal of one of his arms from about me.

And this would infallibly have meant an immediate broken back to him; since only by the brace his clasping arms afforded could he ward off any of the strain of my grip from his spine.

Abandoning, finally, every trick and subterfuge, the man put all his remaining strength into keeping himself from yielding to the steady, increasing backward pressure of my hold. And so, straining, panting, gasping, we wrestled at last almost without outward motion.

My chin pressing the upper part of his body backward, my arms drawing his waist toward me, I was throwing a strain upon his spine that only the mighty muscles of his back and arms could enable him to withstand.

Could I maintain that awful pressure long enough and strongly enough, he must succumb. If, even, for a fraction of a second, he should relax his braced sinews, victory would be mine.

The old wound in my head throbbed and burned under the power I was forcing into my every muscle. But my strength was holding out splendidly. No mortal could much longer resist that under-hold.

If I write coldly, brutally, of my purpose thus to kill Rigault, it is because that purpose was born of dire necessity.

Were I to spare him, it was only a question of time before his relentless Indian cunning would accomplish my death. It was kill or be killed. And, being a normal man, I preferred the former.

The struggle of life in the northern wilds is a cruder, more primitive, thing than in King's College or on the Battery esplanade.

And now, throughout my body, I could

feel that Rigault's strength was going. Redoubling my efforts, I pressed his chest farther and farther backward, his muscular waist closer toward me. Little by little, my superior thews were beginning to tell. In another minute, at most, his strength must give out.

My face was buried in his shoulder, so I could not see the look of hopeless despair that I knew must be stealing over those swarthy, stolid features. But I could hear the moaning gasp in his breath as, abandoning our stationary pose, we thrashed wildly about, over the slippery beach-pebbles. Backward, slowly backward, I forced his chest.

And then, all at once, came the end. With no further warning, his body in a trice relaxed in my grasp, and he hung helpless over my clenched arms as a shot squirrel hangs across a tree-branch.

My work, evidently, was done. His back must be broken.

With a revulsion of disgust, I loosened my hold and let him slip limp and sinewless to the ground. I reeled back exhausted, panting, half blind with pain and overexertion.

But before that inert mass of flesh touched earth, I dimly saw it change, as by magic, to a sentient, muscular creature, vibrant with life and hate.

And, ere this unforeseen apparition could fairly penetrate my dizzy, aching brain, Simon Rigault, knife drawn, was upon me.

It was a simple ruse whereby I had been trapped. The man had relaxed his muscles on the chance that I, feeling his body grow heavy and limp, would release him instead of first making sure I had crushed out his life. And the desperate chance had won.

To a knife-fighter so redoubtable as Rigault, the rest was as child's play.

It is one thing to grapple bare-handed on equal terms with a foe, and quite another to face, unarmed, the same man when he is wielding a twelve-inch knife. My chance of life was far less than when I had faced the half-breed's rifle.

A gun may miss fire, through defective priming, but Rigault's knife-arm would not fail.

Yet, hopeless as I was of victory, and mad as my action must seem, I leaped to meet him. Better to die fighting, no matter how futilely, than to be run down or butchered while waiting nerveless and numb for the death-blow.

So I sprang to meet my fate, noting even in that fleeting instant the evil, twisted smile that flashed into Rigault's face at my onset.

With knife poised he awaited me. I saw the keen blade whirl upward, striking a line of white fire from the peaceful summer sun.

Then, from behind, perhaps a hundred feet distant, a second flash blazed out from among the undergrowth, and once more the hills and woods reechoed to the roaring report of a gun.

Simon Rigault spun around like a teetotum. The knife whizzed harmless from his hand. He crashed down on the stony beach, half in, half out, of the water, shivered once more, and lay still.

From the bushes ran Ben Arnold, gun in hand.

"Just as I was finishing my trip!" he shouted jubilantly, as though it were a deer instead of a man whose life he had taken. "If I'd been a second later—"

But I heard no more. I was on my knees beside Désirée. She had fainted.

With two slashes of the knife that had been meant for my own heart I freed her from thong and gag, and dashed handfuls of water into her face.

Quickly, her strong, forest-nourished nerves responded. She opened her eyes and looked long and silently at me. I, in turn, weak, dazed, infinitely grateful, stared dumbly back.

Even in that moment of relief, I remember, I tried to read in her glance the love-expression I sought. But I saw nothing save a boundless, bewildered thankfulness.

"He is quite dead," reported Ben, turning from Rigault's body and breaking in on our communion of silence.

His voice had lost its jubilant tone and had taken on a certain awe. After all, he was but a boy. And the sight of death is one to which a true man never grows hardened.

The spell was broken. With a shudder, Désirée sat up. Grasping my arm, she raised herself to her feet and stood there, swaying a little, but with the color creeping back to her blanched cheeks.

She could not trust herself to speak,

but, crossing to where Ben stood, she held out her hand to him. That simple, speechless act, I think, meant more to all three of us, each in his own way, than could the most eloquent discourse on valor and gratitude.

Ben gripped the proffered fingers awkwardly, then said:

"Let us take you back to the camp. You must rest. This has been a terrible ordeal for you. Don't try to tell me about it yet. There'll be plenty of time for explanation."

"Go ahead," I added, "if you are strong enough to walk with Ben's help. I'll follow in a few minutes."

I waited until they were out of sight, then walked over to where Rigault lay.

I still grasped his knife, and I approached him with caution. For though, as our Mohawk Valley settlers say, "There is no good Indian but a dead Indian," yet, before making even that grudging admission, it is always well to ascertain if your Indian is really dead.

And Simon Rigault had ever been the shiftiest, cunningest of his Ottawa mother's crafty race. Once before, by taking too much for granted, I had wellnigh lost my own life. I was resolved not to make the same blunder of overconfidence a second time.

But I might have spared my caution. There was no doubt as to the result of Ben's timely shot. I was turning to follow Désirée and her young escort to the camp when a thought stopped me.

Rigault had spoken of being on a second mission to New York.

With verbal message, or papers? It would be well, for our threatened city's sake, to find out.

Remembering the former hiding-place of our plans, I unwound the half-breed's long leggings. But they revealed no papers of any sort. Next I searched his clothing, with no better result. Disappointed, I abandoned my search.

I recalled that Papa Soult's moccasins were worn through and that he had complained of the bruises inflicted by the wayside stones on his unprotected feet. I stooped and unlaced Rigault's. They were stout, if light, and double soled. Just the thing for our old companion.

I started up the trail carrying them swinging loosely by their strings. They struck together as they swung. I stopped, examined them closely, and struck them together once more.

Yes, I had not been mistaken. A faint, crackling sound, such as no well-made moccasin should give forth, again reached my ear.

Separately I inspected the footgear, twisting each in various directions. The second crackled under my manipulation. I felt it all over, carefully, and finally located the sound.

Then I lifted the separate inner sole. Between it and the outer covering lay a soiled paper, doubled twice and sealed.

It bore no superscription, no word of writing on its outer surface. I was minded to break the seal. Then I reflected that the matter concerned our civic council, not me. So, reluctantly (for I was ever cautious), I hid the paper in my breast.

Had I but yielded to my first impulse, more than one life might later have been spared, and this tale would have had a far different ending.

CHAPTER XXIII.

I SCORE ONE MORE BLUNDER.

"Do you know," said Soult confidentially, "I was very wise to set you free, Craig! It was the wisest deed of all my life. At first—just at first—I sometimes doubted it. When Ben left us and took the branch road to his New England home, for instance. I feared then I had done wrong in thinking you or he could help me in my search. I thought you and Désirée would abandon it as he did."

The girl and I exchanged quick looks of disappointment. Ever since the day, weeks earlier, when he had left Raquette Lake in the canoe of his finding, Soult had spoken no word of his strange delusion. We had grown to hope that by such long proximity to white people of his own class, it had faded at last from his mind. Nor, in all that time, had his weird gift of prophecy possessed him.

We had planned to bring him to New York with us, hoping, by the vast change there from anything he had in late years

known, to divert his thoughts into new channels.

Yet here, as we were barely ten miles north of the city, and I was already hurrying my steps in anticipation of the home-coming, he had reverted to that pathetic old delusion of his hopeless "search."

"I have not spoken of it," he prattled on, as though half reading our thoughts, "because it seemed to me that my talk of it pained you. And I would give no one pain. But always—always—it has been at my heart. In the night-time, when the rest of you slept, I have often spent half the dark hours searching through the woods for Celestine and my boy. But for a long time not even the sound of their dear voices came to me as of old."

"I am so sorry, so *sorry*," began Désirée, but he intervened with a happy smile:

"You must not grieve. There is nothing to grieve over. For, of late, their voices have come back. The farther south we travel, the oftener and clearer I hear them. So it is borne in on me that I made a mistake in shunning New York in all my years of search. For, beyond all doubt, it is hereabouts they await me."

Désirée looked at me as though expecting some word of comfort for her old protégé. But what could I—or any one—say?

My disappointment that this mania of Soult's had not passed was poignantly keen. For I had grown very fond of the simple, gentle, unselfish old fellow, with his big, kind heart and tender quaintness of thought and action. He had the soul of a sage and the mind of a child.

He had, in a thousand ways, endeared himself to us all during that tedious journey which was now ending. And Désirée and I had planned many things for his comfort and happiness when we should reach town.

Even his uncanny dress and adornments had grown familiar and pleasant to us. And now all our hopes for him were dashed!

"Yes," he went on with that same happy smile glorifying his age-worn face, "beyond doubt they await me here in the south. For each night as I wander looking for them their voices grow clearer—more distinct. And"—dropping his tone to one of awed joy—"only last night, I *saw* Celestine. Yes, saw her! It is the first time since she was stolen from me.

"She stood before me in the moonlight, just as she used to stand waiting for me to come home. She was taken away again before I could reach her. Or, perhaps—just at first—she did not know me. For I fear I have changed a little since we parted. But I shall find her! And"—his voice rumbled of a sudden like the chest-growl of a bulldog—"perhaps, I shall find, too, the man who carried her and my boy away. And then—"

I could not bear to look on his face, so terrible was the change that had rushed over it.

"Papa Soult!" broke in Désirée, laying her soft hand lovingly across his mouth, "you *mustn't* talk like that. Try to be calm!"

But already smiles had scattered the clouds on his old face. When he spoke his voice was timid.

"I have told you all this," he said, "that you may no longer look pained when I speak of them. Also"—and he hesitated—"that you may not think me churlish if, for a time, I do not walk the road with you. It is in the forest I have ever sought them. The forests lie on both sides of us. Will you be angry if I travel through the woods instead of on the road? I can join you often.

"You see," he went on hastily, as if fearing refusal, "they may come to meet me instead of awaiting me in the city below there. And it is in the forests they always live. I must not miss them."

He slipped from beside us into the shadow of the woods as he finished speaking, moving rapidly lest we call him back. Before we lost sight of him, we saw he was taking the same general southward trend as ourselves. There was no hope for it. We must perforce let him have his own gentle, mad way.

Désirée sighed:

"Poor, *poor* Papa Soult!" she murmured. "And we had such hopes that he was cured!"

"We can do nothing, I'm afraid," I

made answer, "except to find some comfortable resting-place for him in town till the roving fit takes him again. Come! Shall we hurry on? We have scarcely ten miles farther to go. And then—home!"

"Home?"

She echoed the sacred monosyllable with a bitterness at strange variance with her usual sunniness.

I glanced at her in surprise.

"Home?" she repeated. "That means to you the welcome of all you love. The kiss of your mother, the gladness in your father's eyes. The return to the scenes and pursuits that are dear to you, the city where you were born. Winter draws near, and a fireside of one's own is pleasant. There are faces about it that mean everything to you. Yes! After all your dangers and fatigues, home is yours, and rest. But for *me?*"

"For you? Why—"

"There is no home for me!" she sighed, bitterness yielding place to utter dejection. "In the forests of Pontiac there is a grave the Indians reverence. In Alsace there is a château where I was born. But the sleeper in the Pontiac grave can never more welcome me home, and the château lodges a stranger. In this city we are coming to is a gloomy, Dutch house that once gave me a cold, loveless shelter that could never be glorified into the word 'Home!' And now, even that scant refuge will be denied me."

"Denied you?"

"My uncle, the worthy Captain Johann Krauss, will scarcely take me back after what I have done for one he hates. Besides, if you expose his plots against your city, prison awaits him. What will be left for *me!* I am homeless, penniless——"

"Don't!" I cried. "You mustn't speak so. You know it is not true. I—"

"Not true? If you can prove that I am wrong—"

And there we both paused. How *could* I prove it? Despite her bitter, radical way of stating her case, all she said was true.

Yet I, who had never considered the matter in that light, had, nevertheless, often enough formed a plan of my own to render her fears groundless.

"You are mistaken, Désirée," I said, after a moment. "Near the Bouerie Lane, just beyond Petrus von Stuyvesant's old mansion, and on the wood road, stands a little house. The forest creeps up almost to its dooryard, on one side, while in front there are good, fertile fields. It was my mother's father's, and by him was bequeathed to me along with some four thousand pounds. That is to be *my* home, Désirée—and *yours!*"

I do not know how I had expected her to take this prosaic solution of her troubles. Certainly not as she *did* take it.

She looked at me long and without speech, stopping short in the road.

In her big blue eyes there was none of the furtive, coy look I had so often read in Molly Gaines's, nor was there the frank, trustful friendliness which I had ever learned to expect from Désirée herself.

Instead, there was a look of blank wonder, wherein I also thought I read a shadow of pain.

When she spoke, it was with that mocking *grande dame* air of hers, which, she well knew, always infuriated me.

"Am I to gather from your eloquent plea that you are doing me the vast honor to make me a proposal of marriage?" she asked.

"Why, of course!" I faltered, taken aback by this unforeseen turn of word and mien. "Won't—"

She swept me a profound curtsy. In another, similarly attired in tatters, the act would have been grotesque. As it was, the maneuver betokened only an infinite grace.

"Ten thousand thanks for your munificent offer," she murmured in subdued, reverential tones. "It is, indeed, an unexpected and heavy weight of condescension under which Mr. Craig Drysdale, fur-trader, places the poor granddaughter of the Duke du Fresne. But I fear the favor—vast as it is—must be refused. I am unworthy such exaltation."

