BIGGEST MAGAZINE IN THE WORLD

JAN., 1907 — 224 PAGES READING MATTER — 15 CENTS

The Popular Magazine

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Ainslee's for January

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It is the purpose of the publishers, constantly kept in mind, to make up AINSLEE'S MAGAZINE every month with a table of contents which shall embrace as many different types of fiction as can possibly be collected. Entertainment is the object of the magazine, and "no pleasure endures unseasoned by variety."

Thus the new year will be begun with a list of stories that will meet and satisfy every conceivable kind of taste.

The novelette is a most delightful tale of woman's charm and man's self-renunciation. It is by **EDITH MACVANE,** a characteristic story with a French atmosphere which the author has made her own and is probably the best thing she has ever done. It is called *"The Matchmaker."*

B. M. SINCLAIR will have a Western story, *"The Red Ink Maid,"* which for strength, romantic beauty and originality has not been surpassed by any of the noted writers who deal with that absorbingly interesting section of the country.

ANNE WARNER will have an immensely amusing story called *"The Bride's Prevision,"* which tells of some of the funny experiences that weddings bring to the relatives of the brides and grooms.

A charming story of child interest, entitled *"The Mistletoe,"* will be contributed by **GEORGE HIBBARD.**

GEORGE RANDOLPH CHESTER'S story, *"The Substitute Clown,"* is one that has enough solid entertainment to fill two or three books. He has had a great many stories published, first and last, but he never excelled this one.

An absorbing story with an element of mystery in it is *"The Stoneboro Service,"* by **CHURCHILL WILLIAMS.**

"Yesterday's Reckoning," by **JANE W. GUTHRIE,** is an extremely strong story of the conflict of masculine and feminine wills.

KATE JORDAN will contribute another very strong tale, *"In Snow and Candlelight."*

Other stories will be by **JOHNSON MORTON, CONSTANCE SMEDLEY** and **MARTHA McCULLOCH WILLIAMS.**

MARGARET SUTTON BRISCOE will have another of her charming *"Visions of an Optimist,"* and **MARY MANNERS** will have an essay on *"Characters and Consequences."*

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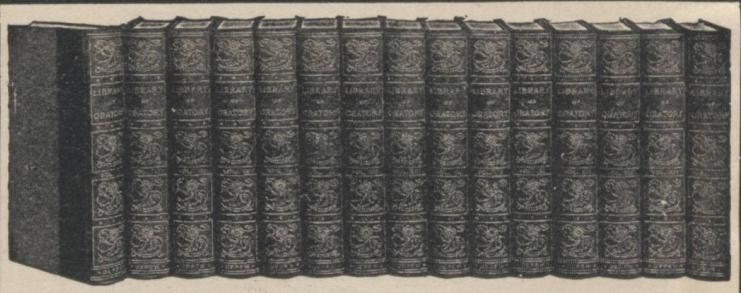

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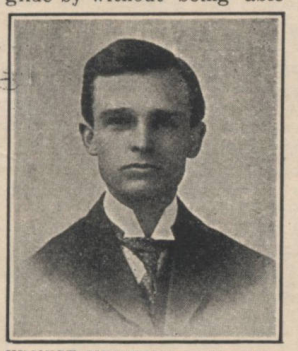

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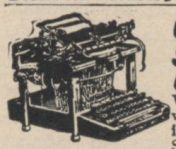

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1171

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CITY.....