The blood boiled red hot into my cheeks. I controlled my chagrin as best I could, and made shift to reply, monstrous polite:

"It was scarce necessary, Mlle. Du Fresne, to remind me that I and my family are of the *bourgeois*—of the middle classes the aristocrats despise. I

have never forgotten it. If I have lifted my eyes to a woman of rank far above my own, it was through no disrespect, but because the mighty volume of my love outweighed my prudence. I crave your pardon."

Though I did not look at her, as I spoke of my love, I could hear the quick intake of her breath. Yet we had walked on several yards before she spoke.

"What a chance you missed!" she said at last, and though there was still mockery in her voice, I could see it was forced. "How readily you might have reminded me that I am a ragged, homeless girl with not a relative to turn to and not a prospect in life, while you are well-to-do in your own right and son of one of the greatest and richest men in the Colonies. Yet when I gibed at our difference in rank, you spoke only of—"

"Of love for you," I finished. "And so I shall speak to the end of my days, Désirée, even though your old-world upbringing may never let you bridge the difference of—"

"The difference, Craig? You *knew* I was joking. Of what use is rank to me—to *any one* in this new country of yours? It is like an old garment—neither in use nor in fashion here. And, at best, rank without wealth is a hollow form. I spoke in jest, using my valueless rank as a weapon; not because it was of use, but because it was the only weapon I had. And—oh, how readily you might have turned it against me!"

"It didn't occur to me. And even if it had—"

"It would have occurred to any other man. You are—"

"I am stupid beyond ordinary—"

"You are a gentleman, which is anything but ordinary. You—you spoke of love, too. Why didn't you speak of that at first? Does any woman wish to be wooed with a 'stanch little house' and 'good, fertile fields'? No, no, Craig! The love was an afterthought. You are sorry for me, and you generously offer to help me in the one way you can."

"It is not true!" I blurted out. "I love you! I always have loved you, I think. Twenty times I have longed to tell you so. But—but if you cared nothing for me, it would have made the rest of our journey together embarrassing for you. So I forced myself to wait till that journey's end."

"And then began an ardent tale of a 'stanch little—'"

"If I am awkward it is because I have scant skill. If I loved you less I could be more eloquent. But it is hard to talk in high-flown phrases to the little comrade who has walked so bravely at my side through many weeks of danger and hardship and fatigue. The comrade who has stood between me and death—who has shared my fare and my hunger—whom I have carried through the forests in my arms when she slept—whom I have treated more like a boy than a maid. So when it came to words of love—"

"And did you think there was a maid on all this earth who did not long for those sweet speeches you find it so hard to voice? Craig, my friend, I sometimes think you don't know what love is."

"You 'sometimes think'? Then you have given some thought to—"

"No. Of course not. I—"

"Look at me!" I commanded. "Yes, it is as I thought. You meet my gaze as a boy might. There is no love in those glorious blue eyes of yours. Just fearlessness and trust and friendship. I was a fool to look for more. Forget what I have said, dear. And, above all, never let any thought of my disappointment distress you. For we shall always be dear, *dear* friends and comrades. And if—some time—your heart finds room for me—"

"Finds *room* for you—?"

So new a note had leaped into her voice that I looked quickly at her. But quick as I was, she was quicker. Her face was averted. One flushed cheek was all I could see of it. I took an impulsive step toward her.

The beat of a horse's hoofs sounded on the muddy road ahead.

A rider cantered around the turn. At sight of us, he reined up with a shout.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A STRANGE HOME-COMING.

We had had more than a week of rain and the roads were ankle-deep in mud,

Horse and rider were splashed with it, and the man drew up so suddenly as to scatter a yellow shower of mire about him.

At first glance I had recognized the horseman. It was my father. His beard was grayer than when we parted in the spring, and his dark face wore a harassed look.

This did not lighten at sight of me, although there was genuine gladness in his eyes.

"I have ridden out in the hope of meeting you," he exclaimed, as he dismounted and shook my hand. "I have ridden past here each day for nearly a fortnight. For I judged you would come by this road."

He had been eying Désirée with frank curiosity.

"My father—Mlle. du Fresne," I said, formally.

At her curtsy and extended hand, the wonderment cleared from his face. He bowed as respectfully as to a duchess, and, with the innate breeding that was always his, forbore to ask any of the dozen questions her presence and aspect might well have excited.

Turning to me, after a few civil words with Désirée, he went on, with some anxiety:

"I wish you had been farther from town when I met you, Craig. You must go back and at once. I will escort Mlle. du Fresne, with her permission, to her uncle's house, or anywhere else she may wish to go. But—"

"Another mission?" I queried in disgust. "I had hoped my wanderings for the present were over."

"I fear they have but begun. Here are two hundred pounds, and here is my fastest horse. That lane to the west will take you across the Boston Road. Make all haste you can, and travel by forest routes as much as may be, until you reach Boston."

"And there?"

"There lie quiet until I can communicate with you. If it becomes needful for you to hide farther afield, I will let you know. I have written to my good friend, young Dr. Warren—"

"Hide? To hide?" I echoed. "You speak as though I were a fugitive!"

"You are," was his curt rejoinder, "and with a price on your capture. I ask nothing of the rights or wrongs—"

But I had flung off his hand from my shoulder and faced him in amazed wrath.

"Speak out!" I cried harshly, forgetting all the veneration due him from me. "What is this talk of fugitive? I—"

"I have never doubted that at heart you were true and that at worst you had but committed an error," he returned, as though seeking to conciliate me. "But the council think otherwise. And Captain Krauss—"

"Captain Krauss!" I shouted.

"He received a letter from Karl, who is a prisoner in Fort du Quesne. Karl swore in the letter that he saw you at Du Quesne, and that you delivered the stolen plans of our city to the French commandant. He also gathered from your speech with the Frenchmen that you were about to go on a mission for him to Champlain's Lake and were coming thence to New York to spy out further of our secrets. Captain—"

If I had let my father speak uninterrupted this far, it was solely because indignation and amaze gripped my tongue. It was Désirée who broke in on his recital.

"It is a falsehood!" she cried. "A black falsehood. He—"

And then I found my voice.

"And on this unsupported letter, written by a fugitive, himself under suspicion of the council, *I* am judged a traitor—a spy?"

"Not unsupported, I am sorry to say," returned my father. "For when the letter was made public, one of the officers of the fort—a Lieutenant Carney—came forward, reluctantly enough, and declared you had approached him, some time ago, on the subject of deserting to the French army, and that you had told him you drove a good trade, as informant, with Dieskau. Mind you, lad, I do not believe him. Openly, in council, I gave the man the lie, and he cringed, scared, before me till Captain Krauss bolstered him up with pledges of protection. But all this had weight with our councillors and—"

"And so you come to advise me to run away unheard? Not I! Come! We waste valuable time!"

And I strode on, savage as a bear.

"Wait! Where are you going?" called my father.

"To face the council and cram the lie down their throats!" I shouted back over my shoulder, never abating my pace.

"Craig!" cried Désirée.

And I stopped.

"For shame!" she went on as she and my father caught me up. "Mr. Drysdale has trusted you in the face of everything. He has risked his own repute as a loyal Englishman to ride out and warn you. Is this the way to treat him?"

"I am sorry, sir," I said, coming to my senses, through the wrath-mists. "If I have seemed churlish, it was not my intent. But you must see how a vile charge like this would sting any man with a spark of honor. Come with me to the council, won't you?"

"If you insist," sighed the unhappy old gentleman. "But I warn you you are running into the lion's jaws. The news we received yesterday will make it all the harder for you."

"What news?"

"From Sir William Johnson's army on Champlain's Lake. There has been a battle—a great battle—with Dieskau's forces, at the new fort there. The French were repulsed. And among the dead found on the field was Karl Krauss."

"Karl Krauss?"

"Yes. We did not even know he was with Johnson's army. It must have been thither that he fled when he escaped from Du Quesne. The council, convinced of your guilt, believe now they accused him falsely, and that his death lies at their door. They will be doubly severe with you to atone for—"

"Karl Krauss with Johnson's army? He was on his way north to join Dieskau when last I heard of him. You may depend on it, sir, that if his body was found on the field after the battle, it was at Dieskau's, not Johnson's, side that he fell."

My father listened in bewilderment.

"I have asked you nothing," he said tentatively, "fearing you might think I doubted you and that I was catechizing. But if you could in honor tell me what has befallen you, these four months, and what you mean by having 'heard of' Karl Krauss, I should perhaps be able—"

Without more ado, and concisely as might be, I related everything—from my eavesdropping at Dead Man's Hut that night in May, to the slaying of Simon Rigault. Here and there Désirée threw in a word of confirmation or added a detail—usually concerning some trifling act of courage of my own that I had chanced to omit.

My father heard in wondering silence. When I reached the part of my tale where Désirée had appeared so providentially to save me from Boulard's torture tree, he impulsively caught one of her hands, bowed low over, and kissed it. Other interruption he made none.

When I was finished, he walked on beside us some little way in silence, thinking deeply, his horse following unheeded at the end of the loose-flung rein.

"And this Rigault told you," he said at length, "that Karl, on finding you had escaped and were bound homeward, wrote to his father? That explains much. He told his father the story of your discovering the plot and of your changing the plans; and then, doubtless, enclosed a second letter to be used as evidence against you. And Johann made his tool, Carney, substantiate it. Oh, it is all plain enough! But that Johann Krauss should be a traitor! The man beside whom I have sat in council for years! Ever since he came to New York."

"Whence did he come?"

"I do not remember. But he brought letters that established his standing. Doubtless, he was even then a French sympathizer at heart. He has ever spent money prodigally, and has been well supplied with it, though he had no trade nor offices. I supposed it was private fortune."

"My mother," ventured Désirée, "was his sister. It was in France, where she had come to be educated, that my father met and married her. I always understood that her family came from Germany, but had lived in some part of America. My father's family frowned on the match. For she was a commoner and of no wealth. So I heard little of

her people. She died when I was a child."

"No wealth? Then it is as a spy of France that Krauss drew his funds? But to prove it!"

"Surely, my word—" I began.

"Your word will carry little weight against that of the fort commandant, backed by Carney's testimony. The council should be thanking you on bended knees for the service you have rendered the city in making those plans useless to Dieskau. But, in their present mood, they are likelier to hang you. Be warned! Turn back until I have had a chance to clear you, or till I can find other evidence against Johann Krauss. Take my horse and start for Boston."

"I have never yet disobeyed you, sir," I said firmly, "but the time has come when, as a brave man's son, I must refuse to play the coward. We will go on to New York."

He muttered disapproval, but his big hand fell on my shoulder with a touch that held pride and unwilling approval as well as fatherly love.

"Have your will then," he agreed. "What man may do for man I will do for you. But I fear—"

"Surely," urged Désirée, "*my* testimony should be of weight. I can substantiate all Craig says."

It cost her an effort, I knew, to say this. For would not such admission be a blow to France as well as forced betrayal of her own uncle? I loved her infinitely the more for the promised sacrifice, even while both my father and myself foresaw its absolute uselessness.

For, what value would such evidence as hers have? The word of a girl who had, presumably, fled her uncle's house and had avowedly spent nearly the whole period of her absence in my company?

Would not her supposed preference for me counterbalance the truth? No, her evidence would be a hindrance to all of us; a help to none.

Yet my father thanked her very graciously. I could see how touched he was by her loyal sympathy for his unlucky wretch of a son.

"The ordeal will come sooner than you expect," he resumed, as we walked on. "For, knowing from Karl the direction whence you were expected, Johann and the council figured out you would naturally come by the Sound road instead of by the highway that leads from Boston. So for ten days a guard has been stationed at Hell Gate Rock to intercept you. Johann himself spends much of his time there. And usually one or two of the council are with him. But for the heavy rains making the roads so rough, he would have sent a squad of cavalry north to meet you."

"Why is the guard posted at Hell Gate Rock?"

"On the chance you might have taken boat somewhere up the Sound. At Hell Gate, when the waters are out, as they are now, no boat may pass. So they knew you would have to land there."

"Hell Gate Rock? In another five minutes we ought to be there. Truly, this is a triumphant home-coming for the prodigal! Even in my proudest moments, I scarce expected the City Guard and its commandant would turn out to meet me!"

(To be continued.)

DECEIVED.

If the love I bore and sought
  In return were something bred
Out of adolescence, wrought
  In a young and idle head;

If it were a dream without
  Promise that could be redeemed,
Still—and though I've found you out—
  It is better to have dreamed.

Joseph Dana Miller.

The Secret of Bandy Hollow.

By EDWARD S. SORENSON.

A story of Australia, involving a discovery of importance which pleased nobody concerned therein.

SIMON CRAIG, an Australian boundary-rider, leaned lazily against the veranda post at Yarramoorie Hut, enveloped in a cloud of tobacco smoke. He was watching the novice, or "jackaroo," as he called him, preparing for a day's outing among the adjacent mountain gorges.

A cynical smile played about his lips as he noted the style of the younger man, and recalled his former trips to the same locality.

"Seems to be gettin' over-fond o' them gorges," he muttered. "Pretends to be sketchin' an' paintin', but hang me if ever I seen him fetch home a picture yet. Strikes me there's some courtin' goin' on. Notice Grace Maclean comes ridin' round 'ere a lot more lately than she useter. Shouldn't wonder if she don't meet him somewhere. Nice for him, I dare say; but it ain't ranch discipline."

The "jackarooo," otherwise Allan Banford, was a "colonial experience man" on the sheep station. He was a tall, well-built young felow, not altogether handsome, but yet prepossessing in appearance. He was blessed with a rich father, who carried on business as a wine and spirit merchant in Sydney, and held an interest, besides, in one or two far-back sheep stations.

It was this interest in pastoral matters that induced him to send his son away into Queensland to gain experience, reasoning that though there might never be any need for him to put such knowledge to any practical use, a little roughing "out back" would do the lad a world of good.

Such, at all events, was the excuse the latter brought in a letter of introduction to Mooli-ambah, old Banford's head sheep station.

Dickson, the manager, received him with very little ceremony and set him to work at anything and everything.

Allan didn't take kindly to this. He wasn't used to it and needed a lot of breaking in. He was to be sent, his father said, the rounds of the out-stations, to put in a month at each, and three months at the head station, alternately.

Thus, at the end of the first quarter he found himself stationed with Simon Craig at Yarramoorie.

Allan was fond of sport and adventure, but his favorite hobby was sketching and painting. It was his wish to take home a few pictures of Queensland's wild scenery to his little sister. At least, that was the yarn he told Simon Craig.

"Better take a 'orse," Simon said, as Allan was about to leave the hut.

"No," the latter answered, "I'd rather let him have a day's rest. He's had a hard time of it lately."

Allan secured his little "bundle-o'-tricks" to the end of a stick, which he slung across his shoulder. He carried a small box in his hand, in which were tea and sugar wrapped in paper.

At one side, thrust through a broad leather belt, swung a light tomahawk, and suspended on the other side was a leather pouch containing the smoker's usual outfit. Top-boots—to protect his legs from snakes—tight riding-trousers, a loose shirt, a kerchief tied loosely round his neck, and a broad felt hat, completed his attire.

He looked a fine, sturdy young fellow, and Craig, gazing at him, felt a pang of jealousy. He knew that Allan, with his gentlemanly ways and good looks, would play havoc with the heart of pretty Grace Maclean. He felt sorry for her, and bitter against Allan; for it must be confessed that Craig had more than a sneaking regard himself for the selector's daughter.

But who hadn't? With her sweet, laughing face and winning manner, she

never failed to impress the men from all the stations.

Even John Dickson himself had an affectionate leaning in that direction. He styled her the flower of Bandy Hollow, and it was whispered that he often went miles out of his way to call at the selection.

Craig, however, gave no credence to these rumors, but he was suspicious and resentful in regard to the movements of Allan Banford.

"He's only amusin' himself with her," he would mutter, as he sulked about the hut. "By'n by he'll ride off as gay as yer like, an' she'll be frettin' her heart out down there in Bandy Hollow."

For Simon Craig had little doubt that the object of Allan's frequent excursions toward Bandy Hollow was Grace Maclean. There were places round Yarramoorie more taking to an artist's eye than this Bandy Hollow.

Yarramoorie itself was as pretty a spot as one could wish to see. The hut stood on a little rise in a long, narrow valley, hemmed in by rugged mountains, dark scrubs, and deep, winding gorges. Here one heard the dingoes and the owls by night and the little bell-birds by day.

Craig could never understand why Allan had no desire to sketch a sunset scene from the hut, when emus came out of the scrubs and corellas flashed their brilliant colors across the grass.

II.

AFTER three hours of hard walking and stiff climbing Allan rested on the top of a tall pinnacle, looking down upon one of the loveliest spots he had ever seen. This was Bandy Hollow, a great scope of flat country enclosed within a circling wall of rock.

Below lay a dense scrub, and through the timber was a broad sheet of water running parallel with the northern wall or ridge. This was a creek, dammed at the lower end. Far below, where it ceased, he could just discern the roofs of a selector's hut and shed.

"There lives Maclean," he muttered, as he stood shading his eyes with his hand. "I should like to go down there. But what excuse can I make? I've heard a lot about Maclean, some ugly rumors, too. I've never met him yet, and until I do and see him with my own eyes, I'll put it all down to the yarns of malignant persons— Hulloa! That sounds like the tramp of a horse!"

He stood up and scanned the rugged path along the top of the precipice. Soon a big chestnut, reeking with sweat, came striding into view. Sitting gracefully upon it in a man's saddle was Grace Maclean.

She wore no habit, but was attired in a simple brown dress, and a black straw hat tied down over her ears with a silk handkerchief.

Allan stepped down to meet her.

"You're before me to-day," she said, and slipping out of the saddle, threw her arms around his neck and kissed him.

"You are late," Allan returned. "I thought you weren't coming—though you never have disappointed me," he added apologetically.

"I had sheep to take to the back of the run this morning," she explained. "We're shearing stragglers, you know."

"I see no dust," said Allan, looking again toward Maclean's home, where the yards were supposed to be.

"No! I—I suppose they're out of sheep," said Grace, a little confused. "What is Craig doing to-day?"

"Laying poisoned baits up Mingie Gully."

"I'll most likely see him, then," went on the girl. "I'll be going round near there."

She smiled mysteriously.

"He doesn't say anything about you coming this way, does he?" she added. "Or try to put you on another track?"

"No!"

"Never asks any questions?"

"No! Why should he?"

"Oh, I don't know! I thought he mightn't like your coming this way. He's a bit sweet on me, you know."

She laughed lightly.

"He never mentions you at all," Allan said. "His talk is mostly about sheep. By the bye, how many sheep has your father got? We had an argument about it the other night."

"Ten thousand," Grace answered.

"All on Bandy Hollow?"

"Mostly. There's a few scattered about on Mooli-ambah country."

"How many bales of wool do you send away?"

"Two hundred. You're very inquisitive this morning," broke off Grace tartly.

Evidently, the subject was not a pleasant one.

"Two hundred?" Allan repeated. "That's a heavy clip, is it not?"

"I suppose so. Father says they're shearing well this year."

"Was it you who told me that your father had a hundred and thirty per cent of lambs last year?"

"I'm sure I never mentioned it," answered Grace.

She colored slightly and looked down in some confusion. "You see, our place is easier managed than yours, and the sheep are better cared for. Your sheep are only seen now and again."

"That may account for our small percentage of lambs," said Allan. "But do you know that our clip just shorn only panned out as many bales as you get from less than half the sheep? But the most remarkable of all," Allan continued, "is that we only sheared twenty thousand sheep, and yet twenty-five thousand *shorn* sheep were mustered immediately after. There's been a mystery like this every year—always put down to loss account.

"The unexpected recovery of a big 'loss' this year—minus wool—caused the devil's own row, and but for my father, poor old Dickson would have got into serious trouble. You know, my father has an interest in Mooli-ambah, and Dickson is an old and trusted friend of his. A meeting of shareholders was held, and I came to Mooli-ambah to learn 'colonial experience' as the result of that meeting.

"Now, from what I have seen of the man, I believe him to be as innocent of any complicity in this unfortunate business as I am. He's very much troubled about it and does all he can to find out everything that happens on the run, but somebody is getting a lot of our wool and not paying for it. Of course, I needn't tell you, dearie, that this is all in strict confidence."

"You may trust me, Allan. Not a word of it will ever escape my lips. And now, dear, I must be going, for I've got to muster up a few stragglers for tomorrow."

"I would like to go down and have a look at your father's men shearing."

"I'd advise you not to do so, Allan," said Grace, with more seriousness than she had yet shown. "You would get a cold reception. My father doesn't like visitors. And let me tell you this, Allan: Simon Craig has been telling him tales about you and me, and father spoke to me about you yesterday. So it's best to keep away."

Allan promised to do so. When he had lifted her on her horse she leaned over the animal's neck and said: "Allan, you are not here to watch my father, are you?"

The question embarrassed the young man and he colored to the eyes.

"They don't suspect *him*, do they?" she continued, her big blue eyes fixed on the young man with a critical gaze.

"No, Grace," he answered. "I have never seen your father, but if I may judge him by what I know of his daughter, I am sure he is incapable of such a crime. As for Dickson, he told me himself that Maclean is the last man he would suspect."

"And what makes you so cock-sure of Dickson's honesty?" she asked with an emphasis on the name, saying which she wheeled her horse round and cantered away, waving her hand gaily to him as she went.

"I wonder what she meant?" Allan mused when she had gone. "To throw suspicion on Dickson? No, I don't think she meant that. According to reports, Dickson is much infatuated with my pretty Grace. And yet—well, I'm hanged if I know what to think!"

III.

ALLAN climbed down into the valley and passed along a low ridge running out toward the scrub. At the end of this, under a tree, he boiled his tea.

While he sat eating his lunch, from a dense scrub between the northern wall and the creek a flock of newly shorn sheep trotted out. Their continual bleating told him that they had just been let out of a yard. He decided to investigate.

He first surveyed the surrounding country to ascertain if any one were about, for he was now on Maclean's run, where trespassing was a crime of the worst type.

The cause of the rumpus at the station had long been public property, for shearers had carried it broadcast, and dilated upon it in transit. Any casual visitor was looked upon as a spy; even poor shearers were viewed with suspicion.

You had only to say you worked on Mooli-ambah to incur the hatred of nearly every man in that neighborhood, a state of things which many people regretted.

So Allan, under the present circumstances, had need to take every precaution—particularly as Simon Craig, his mate, had already placed him in Maclean's "bad books."

It took him an hour to pick his way round the head of the creek, whence he struck out along the sheep-track. It zigzagged so much in the scrub that it was not possible to see more than ten yards ahead; and so many vague sounds reached his ears that he found it necessary to pause at every bend to listen.

Curiosity led him on, a curiosity that somehow was kindled by Grace's remarks. Suddenly he found himself confronted by a wonderful scene, which, bursting in an instant upon his vision in the heart of a dense scrub, made a deep impression upon him.

It was a cleared space in which were many yards and pens filled with sheep. At the side, close by him, was a rough shed where shearing was in full swing. On the other side a lane ran down through the scrub in the direction of Maclean's homestead.

It was by means of this lane that the sheep were brought to the yard. When shorn, they were turned into the scrub to pick their own way out.

At first Allan wondered that Simon Craig had not spoken of the peculiar situation of the Maclean's shed, and of its proximity to Yarramoorie. He surmised that the site had been chosen for protection from wind and the prevailing dust-storms of spring and summer.

Leaning on a stump, he watched with interest the work going on. From descriptions he had heard, he readily picked out Maclean as the occupant of the third stand—a big, sunbrowned man with a bushy black beard. His dress consisted of a pair of greased trousers and a short blue jacket to match. All the men wore moccasins that were made from pieces of old woolpacks.

There were four stands in all. One was occupied by a strong, bare-legged girl, who wielded the shears as deftly and rapidly as did her father. Only in the color of her hair and the blue eyes did she resemble Grace. Otherwise she was fat, and her face was red and repulsive. Ranged side by side below her were two men, apparently her brothers.

The mother stood at the table with bared arms, rolling wool. A boy of nine acted as "picker-up"; another juvenile was picking; while an old man, whom they addressed as grandfather, was pressing.

One more completed the roll. This was a boy, whose performances were somewhat incomprehensible.

He took certain sheep off the shears, dipped them into a shallow tank of water, then rolled them in a heap of sweepings from the yard, and finally passed them through a particular gate into the scrub. They might have been shorn a fortnight as far as appearances went.

Allan's suspicions for the first time were aroused.

An old hand at this juncture would have turned back and got out of the vicinity as quickly as possible. Many a boundary-rider will tell you that, on sighting men killing sheep on the run, he has ridden wide and said nothing about it, on the plea that those men would think less of taking a boundary-rider's life than of suffering five years' hard labor in prison.

But Allan was only a "jackeroo," and now that his curiosity was whetted and his suspicions aroused, he walked boldly up to the board.

They were so intent on their work that he was almost among them before his presence was discovered. The old presser was the first to spy him, and turning his head slightly, gave a peculiar cough.

This, apparently, was a preconcerted signal, for the click of shears stopped instantly and every face was lifted.

Slowly they straightened up, holding their sheep between their knees, and stared at the intruder.

Allan, noting the black looks of the shearers, stopped a few paces from the wool-table, undecided just what to do.

IV.

THE Maclean handed his sheep and shears to the "penner-up" and came toward Allan. The others went on with their shearing.

"Good day!" said Maclean curtly.

"Good day!" said Allan. "Are you Mr. Maclean?"

"I am," the other replied. "And who are you?"

"My name is Banford—Allan Banford."

"Oh! And what do you want here?"

"Nothing, thank you. I'm simply having a look at the country," said Allan. Seeing them glance incredulously at one another, he added: "I hope I'm not committing any transgression in coming here?"

"How did you come here?" Maclean demanded suddenly.

"Purely by accident. I thought this was all virgin scrub. I beg you will excuse me—"

"Where's your camp?" Maclean interrupted.

"Well, I'm staying with Simon Craig at Yarramoorie just at present."

Maclean looked surprised, and at the same time a good deal enlightened. The mother and those about her whispered excitedly to one another, and he heard the former say: "That's the cove Simon told us about! He's a spy!"

Allan began to feel a little uneasy as the real state of affairs slowly dawned upon him.

Presently Maclean said: "Don't you know there's a law forbidding trespass?"

"I do. But I didn't know I was trespassing."

"Didn't you? Well, you're here, anyhow, and here you'll stop until we know something more about you!"

"I don't understand you!" said Allan, amazed at the impudence of the man.

"You will, by and by. For the present you're my prisoner. So just come along, and don't aggravate your offense by giving trouble."

He caught Allan by the coat-sleeve, but that young man very indignantly objected.

"Look here, Mr. Maclean, I think you're going a little too far," he said, while a bright flush mantled his cheeks.

"Doesn't matter what *you* think!" said the Maclean. "If you don't do my biddin', I've plenty here to compel you!"

Maclean was very much in earnest.

"Come with me!" he went on sternly.

Allan glanced around, and seeing all eyes fixed on him, decided that resistance would be useless and allowed himself to be led away from the pens to a spot a few yards off in the scrub.

"Put your back against that and your hands behind it!" Maclean commanded, indicating a stout hickory.

"What are you going to do with me?" Allan demanded with much inward resentment.

He had a mind, now that he was in the scrub, to knock the man down and take to his heels. But he was anticipated by Mrs. Maclean. That portly dame was leaning across a wool-bale with something pointed at him that looked suspiciously like a pistol.

"I'll see he don't try any funny bizness in there with my old man," was what she said when she picked it up. She handled the weapon, too, in a way that showed she was no novice. So the "old man" was spared a punch on the nose.

"I'm going to keep you here till night," he told Allan. "We've got no lock-up to put you in, and can't spare anybody to watch. So you'll excuse me tyin' you up."

"When night comes—what then?" asked Allan.

"The boss will be here then. He'll decide what's to be done with you," answered Maclean, as he coupled Allan's wrists behind the tree-trunk.

"The boss!" Allan repeated. "Aren't you the boss?"

"No! I'm Sam Maclean," saying which the other walked away, leaving Allan more bewildered than ever.

At this point Allan's heart leaped with joy as he caught sight of Grace, who, ostensibly, had just come in, for she was

flushed and breathless. She was attired as he had seen her earlier in the day, albeit her hat was discarded and her hair hanging down.