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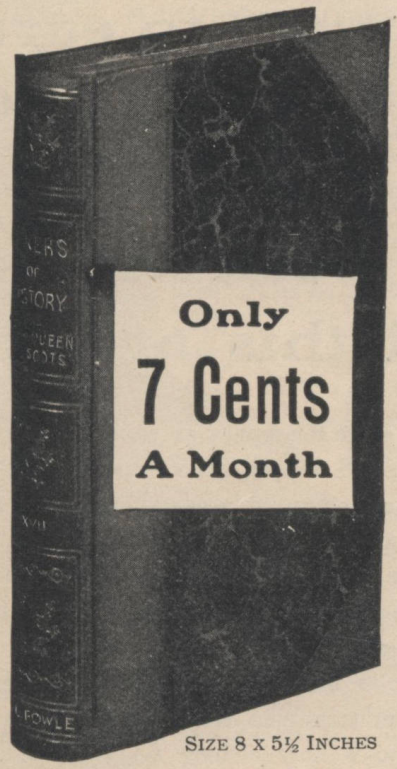

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The Popular Magazine

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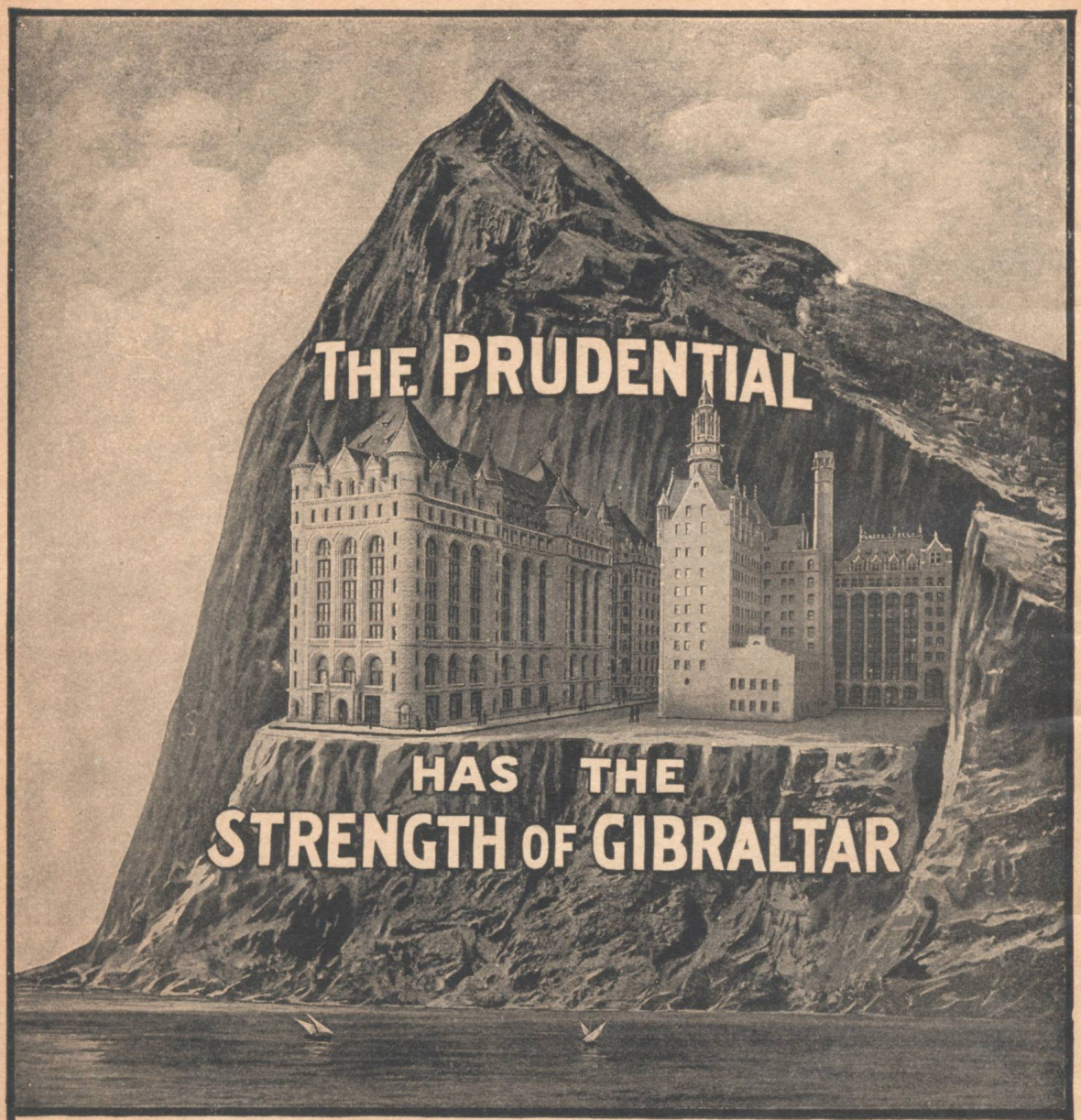