Beautiful indeed she was, and Allan's heart beat faster as he observed her timidly approach her father.

"Father," she said, "that's Mr. Banford!" and she looked toward Allan.

"How do you know?" Maclean asked roughly.

"I've met him several times at Yarramoorie."

"And elsewhere, too, perhaps?"

"Yes, I have met him elsewhere."

Maclean laid his hand on the girl's shoulder.

"Grace, what is there between you and this man? You told me lies the other day!"

"I thought you would stop me from seeing him," she said tearfully.

"Oh!" Maclean retorted. "You've been harboring a snake, eh?"

"No, father! He won't harm you—for my sake!"

"Hm!" said the Maclean, and for a while he looked fixedly at his daughter. "This is the reason, then, that Mr. Dickson gets nothing but sour looks lately. He thinks the world of you. He'd make you a good husband. And he's thrown aside for a cur like this. I gave you credit for having more sense. You're a fool! And you've been fooling your time away with him."

"I've never neglected my work," she responded tearfully.

There was a moment's pause, and then she asked: "What do you intend to do with him?"

"That's for the boss to decide. He'll be here to-night."

The girl hung her head with her finger to her lips. Maclean attempted to pass on, but she caught him by the sleeve.

"They won't harm him, will they?" she pleaded. "Oh, father, don't let there be—"

She finished the sentence in a whisper.

"Mind your own business, girl!" retorted Maclean, roughly. "And get away with those sheep!"

All that long afternoon her sweet, flushed face and pleading eyes haunted the prisoner, and her last words kept ringing in his ears.

He tried again and again to free himself; but his hands were tied securely with stout cord. At last he slipped them down the trunk, and sat on the ground to wait for the mysterious "boss" who was to decide his fate.

V.

NIGHT approached. It was dark and dismal in the scrub, but bright enough in the open. It was very quiet now about the yards.

Maclean sat in front of a bough shed moodily smoking his pipe. Allan wondered that he did not release him, if only for a little respite; or why he did not question him with regard to Grace after what she had told him. This did not augur well for him, particularly as he had called twice to Maclean and received no answer.

The time passed very slowly. Minute after minute ticked away, dreary minutes that seemed like hours. He heard the owls howling in the mountains around Bandy Hollow.

Then came the tramp of a horse, and soon, across the moonlit space, he saw some one ride to the shed. Maclean straightened up.

"Hulloa!" he said. "What brings you here to-night?"

"I'm lookin' for that fool of a mate o' mine," said the voice of Simon Craig.

Allan's relief was great. Simon would soon explain things, and help him out of an ugly situation.

"I called at th' 'ouse to see Grace," Simon continued, dismounting, and throwing the reins over a post. "Thought she might've come across him on the run. But she wasn't home. The missus told me to come an' see you. What's keepin' yer 'ere to this hour? Anything wrong?"

"Everything!" answered Maclean gruffly. "What's that jackeroo supposed to've been doing to-day?"

"Gawkin' about an' paintin' rocks an' gum trees! I give him a day off so's I could shoot that lot o' station 'wollies' down among your'n. He said he'd be home by sundown for certain. I s'pose the fool 'as gone an' got bushed."

"Did he ever let on that he knew anything about this business?"

"No! He knows nothin'. Nobody knows."

"Well, you needn't look any further for him! He's here!"

"Good Lord! You don't say so!" gasped Craig. "What the devil brought the fool here?"

"Accident, he says; but I reckon he's been doing a bit of spyin'. I've got him there—tied to a tree!"

"If you copped him prowlin' about 'ere, he must know everything! An' if we let him off ev'ry man Jack of us will go up!"

Allan's feelings at this juncture were hard to define. The man from whom he had expected all possible help was one of the enemy. This revelation filled him with amazement, which gradually gave way to despair.

"It's an ugly business," Maclean admitted, "and I'm hanged if I can see what we're going to do to get out of it."

"Easy as winkin'," said Craig. "It's well known to ev'rybody that he goes pokin' about the gorges takin' pictures, an' it's just wot ev'rybody would expect if he met with an accident."

"What do you mean?" the Maclean asked.

Simon lowered his voice and added hurriedly: "Couldn't he fall over a precipice by accident?"

Maclean, with a shrug of his broad shoulders, demurred.

"I've done my share of stealing sheep and wool," he said, "but murder I will never countenance!"

"It's yer only hope," urged Craig, persuasively. "It won't do to be squeamish, Sam! Better make up yer mind at once. We can't stop 'ere all night."

"It's not for us to settle," Maclean rejoined. "The boss is coming to-night. He should've been here by now. Let him decide."

Allan suddenly became aware of something brushing lightly through the bushes near him. A lithe form crept stealthily through the darkness, and straightened up close in front of him. A hand was thrust against him, and a soft voice whispered in his ear:

"You foolish boy! Why did you come when I told you not to—and you promised that you wouldn't?"

"I didn't know there was anything like this in the scrub!" Allan whispered back. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"Well, never mind! It can't be helped now. Keep quiet—I've come to save you!"

It was Grace Maclean! She kissed him once—twice; and the next minute his bonds were loosed.

VI.

CRAIG and Maclean sat by the side of a small flickering fire. Neither was in a very good humor in consequence of their little difference regarding the disposal of the jackeroo.

That worthy, oblivious of this for the time being, was at the moment deliberating as to what course he should pursue. It was a struggle between love and duty. He had been commissioned by the firm of Banford & Co., proprietors of Mooliambah Station, to discover by what means the station was being defrauded, and to bring the perpetrators to justice.

Partly through the girl whose love he had won, and partly by accident, he had unearthed the gang of robbers, and discovered the secret of Bandy Hollow. He had learned that, though Mooli-ambah possessed 30,000 sheep, only 20,000 had been accredited to it, the balance being the yearly spoil of the gang operating at Bandy Hollow.

"How long has this gang been operating?" Allan asked, as they crouched together by the roadside.

"Several years, I believe," Grace answered, "though I knew nothing about it till this shearing. I live mostly with my aunt in Brolga. I've pleaded with father; and I think he'd be glad to be clear of the business. It was hard times with him when he started here, and the boss induced him to go partners in this scheme. He gave him half the profits because, with a big family, he was able to do all the work, and Bandy Hollow was so well adapted for the purpose. The boss, I think, paid Craig a percentage of his half.

"He's coming now!" she added. Listen!"

The tramp of a horse was heard along the narrow lane. A little excited, Allan peered through the drooping boughs,

watching for the man upon whose verdict his fate depended.

He came out of the darkness, and rode at an easy jog across the patch of moonlight.

He was a big man and full bearded. Allan recognized him even before he had spoken to the men waiting by the dying fire.

"Why, that's *my* boss!" he exclaimed in an undertone.

"And *theirs*," added Grace.

Allan looked at her in blank astonishment.

"That man," Grace continued with emphasis, "is the boss of this gang!"

"What! John Dickson!" gasped Allan.

"Yes," Grace answered.

Allan was dumfounded. It seemed incredible that Dickson, whom he had thought the straightest of men, could be the leader of a band of robbers.

He was filled with conflicting emotions. At one moment he was determined to denounce Dickson, and to lay information against the whole gang at Bandy Hollow. The next moment he would think of Grace, and in fancy he would see her blue eyes fixed on him.

He loved her, loved her passionately. He shrank from the thought of branding her for life; and yet how was he to do his duty to the firm of Banford & Co. without disgracing her? And how could he marry her with that stigma on the family name?

"Damn the firm," he said under his breath. "What's a few sheep to them! This will stop now—and they have that much to thank me for!

"Grace," he said aloud, "let us get out of this. I feel that I cannot trust myself to face those men to-night. I will go straight from here to Brolga. I'll send for them to meet me there when I've considered what is best to be done. Where is your horse?"

"Down by the creek," Grace answered.

"Then we must part here. You'll go straight home, won't you? I shouldn't like them to find out that you released me."

"Don't fear for me, Allan, I'll be perfectly safe. But you—"

"I can't get lost."

"When shall I see you again?"

"In a few days. Till then—Good-by, my darling."

"Good-by, Allan. You won't think too hard of me, will you? And—I can leave them to your care!"

He took her in his arms and kissed her. In a moment he was gone.

VII.

GRACE stood for some minutes where he had left her; then, emerging from the scrub, she walked boldly up to the three men who stood together in earnest conversation.

All were surprised and no little disconcerted at her appearance. Maclean glanced apprehensively in the direction of his impromptu lock-up. Grace understood what was in his mind as plainly as though he had asked the question.

"I may as well tell you, gentlemen, that I have released Mr. Banford!"

She clasped her riding whip behind her, her bright eyes flashing defiance at the triumvirate.

"As he is the object of this conference," she continued, assuming as bold a front as she could, though she felt an inward tremor, "I have come to appear in his stead! May I ask—"

But here Maclean interrupted with a half smothered oath.

"Have you—have you—" he gasped, his face crimson with rage. "Have you dared to defy me, girl? Have you dared?"

"Yes, father, since I've heard the suggestions of that coward there!"

Turning sharply, she thrust her whip almost into the face of Simon Craig, who, alarmed at her words, retreated hastily behind the substantial form of John Dickson.

"If Mr. Banford is to be found dead," she continued, "let him meet his death without assistance!"

Mr. Dickson, with a preparatory cough, took a step forward.

"Miss Maclean," he said, "I do not wish—nor have I suggested—that he should be assisted in the way you mention. While deeply regretting this incident I—er—I desired to confer with him with a view to settling this business—quietly. We have decided to cease operations, as this sort of thing isn't—

well, it isn't the proper thing; and we've agreed to make some recompense to the young man—er—that is, if he's prepared to meet us on a friendly footing. I regret that he has gone—".

"He hasn't gone exactly," Grace broke in. "I don't think you'll find him about here to-night though. I can answer for him that what he knows of Bandy Hollow will be kept secret—for the present."

"Let the man come forward and speak for himself!" cried Maclean. "Is he a cur that he has fled and left a girl to speak for him? What guarantee have we that we are not already betrayed?"

"You have my word! Is that not sufficient?" said Grace, with resentment in her look and tone.

Maclean took a few steps forward toward the yards, stood a while with his hands behind him, then strode slowly back again. Dickson fidgeted uneasily, and coughed once or twice; Craig stood by him, mute and motionless.

"In a few days," Grace continued, "you will each receive a summons" (Craig started and turned pale) "to meet Mr. Banford at a certain place in Brolga. He will then hear what you have to say, and decide on what course of action he'll take."

"You seem to have a good deal of influence with Mr. Banford!" said Dickson. "Perhaps he might so far condescend as to permit you to decide for him."

He spoke in a slightly sneering tone, for it did not please John Dickson to know that Allan had a champion in Grace Maclean.

"It is for *you* to decide!" Grace answered. "At least," she added, "I think so."

"How?" asked Dickson and the Maclean in a breath.

Grace took two glowing firebrands from the fire, and laid them one across the other at Dickson's feet.

"Kneel there!" she said. "I want you to swear over that fiery cross that you will never again commit any act or deed contrary to the laws of your country! In return I promise to exert my influence to your advantage!"

There was a moment's hesitation, then Dickson, removing his helmet, knelt down and took the necessary oath. Maclean followed suit. The last to kneel was Simon Craig, who repeated the words after Grace awkwardly and nervously.

As they stood brushing the dust from their knees, Grace, with a hurried "Good night," disappeared.

The events which have been described in this tale occurred a long time ago. Meantime, Allan has become the leading artist of Australia. When his father died he sold out his interests in the sheep ranch to Dickson, who is honestly working out his destiny. Maclean is his foreman and Craig is an underpaid shearer.

In Allan's house in Sydney, there hangs, over the stairs, a picture of a rugged cliff. On the edge of it a man is standing, clasping in his arms the figure of a young girl. He calls it "Love at Bandy Hollow," and his wife is satisfied that it is not only an excellent portrait of herself, but the greatest picture in the world.

THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM.

Out of the past's black night
There shines one star
Whose light
Is more than countless constellations are.

High in the east it gleams—
This radiant star
Whose beams
Are more to man than all the planets are.

Still be thy light displayed,
Oh, Bethlehem star!
Nor fade
Until the circling systems no more are!

Sennett Stephens.

THE CRUMBS OF CHANCE.

By MATTHEW WHITE, Jr.

What happened to the old man whose one joy was the memory of other days.

IT was only on fine spring days like the present one that the old man could go so far.

His life had been a failure and he knew it. And yet he had committed no crime, nor ever knowingly injured a fellow being. It had all come through ill luck, and here he was now, at seventy, existing on the grudging bounty of a half-sister, his only living relative.

Memory of the past was his one resource, for the spring-time of his life had been, like this glorious May day, suffused in the sunshine of prosperity. Seated on a bench near Central Park's busy East Drive the old man loved to recall the afternoons of thirty years ago when he was one of the whirling throng, his wife by his side, and Bruce, his joy, his pride, his *son*, between his knees, his little hand on the slack of the lines, pretending to "drive for papa."

When wife and boy were taken from him with one crushing blow disasters followed thick and fast, until now he had become "old man Seeley," owing his living to sharp-tongued Caroline Bond, who made bonnets for the Four Hundred of Third Avenue.

He was more feeble than usual today by the time he arrived within the walls of the Park, and soon dropped upon a bench to rest. He was not at all certain that he would be able to reach the drive to-day. So he sat on, his head dropped forward almost upon his chest, his eyes riveted upon a patch of grass just across the path. So quiet was he that presently a squirrel trotted confidently across the asphalt, leaped up on the seat beside the still figure, and began to nose about for the expected offerings of nuts or apple.

But the old man took no heed; his mind was now busy with the joys of the past, the only surcease it had from the miseries of the present.

Some one else, however, did note Master Squirrel's docility, a tiny figure in modish sailor rig. Creeping slowly, cautiously along on the grass, the boy drew closer and closer, one tiny hand extended with a tender of cracker crumbs.

Not until the child's object had been accomplished and he was gazing rapturously at the squirrel nibbling the toothsome morsels from between his fingers was the old man conscious of this pretty tableau being enacted by his side.

The lunch vanished, the bead-like eyes cocked themselves questioningly at the boy, who in turn, still not daring to move, whispered:

"I say, have you got any peanuts in your pockets?"

Old man Seeley turned so suddenly that the squirrel was off with a leap of two or three yards, and went scuttling across the lawn.

"Oh!" cried the boy. "Now you've frightened him away. See, there he goes up that tree yonder. My! Wouldn't you like to be able to climb as fast as that?"

"I think I'd rather have a horse to drive," replied the old man, fairly devouring the boy with his gaze.

Little Bruce had been just his age when they used to take those rides in this very park.

"Oh, I've got a pony and a cart, too, and sometimes I drive myself. Not in the city, though. Danvers says it isn't safe. Don't you think he might let me hold the lines sometimes in the Park?"

"Yes, indeed, he might," answered the old man, moving along so that the boy might sit down beside him. "I used to let my little boy hold the lines."

"Right here in the city?" queried the child.

"Yes, in this very park. He used to stand up between my knees, so. Here, let me show you. Just like this. He was about your size then. But his hair was light, not dark as yours is, and—turn your face around—no, *his* eyes were blue; yours are brown."

"What was his name?"

"Bruce. And what is your name, my son?"

By now the old man had placed the small stranger on his knee.

"It's Arthur. But tell me more about your boy. Does he go to school? I'm to go next year," proudly.

"No, he never went to school," answered the old man softly. "You see, I lost him."

"Oh, tell about it!" cried Arthur, wriggling with excitement. "Did he run away?"

"No, he would never have done that. He was too happy at home. He was—was taken away from me."

"Kidnapers?" The child's eyes were round with an excitement in which eagerness jostled dread.

"No, my son, not kidnapers." The old man's voice had sunk to a whisper.

"I know," broke in the other in a tone of awe. "He died. That's what my papa almost did when he was about the size of me. Oh, it's a splendid story, better than any you can read out of books. Wouldn't you like to have him tell it to you?"

A sharp voice struck in before the old man could reply.

"Arthur, you naughty child, why did you run off? *Ma foi*, what a fright you have given me! Come home this instant. Don't you see the clouds? We're going to have a shower."

The nurse took hold of the boy's elbow with no gentle hand and lifted him from old man Seeley's knee.

"But I want him to go, too," protested the child. "He wants to hear papa tell about his adventure on the raft. Don't you?"

"I'll walk along with him, anyway, for a short distance," the old man told the nurse over the boy's head. Then to the little fellow, as they started off, he added: "You begin to tell me the story now, won't you? Your papa may not be home."

"All right," said the boy, wriggling his hand closer into the clasp of his new and strangely found friend. "You see, when papa was just about like me he and his mama went for a long trip on the ocean some place. And another ship came along and ran straight into them. It was in the night, you see, and lots of people were drowned—my grandma—of course, she wasn't that yet—and my papa was floating about in the sea, when a man grabbed him and took him on a raft. Wasn't it just like a story out of a book?"

But the old man had suddenly stopped still there in the middle of the sidewalk.

"And where was *his* father?" he asked almost sharply. "Your grandpa, boy?"

"Why," was the reply, "he never could find him again, nor any of the family."

"Come, Arthur," broke in the nurse. "Say good-by to the old gentleman, or we will get wet."

"I'll go on with you a piece farther," said the old man. "What is your name—your last name, I mean, Arthur?"

The voice quavered in its eagerness, and the faded eyes were fairly devouring the bright young face that was lifted to his.

"Healey. Arthur Healey."

"Like—very like," muttered the old man. Then eagerly: "And your papa's first name, what is that?"

"Bruce. Why, it's just like your little boy's. That's funny, isn't it? And what is your name?"

"Robert Seeley." He was just able to get out these two words, then he began to sway, caught at the railing of a stoop they were passing, and sank down on the bottom step.

"Tell me—tell me," he said faintly, "where you live. I must come and see your father."

"Why, it's right here, the next house," replied the boy. "I'll send Danvers out to help you in, and then we'll telephone for papa."

"If it could be, if it could be," the old man murmured while he waited. "And yet there is no proof. How can there be? He was but a child of five. I shouldn't know him now, nor he me. And yet there is the wreck, the name Bruce. But thirty years, thirty years between!"

The suspense, the uncertainty, the perplexity of the problem were too much for the weakened frame. His head dropped back against the stone pillar at the foot of the stoop—and then he seemed to wake up in a dream, as it were. He was lying on a couch in a room, where the furnishings were rich, the lights soft, and a sweet-toned bell was chiming six.

As he opened his eyes, they fixed themselves on a figure beside him—a man with light hair, dark blue eyes, the little boy Arthur on his knee, and a sweet-faced woman looking over his shoulder.

"Is it—can it be you are little Bruce, my Bruce?" The old man struggled to raise himself, but was pushed gently back again.

"No need to look closer father," said the young man. "Arthur here has told me of the little boy that used to drive from between your knees. That is the first thing I can remember."

"But the name—Healey? If you remembered Bruce, why could you not remember the rest?"

"I did, but I couldn't say it. I was all of seven before I learned to pronounce the letter 's.' When I told them Seeley, they took it for Healey, and the man that adopted me lived in England. But I married an American girl, and we have been here since before Arthur was born. And I have never ceased hunting for you."

"And I found you, didn't I, grandpa? The squirrel and I."

MRS. DARCY'S DILEMMA.

By CHARLES B. FREMONT.

A sequel to bridge-playing, in the way of being a leap from the frying-pan into the fire.

MRS. DARCY gazed, sadly, at the little glittering object which rested in the palm of her hand.

"I suppose that I must part with it," she sighed. "It seems to be the only way out of the difficulty. I just hate to do it; but it can't be helped. Paul will probably find out; and there will be a terrible row. Paul has such decided views on the subject of getting into debt, and he is so dreadfully violent when he is really angry. Well, it shall be a lesson to me. I shall never play bridge any more. I shall never even look at a card again. No—never!"

From which resolution it may be gathered that Mrs. Darcy had played bridge and lost. Nobody ever makes a resolution to eschew cards until fortune proves unkind.

With another profound sigh, which came straight from a remorse-laden heart, Mrs. Darcy carefully wrapped the glittering object in tissue-paper and, walking down-stairs with the air of one who goes to attend the funeral of a dear friend, softly closed the front door behind her and hurried toward the elevated station.

There she took a train down-town and halted before the door of a certain Sixth Avenue establishment, presided over by a suave gentleman named Morse.

There was a brass sign hanging over the doorway of Mr. Morse's shop, and Mrs. Darcy shuddered as her eyes encountered it.

There was something terribly sinister-looking about that sign — something which chilled the blood in her veins. Those brazen spheroids seemed to constitute a monument to human despair and degradation.

She had never before been inside such a place. She had always looked upon the business which that sign stood for with instinctive horror. She had always regarded with contempt not unmixed with curiosity, the class of unfortunates who made such a business possible.

And now she was about to join that class! She was about to link hands with the unknown persons who had been forced by stern necessity to part with the pair of faded red portières, the broken violin, the cut-glass vases, the real china tea service, the mother-of-pearl opera-glasses, and the hundred other objects which ornamented the pawnbroker's window.

She felt that she could not do it. Panic seized her and she turned as if about to flee from the spot.

But a sudden recollection of her great necessity gave her that courage which is born of desperation; and after an apprehensive glance over each shoulder to assure herself that she was not observed, she tremblingly entered the shop.

The proprietor nodded to her pleasantly. He was a little bald-headed man with a most paternal air. His manner was reassuring, and the aspect of the place also tended to restore her fugitive courage.

Until that moment Mrs. Darcy had always entertained a vague idea that the interior of a pawn-shop was replete with terror-inspiring sights. She was very much relieved to discover that, so far as conventional appearances went, there was very little difference between her present surroundings and the store of her grocery man.

It was almost with self-possession that she stepped up to the counter and inquired, "How much for this, please?"

Mr. Morse took the sparkling diamond sunburst in his hand and regarded it intently. Then he affixed a jeweler's magnifying-glass to his eye and examined each stone separately.

Mrs. Darcy stood watching these maneuvers in an agony of impatience.

"Oh, hurry up, please," she cried, nervously. "Suppose somebody should come in and find me here."

"Just a minute, my dear madam. Just a minute. Don't be alarmed," said the pawnbroker in the soothing voice a mother uses to a fretful child. "I must examine these diamonds carefully, you know. So many clever imitations nowadays."

"These are not imitations," cried Mrs. Darcy indignantly. "My husband gave me that pin last Christmas, and I know that he paid over five hundred dollars for it."

The train of thought that this remark suggested brought the tears to her big brown eyes.

"Humph! And how much do you want on it, my dear?"

"A hundred dollars, please. I'm not selling it, you understand. I'm only borrowing the money for a few days. Let us understand that thoroughly. I wouldn't part with it permanently for twenty times its value."

"Of course not," purred the pawnbroker. "I understand, perfectly. But why not take a little more than a hundred, while you're about it, my dear? I don't mind letting you have three hundred, if you like."

Mrs. Darcy hesitated. It was hard to resist such a generous offer. Her first impulse was to take this additional two hundred and seek, by its means, to win the other hundred at the bridge table. But to her eternal credit, she resisted this temptation.

"No," she faltered, "I'll only take the hundred, thank you. Please give it to me quick and let me get out of this horrid place. I'm so afraid somebody will recognize me."

"No danger of that," replied Mr. Morse. "You can go and hide in one of those little booths over there while I'm making out the ticket, if you like."

When Mrs. Darcy left the place, five minutes afterward, she was the richer by a crisp one-hundred-dollar bill and a formidable-looking pawn-ticket, and minus a twelve-stone diamond sunburst and a great portion of her self-respect.

II.

All that day she felt very wretched, and her state of mind must have had its effect upon her outward appearance, for when her husband came home that evening, he exclaimed in some alarm: "Good gracious, dear, how poorly you're looking! Anything wrong?"

"No, Paul," she answered, trying to speak in a matter-of-fact tone.

"Well, you certainly look all played out. You've been confining yourself to the house too closely. Get your things on after dinner, and I'll take you to the theater. I've got the tickets in my pocket."

Mrs. Darcy did not feel much inclined for the play that night; but she was afraid to refuse, lest her husband would be encouraged in his belief that something was the matter.

Therefore, she went up-stairs to her room and dressed, in fear and trembling. If that diamond sunburst had been reposing just then in her plush-lined jewel-case, the chances are that she might not have worn it, anyway; for she was not the kind of woman who displays her jewelry on every occasion. But the knowledge that it was not there made her feel that her attire was conspicuously incomplete without it.

And the chances are that under or-

dinary circumstances her husband would never have noticed whether she was wearing or not wearing his last year's Christmas present; for Mr. Darcy was not given to scrutinizing his wife's dress.

But it happened that on this particular night, as they were seated in the trolley-car on their way to the theater, he looked at her well-rounded figure admiringly for a second and then remarked abruptly: "Say, dear! How is it that you are not wearing that diamond pin I gave you? Haven't lost it, have you?"

She looked at him panic stricken.

"Lost it?" she gasped. "Of course not, Paul. What a silly question. I—I just didn't feel like wearing it to-night, that's all."

She noted with a sigh of relief that her unsuspecting husband appeared to be quite satisfied with this explanation, but she told herself that unless she managed to redeem that pledged sunburst very soon, her hair would turn gray with suspense and apprehension.

Her husband was so kind and attentive to her that evening that she almost regretted that she had not gone to him in the first place and, confessing that she had disobeyed him by playing cards, begged him to settle her losses.

Of course he would have been angry, but not nearly as angry as he would be if he ever learned of her visit to the pawn-shop.

So troubled was she in mind that it is probable she would have gone back to the pawn-shop the very next morning, returned to Mr. Morse his hundred-dollar bill, and reclaimed her diamonds, leaving her bridge debts unpaid for the present, if it had not been for the fact that this course was no longer possible.

She no longer had the money. She had already paid her card debts. Immediately after leaving the pawnbroker's office, she had visited Mrs. Mainwaring and Mrs. Phelps, to each of whom she owed fifty dollars, and had settled her obligations.

What the play was about that night, Mrs. Darcy never knew. She was not paying any attention to the drama on the stage. Her thoughts were fully occupied by the little drama in which she herself was unwillingly playing a star part.

Once again she registered a resolve never to touch another playing-card. Once again she made up her mind that her husband must never learn of her little transaction with the bald-headed Mr. Morse.

Fortune seemed to favor her to some slight extent the very next day. She was passing the window of a store which sold cheap imitation jewelry, and her attention was attracted by a sunburst in the show-case.

This sunburst was made of paste and bore a ticket reading: "Very cheap. Only $4.65. Experts can't tell these from real diamonds."

Mrs. Darcy noted with surprise and joy that this piece of paste jewelry was in design an exact counterpart of the sunburst she had pawned.

She eagerly entered the store, and in a few minutes the imitation diamonds had changed hands.

"Now my worries are at an end," she exclaimed joyously. "Paul will never know the difference. I now can safely leave my own pin with that horrid pawnbroker until I have saved up a hundred dollars from the housekeeping money."

A few nights afterward, when her husband again invited her to accompany him to the theater, she accepted his invitation eagerly.

After she had completed her toilet, however, and had pinned the imitation brooch to her collar, she felt more than a little anxious as she noticed her husband's keen eyes resting intently upon the paste gems.

Surely he must discover the deception, she thought, and she felt her face grow pale as she waited apprehensively for his next words.

"How stunning you look to-night, little woman!" he exclaimed. "And how that diamond pin of yours does sparkle, doesn't it? I think there is nothing like a few diamonds to set off a woman's appearance. Gives a sort of finishing touch, you know. Every time I look at that brooch—I feel glad that I bought it for you. It certainly was a great bargain. I only paid five hundred dollars for it, and I understand it is worth at least six."

At his words a smile of relief illuminated Mrs. Darcy's pretty face.

She was very happy at the theater that night, for she now felt supremely confident that her secret was safe.

True, her conscience troubled her somewhat; but she stilled it with the mental vow that never again would she allow herself to be placed in a position where it became necessary to practise deception upon her husband.

After the theater was over, they boarded a crowded Broadway car with the intention of proceeding to a certain uptown restaurant for supper.

The conductor had pulled his bell-cord for the car to go ahead, when Mr. Darcy suddenly exclaimed excitedly: "Look out, dear! Your diamond brooch! I just saw you drop it! See; there it is, lying in the roadway, there. Hi, conductor, stop the car, we want to get out!"