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. VII. JANUARY, 1907. No. 3.

Adventurers Extraordinary

By George Bronson-Howard

Author of "Norroy, Diplomatic Agent," "The Girl of the Third Army," Etc.

We are confident that your verdict will be, "uncommonly good," after reading Mr. Bronson-Howard's new novel, which the enlarged "Popular" permits us to print complete in this issue. The plot—a most ingenious one—has to do with a little company of Americans who find strange adventures in the China Sea and accidentally come upon a dastardly scheme against the welfare of the United States. You will be interested in the recital of how the "adventurers extraordinary" set about thwarting the scheme, and what came of their efforts.

(*A Complete Novel*)

YOU who look for romance might gaze and gaze again upon the spectacle of four men and one girl in bathing-suits, and, unless your imagination be highly developed, there would seem to be no chance for a romance growing out of the mere fact that they *were* in bathing-suits. Yet, if they had not been, this series of adventures would not have befallen them; for in that case they would——

But, after all, you are not quite ready for what befell. Simply to say that they were in bathing-suits, and that they were four men and a girl does not convey any idea of their personalities to you. And unless you are interested in them, you hardly care whether they were in bathing-suits or in kimonos. To be brutally frank, two of them did not look well in that abbreviated attire. There was Pursey Ochs, for instance, who was ridiculously stout—not fat, mind you! only stout—a sight of whose calves inspired instant and respectful admiration to the exclusion of other portions of his rotundity. There, too, was Schlauss Hyman, A. B., M. D., B. Sc., (and some other things which elude our memory) who was, not to put too fine a point on it, skinny; and a spectacle of whose large head and features on his insignificant frame was somewhat amazing. Also——

It would appear that fate wishes to have them in the sea before their time; so to circumvent that stern lady, we will forget all about those same bathing-suits for the moment and antedate the donning of them by some little time—say a few hours. At the particular moment in question Pursey Ochs, Schlauss Hyman, and Hopworth K. Dreen sat in the smoking-room of the P. M. S. S. *Sultana* and discussed matters appertaining to the human soul,

what was best to eat, and Miss Dorothy Gordon. They also spoke of other things, many other things; and they included Mr. J. B. Brent among the things. They did not like Mr. Brent overwell.

The men had never met before they boarded the boat at San Francisco; but Schlauss Hyman and Pursey Ochs had heard much of one another, for they were both very well-known men. Mr. Ochs edited the *Daily Star,* of St. Louis, and had become a national figure in the last presidential election because of the verbal vitriol hurled by him at one of the candidates. Mr. Ochs was an iconoclast, and never happy unless he had something to smash. He was a young man, hardly more than thirty, and had won his way upward from the ranks by sheer force of personal magnetism and ability. He was, as has been before stated, stout. He acknowledged this, but denied indignantly that he was fat; and, after all, he should know.

Schlauss Hyman was in his own little niche of fame through having successfully operated on a semi-billionaire's daughter when the specialists of America and Europe had given her up for lost. At that time no one had heard of him; afterward he made it generally known that he could be seen by appointment only, and even that kept him very busy.