By a miracle of miracles, the conductor actually managed to bring the car to a stop within less than half a block. Mr. Darcy hastily assisted his wife to alight, and the pair rushed eagerly toward the sunburst, which still lay glittering upon the asphalted roadway."

But before they could reach it, a shabby-looking man darted from the sidewalk and, at imminent peril of being knocked down by numerous cabs and automobiles, hastily picked up the sparkling object and regained the sidewalk.

"Hi, there!" cried Mr. Darcy, indignantly. "That belongs to us. My wife just dropped it."

Pulling his wife along by the arm, he started toward the shabby-looking man.

The latter cast one hurried glance at Mr. Darcy's somewhat portly form and then, taking to his heels, darted down a side street.

"Wait here," gasped Mr. Darcy, almost shoving his wife into the doorway of a store. "Don't move until I come back. I'll catch him."

And, sadly out of training though he was, he started running after the fugitive, crying, "Stop thief!" at the top of his voice.

The fellow ran toward Seventh Avenue and, turning the corner, doubtless would have outdistanced his pursuer if he had not had the ill fortune to run straight into the outstretched arms of a policeman.

"Not so fast, sonny," exclaimed the bluecoat, clasping his captive affectionately around the neck.

"Hold him, officer!" gasped Mr. Darcy, badly winded, but still running. "Don't let him get away. He's a thief. He just stole my wife's diamond brooch."

Of course, the man protested his innocence and denounced his arrest as an outrage. A few minutes afterward, Mrs. Darcy joined the group. She had followed her husband instead of obeying his injunction to wait in the doorway of the Broadway store.

The Tenderloin police station was only a few blocks away, and, with the usual crowd at their heels, they proceeded thither.

The prisoner's pedigree was duly entered upon the blotter and his pockets were carefully searched.

To the surprise of the Darcys, the sunburst was not found upon him. Even after the policeman had looked under the lining of the prisoner's hat and inside his shoes, the stolen article was not discovered.

"Isn't that extraordinary!" exclaimed Mrs. Darcy. "I am sure he picked it up. We both saw him grab it."

"Oh, there's nothing strange about his not having the goods on his person, madam," said the polite sergeant, behind the desk "He probably threw it away when the chase became too hot, or he may have passed it to a confederate. I guess he's too smart a crook to be caught with the goods on him. They always manage to lose the stuff before they reach the station-house. By the way, madam, what valuation do you set upon the stolen article?"

Mrs. Darcy hesitated. Here was a dilemma, to be sure. She had paid only four dollars and sixty-five cents for the imitation gems; but she could not state that fact in the presence of her unsuspecting husband.

It was an embarrassing situation; but Mr. Darcy came to the rescue by answering the question for her.

"You can put the value down at five hundred dollars, sergeant," he said. "The diamonds were really worth more than that amount; but I bought it at a bargain."

"Very good, sir," answered the ser-

geant. "Be in Jefferson Market Court to-morrow morning at nine o'clock, Mrs. Darcy. The prisoner will be arraigned there for grand larceny at that hour, and unless you appear against him, the judge will probably discharge him."

"Oh, she'll be there," said Mr. Darcy confidently. "I'll accompany her as a witness. I saw my wife drop the brooch and I saw that rascal pick it up."

"Very well," exclaimed the sergeant. "You've got corroborative evidence. It looks like a pretty strong case—even though we can't produce the stolen property."

The next morning the Darcys appeared in court and told their story to the magistrate, who promptly remanded the prisoner to the Tombs, to be held there for "sessions."

Mrs. Darcy was inclined to drop the case at this point, knowing how little her loss actually amounted to; but her husband, of course not sharing this knowledge, and, besides, holding very rigid views on the subject of personal honesty, would not listen to any such proposition, and insisted upon his wife appearing in court again when the case came up before General Sessions.

The prisoner had managed to secure the services of a smart criminal lawyer, who fought valiantly to secure the acquittal of his client; but his efforts proved unavailing.

After brief deliberation, the jury declared the prisoner guilty, and the court sentenced him to three years' imprisonment.

Mr. Darcy left the court-room in a very elated frame of mind.

"Serves the rascal right!" he declared vigorously. "I've got no use for a fellow who is dishonest. Aren't you pleased with the verdict, my dear?"

"Yes, I suppose so," declared Mrs. Darcy, with a deep sigh. "I dare say the poor fellow deserved to be punished. But doesn't it seem an awful thing, Paul, that we should have been instrumental in depriving a human being of his liberty for three long years?"

"Not at all. Not at all!" cried her husband. "The trouble with you women is that you're too soft-hearted. The rascal deserved all he got. The police tell me that he's an old offender and has seen the inside of a prison several times. What are prisons for, I should like to know, if criminals are to be allowed to go free out of foolish sentimentality?"

"But three years is a terribly long time, Paul," said Mrs. Darcy sadly. "Don't you really think that the punishment in this case was too severe for the crime?"

"Too severe! I should say not. The penalty is prescribed by law. The court was guided by the code. Of course, the penalty was not too severe."

"But," his wife protested, "when Mrs. Alexander's gardener stole her pocketbook, he only got a year, and I remember that at the time the judge said that he was giving him the full limit of the penalty the law allowed. If such was the case, how is it that this poor fellow received such a long sentence?"

Mr. Darcy smiled indulgently.

"That is easily explained, my dear," he replied. "Mrs. Alexander's gardener committed petty larceny, while this fellow committed grand larceny. The limit for petty larceny is only one year, while the full penalty for grand larceny is five years, I believe. Do you understand now?"

Mrs. Darcy appeared surprised.

"Do you mean to say that it is petty larceny to steal a pocketbook and grand larceny to steal jewelry?" she exclaimed.

"Not exactly that, my dear. It isn't the nature of the article stolen which counts—it's the value of it. Mrs. Alexander's pocketbook contained only a few dollars. The law defines that thefts of articles of less than twenty-five dollars in value constitute petty larceny, while thefts of articles over twenty-five dollars in value constitute grand larceny. Your diamond pin was worth five hundred dollars, you see, and that is why that fellow received such a long sentence."

To Mr. Darcy's great surprise, his wife suddenly burst into tears.

III.

For several days after that Mrs. Darcy was the most miserable woman in the world. Her face gradually grew paler and paler. Her husband often discovered with alarm that her eyes were red from weeping.

He became greatly concerned as to her state of health and spoke of calling in the family physician.

But his wife begged him not to do this. The wretched woman knew that the services of a medical practitioner could not do her any good. Even the most skilled physician could not cure a stricken conscience.

And Mrs. Darcy's conscience refused to be downed. She knew now that, as a result of her all too successful attempt to deceive her husband, she had condemned an unfortunate man to a much longer term in prison than his offense merited.

Her heart was filled with horror at the awful thought. The face of the unfortunate victim of her deception was always before her.

At night-time she dreamed of that scene in court and heard the judge sternly sentencing the unfortunate wretch to three years' imprisonment; and often she woke herself by crying aloud in her sleep that this must not be.

She tried to ease her troubled conscience by arguing herself into the belief that, after all, the fellow was getting no more than his just deserts.

He had stolen the gems under the impression that they were genuine. His intention had been to commit grand larceny. Was it not, therefore, proper that he should suffer the penalty of the crime he had fully intended to commit?

But although she made desperate efforts to look at the matter from this satisfactory standpoint, she could not convince herself that this argument was anything more than sophistry.

There always remained the bitter fact that, through her instrumentality, a wretched man would be forced to remain in prison two years beyond the time when legally he should be allowed to go free.

She began to take a feverish interest in prison life. She borrowed from the public library several volumes on the subject of penal institutions.

Some of these works were illustrated. She gazed upon the pictures of gaunt, desperate-looking convicts and their cheerless prison cells and shuddered at the sight.

And to add to her agony of soul, she one day made an alarming discovery.

Her husband was reading to her from the morning newspaper about a woman who had been sent to jail for committing perjury on the witness-stand.

"It's a good thing that you took care to tell the truth when you were on the stand the other day, little woman," he remarked lightly; "otherwise you might have found yourself in the position of this unfortunate woman in the newspaper here."

Of course, he spoke only jestingly, but to his astonishment he had no sooner uttered the words than his wife uttered a loud shriek and fell fainting to the floor.

After that, a terrible haunting fear was added to her remorse and grief.

She herself was a criminal and in danger of being sentenced to a term in prison. She had gone on the witness-stand and while under oath had allowed it to be understood that the stolen brooch was worth five hundred dollars.

The enormity of this misrepresentation had not occurred to her at that time. She had not dreamed that she was committing perjury which could land her behind prison bars.

Now, however, she knew that such was the case, and the knowledge caused her to shrink in terror every time she caught sight of the blue uniform of a policeman.

Her condition at length became so alarming that her husband refused to listen to her protests any longer and insisted on calling in the family physician.

The latter came, and after he had examined the patient looked very grave.

"Your wife is on the verge of a nervous breakdown," he told Darcy. "Something must be done at once. I would advise an ocean trip, if possible. Complete rest, lack of worry, is what the patient needs. It seems to me that there must be something preying upon her mind."

Mr. Darcy shook his head.

"I don't think so, doctor," he said. "I can't think of anything that has occurred to worry her, unless—"

He stopped suddenly, and an expression of enlightenment stole across his features.

"By Jove!" he cried. "I wonder if that can be it! What a fool I am, not to have thought of it before. I shouldn't be at all surprised if I have hit upon the

real solution of the problem. Women are strange creatures!"

He went straight down-town to the office of a manufacturing jeweler.

"Last Christmas," he said, "I bought a diamond sunburst for my wife. She has lost it and, if possible, I would like to duplicate it."

The jeweler handed him a catalogue, and in its pages he found the design he sought.

"That's it," he cried eagerly. "I want another one just like it, no matter what the cost."

An hour afterward he triumphantly entered his wife's presence and took from his pocket a little white cardboard box.

"Here little woman," he said gently, "I've bought you a little present. I hope that this will cure your melancholy. I'm a brute not to have thought of it before."

She opened the package with trembling fingers, and as its contents were revealed she looked at him out of startled eyes.

"Paul! Paul!" she gasped. "Where did you get this horrid thing?"

"Horrid thing!" exclaimed Darcy in surprise. "Why, it's an exact duplicate of the one that was stolen. I've just been down-town and bought it. I fancied that you might be grieving over the loss of that brooch, you know."

And then Mrs. Darcy suddenly broke down and told him everything; begging him, hysterically, to see that justice was done to that poor wretch in prison, and, above all, to save her from the clutches of the law."

Her husband listened to her frenzied confession in petrified astonishment.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" he at length managed to exclaim. "And so that is what had been on your mind all the time, eh? You poor little thing! You certainly have been very foolish; but I guess you have suffered enough for it. Cheer up, little woman, and don't worry any more. We'll straighten this matter out all right. The district attorney happens to be an old college chum of mine, and he'll fix things without any trouble. But, say! The next time you get into debt, don't pawn your jewelry! And, above all things, don't wear any more paste gems. They're dangerous."

A DOUBLE-HEADER IN REWARDS.

By H. M. LYON.

Setting forth how the sheriff went after a desperado on a bicycle and minus a gun.

NOW this happened down in Texas, a State which is certainly large enough for almost anything to happen in; and it took place in the county of—well, we will say in Fracas County. Fracas County wasn't its name, but it might well have been; and I would much rather call the place Fracas County than call it by its real name, because—well, you see, I happen to know the sheriff of Fracas.

I know him well. He is a little man, with a large Adam's-apple and a peculiar twinkle in his eye. His face is as red as brickdust and as wrinkled as a prune, for he has spent a considerable amount of his time conversing with Texas winds and the Texas sun.

The sheriff of Fracas is cute. He will sit by the hour, out back of the post-office, his mouth full of tobacco juice; and his main occupation seems to be that of hitching one leg over another for his greater physical comfort. He doesn't appear to be the least bit heroic, but old-timers can tell you of some of the sheriff's deeds which will harrow up your young blood and make you remember the quills upon the fretful porpentine.

That was not so many years ago, either. But now there is an anti-pistol-toting law, and there are editorials in the newspapers calling upon the young bloods of the county to desist from letting daylight through one another. Thus the sheriff's calling seems to have fallen on sere and yellow days.

But it has not. As I have said, the sheriff has grown cute; he still gets his men, but he does it in a different fashion.

And that brings me to the story of the Nueces Kid.

A decade ago, in the early '90's, the Nueces Kid was making it hot for all the territory about that river from which he drew his name; and I need hardly add that Fracas County and the sheriff of Fracas were both in that territory. The Kid was a daredevil, le m the olden days to taunt a newer civilization. He had all the old element of mystery and romance about his comings and goings. It was rumored among the Mexicans that he rode a winged steed, for he would be heard from in two different parts of the State at once!

Early of an afternoon the report would come in that the Kid had held up and robbed a miserly old cattleman and given the money with a lavish hand to the poor women of the neighborhood; and inside of three hours a poor negro cowboy would dash into town, saying the Kid had held him up fifty miles from there, had deprived him of a few paltry dollars and his gun, and had commanded him to ride into town and give his (the Kid's) respects to the sheriff.

On one occasion the Kid had turned over to a struggling Baptist minister all of his week's loot, saying it was a sort of "conscience fund"—and, not twenty minutes later, he rode up from an entirely opposite direction and deprived the clerical gentleman grandly of the whole sum. Such contradictory actions seemed impossible. Yet every victim gave exactly the same description of the desperado as to height, looks, outfit, and so forth; and every one of them was visibly in earnest as he did so.

The sheriff of Fracas was cute. He sat out back of the post-office with his legs crossed while reports such as these came in thick and fast: "Compliments from the Kid." "Would the sheriff like to come out and get him?" and so forth. By one victim the Kid sent in word that if the sheriff would borrow ten dollars —enough to make the little adventure worth while—and would announce the day that he had the borrowed money on his person the Nueces Kid would be glad to attend at once and relieve the sheriff of his "pile"!

Meanwhile, though the grumbling citizens could get no relief from that complacent limb of the law, they organized posses themselves, and thrashed the country for miles around. All to no use, however, for it seemed the Kid could split in two ways at once while they were still pursuing him, and could continue his depredations simultaneously from both ends of the county. The sheriff was publicly denounced. He was threatened with sure defeat at the polls, in case he stood for re-election. And all the time he ruminated over his quid, his Adam's-apple calmly bobbing up and down, his eye twinkling just the least bit more peculiarly.

The Governor of the State made the next move—he authorized a reward.

"Five hundred dollars for the outlaw known as 'The Nueces Kid,' *dead or alive!*" That was the way the handbills read.

Then, and not until then (though the reader knows I do not mean to impute mercenary motives to my friend, the sheriff) did that worthy arise from his seat in the rear of the post-office, gird up his loins, and prepare for the search. It *may* have been that he was awaiting the publication of this almost certain reward; it *may* have been that he was simply waiting for a small box which came to him that day by express from El Paso. *Quien sabe?*—as any good Mexican would remark.

At any rate, the sheriff certainly had a scheme in his mind. For the sheriff was cute, as I have already told you; and he was an old hand at the outlaw game; and he knew his business very, very well.

You would probably have had your faith in the sheriff completely shattered, however, if you could have seen him making his preparations that day. The first thing he did was to divest himself of his gun. Imagine a as sheriff going out to bring in a desperate man-killer without even so much as taking his gun with him!

The inhabitants of the good little town gathered around the post-office in wide-eyed amazement, and some pointed their fingers significantly at their forelocks, murmuring something about a "touch o' the sun." Others attributed it to the sheriff's old age (though I may as well say right here that he is still

holding down his job out in Fracas), and still others whispered vague hints about not enforcing the prohibition law as it ought to be.

But if their wonder was excited by such a move, can you conceive of their surprise when they saw him depart down the street, dive into a little shop, and emerge some fifteen minutes later clad in a sweater, a cap, and a pair of knickerbockers? Gone were his leather-stitched trousers, his sombrero, his blue flannel shirt and his old red neckerchief. Instead, he looked like one of those cross-country travelers bent upon going by foot from New Orleans to San Francisco for a wager. Gone, too, was his long, drooping, sand-colored mustache. Save for the Adam's-apple, the twinkling eye and the quid, the sheriff of Fracas was unrecognizable.

And still his preparations were not finished. When one of the boys in the crowd offered to go over and bring his horse around for him, the sheriff waved his hand contemptuously and said:

"Nope. Let the pinto stay thar. I've got another notion for the Nueces gentleman that's been so kind in his offers to me."

"Jack, are you plumb crazy?" asked the postmaster, as spokesman for the crowd of gaping townsmen.

"Nope, not yet. But I will be, if you fellers stand there lookin' that way much longer," was the terse response.

"What d'ye intend to do, then?" was the next query.

"I intend to borry that there bicycle of yourn, if you'll let me have it," said the sheriff to the postmaster.

"Are you a goin' after a desperado on a bicycle, an' without no gun?" guffawed the nonplussed villager.

"I am," was the modest response of the sheriff. And the vehicle being provided, he rode off down the street to the express office.

Some one at once bethought himself of the strange box that had come that day, but could suggest no solution of the mystery. Nor was it any further solved by the appearance of their sheriff, whom every one now believed to have gone entirely insane (whether from thoughts of the reward or not, I refuse to say). In fact, if anything, the good people were more than ever distressed to see him walk out of the station carrying a bicycle pump gingerly in his right hand.

Scarcely had he come back to the group, when a cow-man dashed up, his horse in a lather, and yelled:

"Quick, sheriff! The Kid's only half a mile out o' town, right now."

Like a flash, the officer of the law was in the saddle of his rubber-tired steed.

"Follow me in ten minutes, boys!" he shouted, as he flew over the road toward the direction indicated, all traces of his old idleness gone.

And now let us leave his friends in suspense, as they are, and follow the erratic sheriff. He had not gone a quarter of a mile before he saw his man, standing beside a pony, and occupying the middle of the trail. As the wheelman drew nearer, he could see that the horseman was inspecting his mount carefully. Something had gone wrong with the steed's left front leg. Curiously enough, at the very moment the disguised sheriff wheeled into speaking distance, something went wrong with *his* steed also. The front tire unfortunately went flat, and the rider dismounted with a loud curse.

The Kid, who had been engrossed in examination of his pony's leg, wheeled at once, his hand on his gun. Then, when he saw that the oncomer was merely a cyclist, evidently unarmed, he gave a hearty laugh and said:

"Wall, whar 'd youh git that nag, my frien'?"

"Got it in Houston," squeaked the sheriff, in a disguised voice. "An' I'm hanged if I wouldn't like to shoot the feller that sold it to me. This is the dozenth time she's gone an' broke down on me sence I started out."

"What all's the matter — hamstrung?" jested the Kid.

The sheriff ignored the joke.

"It's that blamed front tire gone flat agin. I don't know what's the matter with it. I've pumped it up an' pumped it up, until I'm blue in the face"—here he waved the powerful foot-pump in the air—"but it don't seem to do no good. I couldn't get no help at that town back there. They're all worried to death about

some shooter they call the 'Nueces Kid' —say he's comin' in to blow up the place —an' they won't pay any 'tention to nobody else."

The Kid appeared interested.

The cyclist went on, in a quavering voice:

"I don't s'pose you know anything about sech a machine as this, do yuh?"

"Wall, no, can't say I do," replied the Kid, strolling over interestedly, and squatting down alongside the front tire to take a good look at it, "but I don't mind learnin'."

"Wall," snapped the sheriff, in his own voice, "what part of yuh would yuh jest as soon learn it in?"

The Kid faced around with a sudden suspicion. Up came the bicycle pump. There was a sudden swish and a squirt, and the pride of the Nueces was rolling in the dust, spluttering, blinded, and almost unconscious, while a keen, penetrating odor drifted up and away over the prairie. Ammonia!

The sheriff leaned over his man and chuckled. The mystery of the express-box was solved.

Here came the whole village down the road, too, at breakneck speed. He stood up, smiling, expecting congratulations, but he saw panic in their faces.

"Hurry, sheriff!" gasped the foremost citizen. "The Kid's in the town now! S'elp me bob, he disarmed every one of us!"

As the officer of the law stared in amazement at the news, so did his informant stare at the recumbent body. The latter turned, and as soon as he could get his voice, yelled:

"Come on, men, he's got the Kid!"

There was a pell-mell rush; then a babel of voices.

"That's what he has! Look!"

"That's the Kid, all right; but we left him in the town!"

"He's back there! I guess I know! He took my gun away, didn't he?"

"Go see for yourself!"

"This is him, all right!"

The man in the dust stirred uneasily.

"Here, you fellers!" exclaimed the sheriff, snatching a handkerchief from a man's neck and soaking it with the fluid from the bicycle pump, "just you hold this over his nose and bring him back to town. I'll go see about this other bizness. Hanged if they don't make a man do all his work over again these days. Useter be different in the good old times. Gittin' so now a man's got to go around capturin' a whole county afore his feller-townsmen is satisfied. Wall," he continued, as he picked up the wheel and started to trundle it back to the post-office, "this is the last time I'm goin' to take this man today—whether y'all like it or not."

Fifteen minutes later, a weary, dusty wheelman trudged up to a lone gentleman sitting in front of the town saloon —a lone gentleman who held both guns cocked and a vigilant eye on the entire surrounding vicinity. But it wasn't the display of artillery which nearly made the cyclist fall over in a faint. Before him stood—or, rather, sat—the living, breathing image of the man whom he had just a moment ago so bloodlessly overcome a half-mile up the road!

"Howdy," he remarked feebly. The apparition chuckled.

"You're a nice-lookin' specimen, ain't ye?" it began. "What air yuh doin' with that there flabbergasted mowin' machine? Never mind answerin' *that*," he interjected sharply, as the man beside the wheel started to open his mouth. "What I want to know fust is, did yuh see any frien's o' mine headed out yore way on a dead trot?"

"Mister," began the sheriff meekly, "I certainly did; an' I want to say, right here—"

"Never min' what yuh want to say!" commanded the other sharply. "I know all I want to know out o' you."

If the sheriff, under his disguise, had thought he was in communion with a ghost, he was now relieved of any such fear. For the supposed astral body shoved a large, material gun under his ear and invited him into the saloon to have a drink.

"Whoop!" said the triumphant victor, "it's on the town. Yuh must take one on the town every time yuh git a chanst!"

"B-b-but I-I-I'm not a drinkin' man," stammered the sheriff humbly. "I don't take nothin' but sassparilla or lemmynade." Nevertheless, he followed his captor into the barroom.

"Yuh'll drink with *me,* though," asserted the man behind the gun genially. "An' when yuh drink with me yuh drink good old *aguardiente,* too—*sabe?* Come on." Then, noticing that his captive carried no weapon save an innocent bicycle pump, he commanded: "Git aroun' behin' that bar, frien', an' do the servin'. Yuh look more tuh me like a bartender than yuh do a wheel-racer, anyhow."

Complaisantly, the little sheriff obeyed. He set the pump down in front of him, spread out his arms, and said, in his best manner: "What'll yuh have, sir?"

"Whoop-ee! That's the way to talk. I'll take w'isky," the other ordered, leaning over to pat his new recruit on the shoulder.

"W'isky? Very well, sir," said the sheriff, the twinkle coming into his eye, and his Adam's-apple traveling perpendicularly like a shuttle, "an' won't yuh have a little seltzer on the side?"

"Seltzer?" queried the outlaw incomprehendingly, it being a new drink to him. "What's that?"

"This is it!" barked the sheriff, quickly grasping the faithful pump.

Again there was the ominous swish and squirt; again the penetrating odor arose; again the Nueces Kid (or whoever he was) fell unconscious to the floor. The little sheriff looked down grimly, as a man who is through with his work for the day; and as he stood there in silent contemplation of this second "Kid," his friends came, bringing back the first victim, still unconscious.

Side by side they were laid out on the front sidewalk.

"Twins, by Judas's priest!" muttered some one.

The sheriff snapped the handcuffs on them. "That explains all this mystery business, I guess," he said, with satisfaction.

During the ominous silence which followed, the town wit broke in with:

"Sheriff, I reckon yuh know yuh won't git the reward that away, don't yuh?"

"Why not?" he asked.

"'Cause it says 'dead or alive,' and they ain't neither one. They're unconscious—betwixt an' between!"

"Wall, I thought yuh had another answer, Mister Smart Aleck," was the quaint response of the officer, as he rolled his quid again. "I thought yuh meant I wouldn't git the five hundred, because I'll git a thousand—which is exackly what I mean to do. I'm going to deliver up one Nueces Kid at a time, yuh see. An' as for the 'alive or dead' bizness, I have the privilege of waitin' until they come to, or else of knockin' them in the head, haven't I?"

CHARACTERISTIC.

THE balladist sat in his easy-chair,
And he rolled his eyes, and he stroked his hair,
And he said, "By my muse, 'tis a splendid thought,
Unique, and no sooner penned than bought.
It is sure to be crowned with a great success,
And will reach them just as they go to press.
It will tickle the editor's soul, I know,
Because it's so happily *apropos!*"

The editor sat in his easy-chair,
And he rolled his eyes, and he tore his hair,
And he said, "By my word, at this time of year
By dozens and scores these things appear!
All written by one familiar rule,
And every one ends with 'April Fool';
But they serve the balladists' bent to show
Because they're so happily *apropos!*"

Frederick F. Bristol.

SWIFT TRANSITION.

By JOHN QUINCY MAWHINNEY.

A plunge from the heights of gratified ambition and a strange sequel thereto.

"WHAT!"

The word burst from the colorless lips of Franklin Simms after the fashion of preserve-jars exploding from fermentation, and his general aspect became that of a condemned criminal waiting for the trap to drop from beneath his feet.

With trembling hand he grasped the back of a friendly chair, into which he sank, weak and fairly exhausted by the bit of information he had just heard.

And all on account of a small newspaper item of which he was author—his first real effort, which, several hours before, he had read, edited, and reread with pardonable pride countless times before he had allowed it to go to press. And now!

But to go back. Simms was a dramatic reporter—that is, he ran his legs off, almost, in search of live news concerning the various theaters, their stars, and plays within a radius of several miles of his paper, the *Intelligencer*.

He was a hard worker—too hard, in fact—and with an ambition to some day be a real dramatic editor, his labors knew no pause. As it was, he was progressing rapidly, for did not his chief allow him to "hold down" the editorial desk whenever the said chief wished to absent himself on his own pleasure — which was often—and was not said Simms, although new in the position, permitted to use his discretion as to what news was to be printed without worrying the head of the department about it?

Answer, yes; and it was this very discretion that precipitated the industrious news-gatherer into his present uncomfortable state of mind.

With his usual alertness, and with his newly acquired walking-stick, he had dropped in at the Fordley Theater the evening before, with ears opened wide and eyes inquisitive, a seductive smile on his lips.

Yes, as luck would have it, there was "something doing" on that particular evening. The star had taken suddenly ill, and the understudy was being accorded the chance of a lifetime.

"And she's making good," declared the manager, trying to bias Simms's opinion as they passed into the auditorium; but the reporter was not to be deceived—he knew too much about good acting and the other kind, and, besides, did he not some day expect to be a critic and judge entirely for himself?

He would do it in this case—and he did.

Hurriedly he returned to his office. Invariably, when an understudy had taken the star's rôle on short notice, he or she had surpassed the star in every way—at least, so the papers had invariably written of them.

But was Franklin Simms to use these precedents as models? Not on your life. A departure for his. The understudy in this particular case was bad, and so he intended to write, even though she were a woman.

And so he wrote. Happily, his chief being away, the article would go through without mutilation, and, with this knowledge in mind, there flowed from his pen line after line of biting criticism.

He would show them that they could not deceive Franklin Simms by putting the star's part into the hands of one who "mouthed her words as though her teeth were false, moved without grace, and acted with the finish of an untutored amateur."

He remained at the office until his paper came out, in order that he might read his first real criticism in print, and after perusing it several times, confident in his own mind that his chief could not have done it as well, he went home and to bed.

Now, it so happens that dramatic editors, through their close association with

the theater, often become enamored of the gentlewomen thereof, and not infrequently pick from the stage a helpmate for better or for worse; and it incidentally so happened that the wife of the dramatic editor of the *Intelligencer* was an actress playing at the—

What was that?

Simms was roused from bed by a telephone call. It was his chief, who always read his paper with his breakfast. Simms surmised immediately that there must be something wrong, judging by the angry tone in which his chief demanded if that were he.

"What is the meaning of this article about Kathryn Sweete in the *Intelligencer* this morning? What in the world ever possessed you to write such a thing? Say, have you brains in your head or is that cranium of yours a vacuum? Hey?"

"Why—why," faltered Simms, rather bewildered, "it's nothing but the truth. I—"

"The truth!" shouted back his chief over the wire wrathfully. "Wait till I get to the office; and meet me there immediately, you blithering numskull. I'll show you! Do you know who Kathryn Sweete is?"

"Yes," retorted Simms, with a tinge of asperity, stung to the quick by his superior's words. "I know she is a mighty poor actress."

"Shut up!" yelled the man at the other end. "Don't you know that Kathryn Sweete is my *wife?*"

"What!" exploded Simms, then gasped for his breath. And this is the same "What!" that opens this little tragedy.

After he had succeeded in recapturing sufficient energy to stand upright, he dressed and made his way to the newspaper office. During the journey his mind was filled with many thoughts. All was gone—his prospects, everything. He would write his resignation before his chief arrived.

How cruel Fate could be when she wished—how inconsiderate! Just a few little words, and see what trouble they had stirred up.

How was he to know that Kathryn Sweete was the wife of his chief when he had not been working for the dramatic editor long enough to find out about his domestic ties? He wiped the perspiration from his brow and entered the office to hear his doom.

Sitting down at the typewriter, he was in the act of composing his letter of resignation when his superior entered. Simms rose hurriedly, and went respectfully toward him.

"Mr. Denton, I beg a thousand pardons," he began.

But the chief stopped him with a wave of the hand.

"Simms, beginning next Monday I'll raise your salary five dollars a week," was the astounding reply, and then seeing the puzzled—nay, amazed—expression on the reporter's face, Mr. Denton continued.

"You see, my wife has been on the stage only a year or two, and after we were married I asked her to give it up. But she was so imbued with the belief that some day she would be a Bernhardt that she refused. Your criticism finished her, and she has decided to resign, much to my satisfaction."

"But — but —" interrupted Simms, hardly able to believe what he heard, "your call-down over the telephone. You certainly were angry—"

"Just a bluff," laughed the editor, winking. "Kathryn was in the room with me. I know she is a poor actress, but of course I wouldn't agree with you in her presence. Have you had your breakfast?"

Simms hadn't, so he went out and bought a dollar's worth.

MILESTONES.

DEEP in a dream wherein thronged hopes and fears
Did I behold strange monoliths uprise;
I questioned one, who said, "They are the years
That mark the highway of the centuries."

Clinton Scollard.

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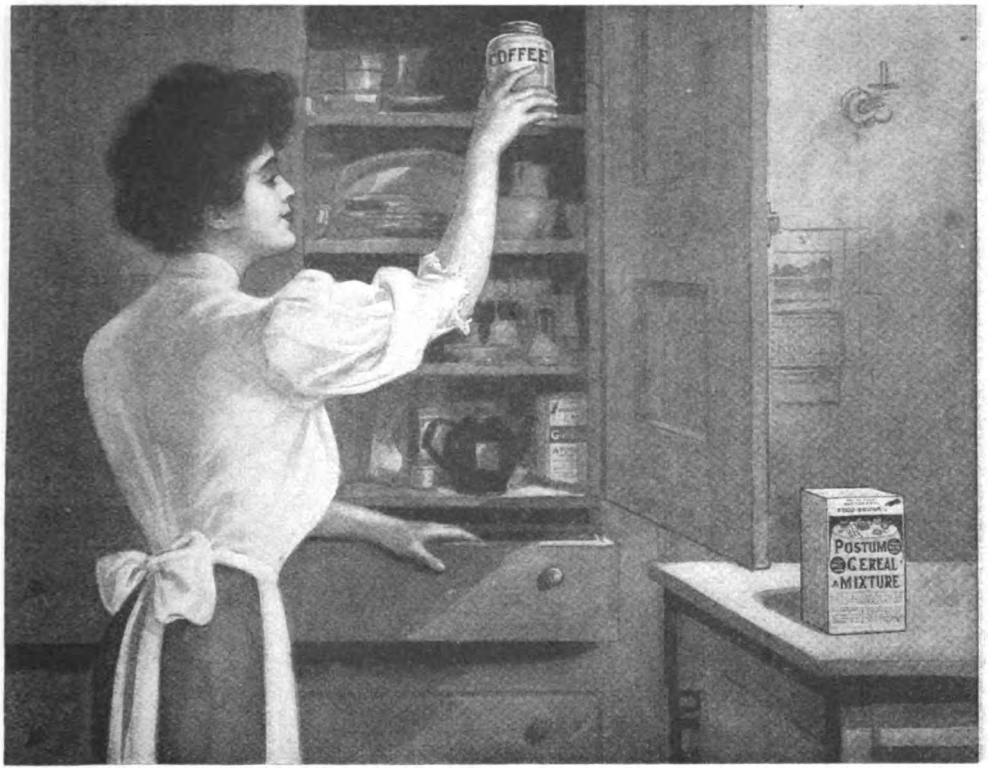

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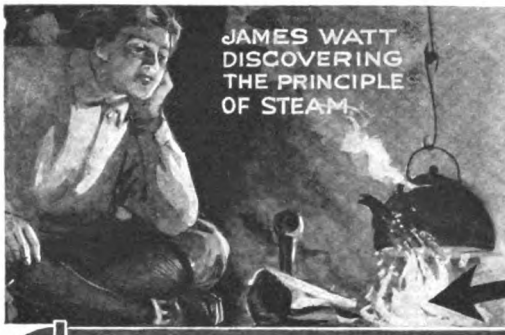

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THEN

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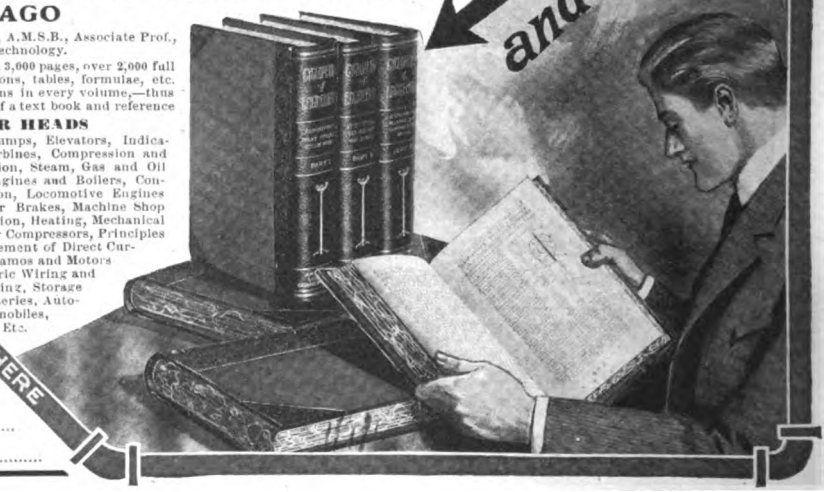

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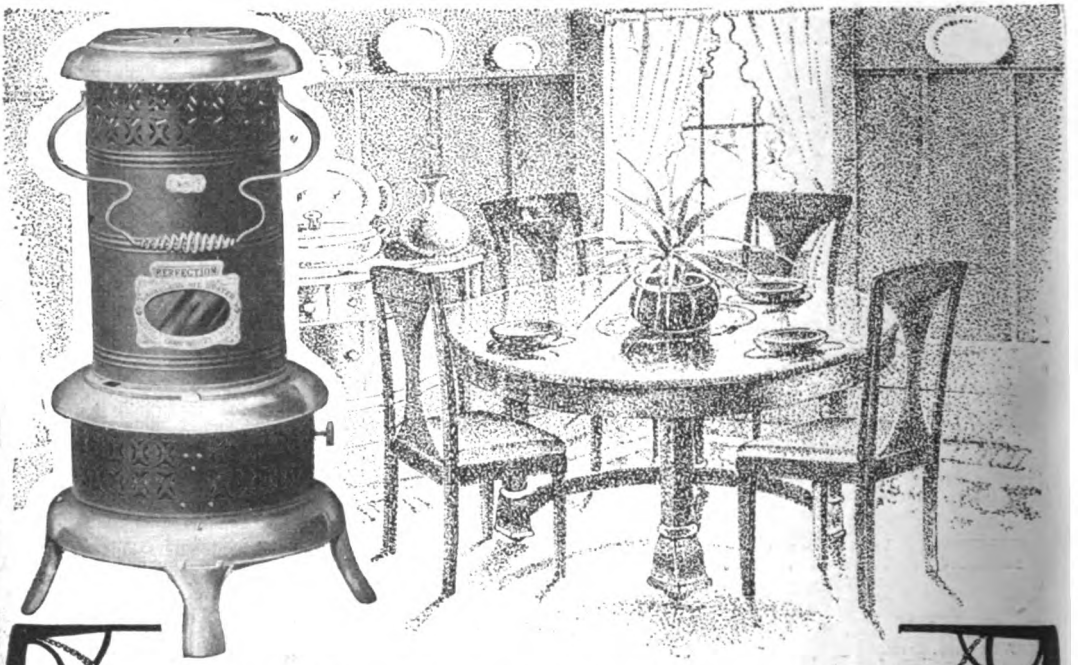

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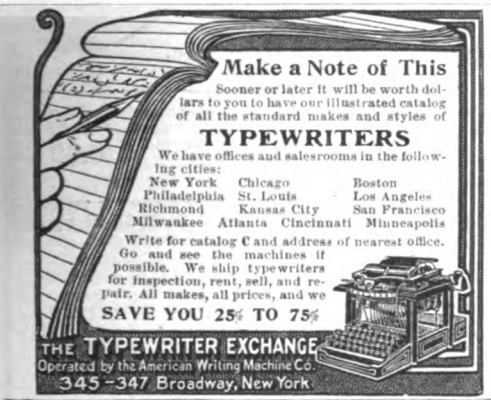

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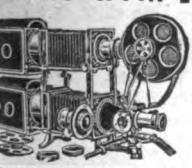

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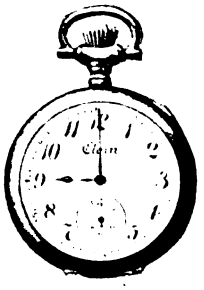

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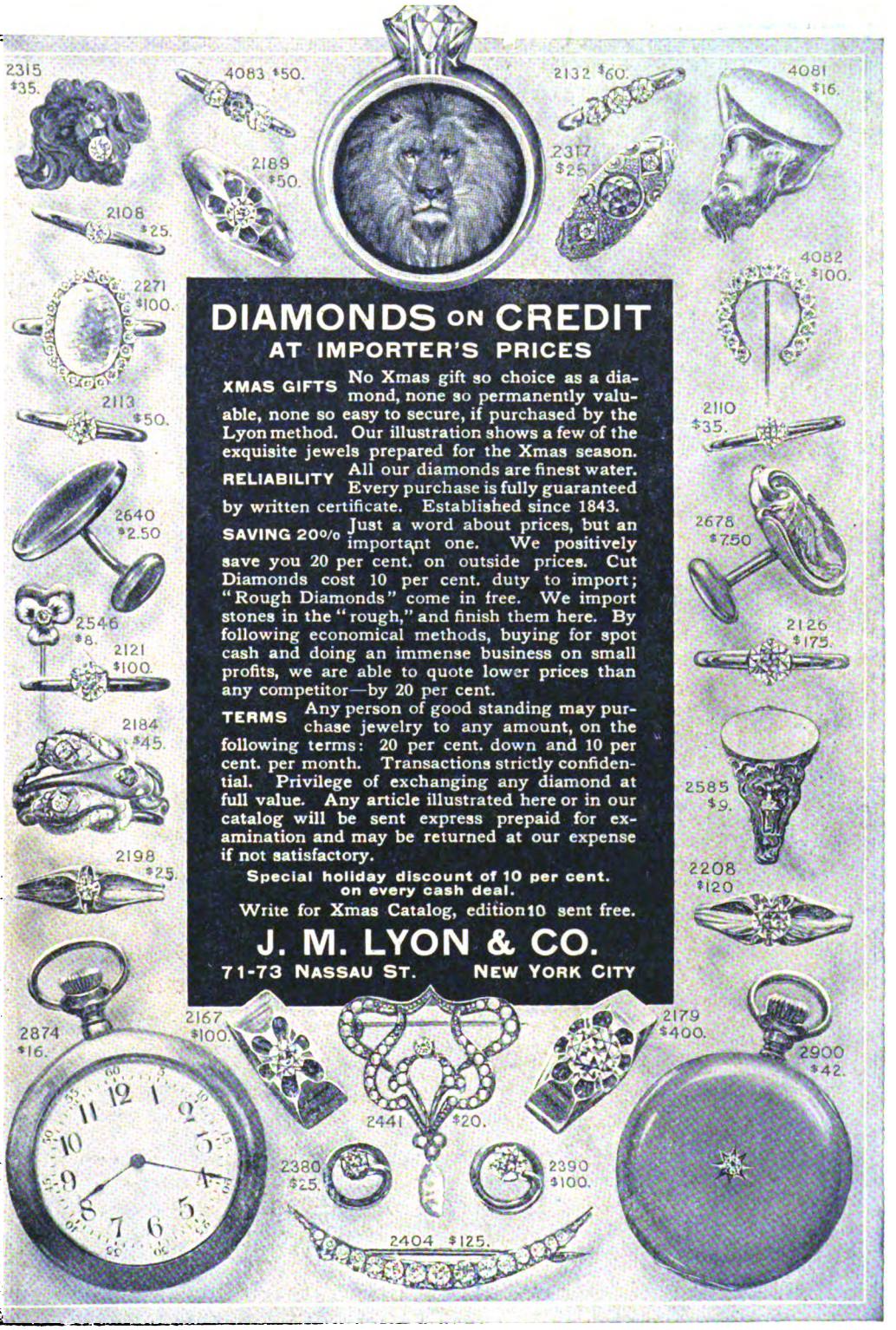
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