When Dreen recalled himself to them, they remembered him, too; for Hopworth K. Dreen had been somewhat famous through the sporting-pages of the newspapers of some five years before, when the gridiron of Old Eli resounded with his name, yelled from thousands of throats. He had been half-back on the eleven at the time. That was his day. After he left college he was surprised that people forgot him so quickly. That was his grievance. His father had left him many thousands of acres of cattle-grazing country in Wyoming; and he spent some of his time upon them, interfering with the foreman and the manager.

He was a large-framed, handsome fellow with a crop of auburn curls that fell over his forehead, which, to tell truth, was none too high and receded a trifle. He was very proud of his enormous strength, and was forever calling attention to it. His nose was quite Grecian in its chiseling, his mouth much too small, and his eyes were gray, large, and luminous. He was a very vain young man, with an idea that women were made for the sole purpose of admiring and loving him.

His was the chief grudge against Mr. J. B. Brent, for Mr. Brent had, to a certain extent, removed the fair flush of health from the last idea. Mr. Dreen did not like Mr. Brent at all.

"Oily beggar," said Mr. Dreen. "But some women have such mighty poor taste!" He was referring to Miss Dorothy Gordon. The remark was called forth by looking through the port-hole nearest him and seeing Miss Gordon and Mr. Brent passing, arm in arm, Brent talking and Miss Gordon listening with flattering intensity.

"What's that?" asked Pursey Ochs, clicking his tongue against the butt of his cigar and getting it into a corner of his mouth. He was never known to touch his cigar with his fingers after once placing the weed in his mouth. He closed one eye to keep the smoke out of it, and looked at Hopworth K. Dreen. "What say?" he asked.

"Nothing," replied Mr. Dreen sulkily. He picked up a book which Ochs had laid face downward on one of the little card-tables. Carelessly he turned over the pages.

"And so," continued Pursey Ochs, still speaking to Doctor Schlauss Hyman, "this gentleman came up to see me, full of beer and bad intentions. Also with a long blacksnake whip. Says the office boy to him: 'Mr. Ochs ain't in.' Says the gentleman: 'Don't lie to me, I know he is in; and, what's more, when I find him, I'm going to cut him into ribbons with this here whip I got.' On hearing those cheerful words, I guess you think I walked out into that anteroom and boldly bade him defiance. You guess wrong, doc. I climbed into my spike-tail, turned my

cuffs to the clean side, and shinned down the fire-escape. That's what I did. And they do say that the gentleman beat up the assistant city editor under the impression that he was J. P. Ochs. Either that or the assistant city editor went on a bat and fell into a tar-barrel. Only those two things would account for his blackened condition."

"Say," broke in Hopworth K. Dreen, always mindful of his good manners and with fine consideration for the conversation of others, "this book any good, Pursey?"

Ochs, not in the least angered, smiled genially upon him. "I was coming to that," said he. "I'd have been there if you'd given me another minute. The book—oh, that! You mean 'The Wild Places'? I have been reading it, and have been boring myself extremely. It's the story of some civilized men suddenly dumped into uncivilized conditions. It's the story of the triumph of muscle over brains. It's puerile."

Mr. Brent, entering at that moment, smiled. When he smiled his nostrils quivered upward derisively. It was not really a smile at all, it was a sneer. There were few things which made Mr. Pursey Ochs forget that he was an impartial critic and one who allowed personal feelings to influence him not at all—Mr. Brent's sneer was one of these few.

"Why does it bore me? I'll tell you," continued Pursey Ochs, becoming suddenly very earnest. "Because it tells of a condition of things that doesn't interest me. Because we're living in a civilized age. Because the story doesn't touch vitally on our lives. Besides, it's melodramatic and crudely written. It has no literary style. It—— May I ask what amuses you, Mr. Brent?"

For Brent, lazily contemplating his cigarette, had sneered again.

"Nothing much," yawned Brent. "I was only remembering that several critics have spoken rather highly of the style, the construction, and the drama of the book."

"Oh, well, opinions differ, of course. But leaving out the question of the book's literary value, I repeat my former statement that it has no vital interest for one living in this age. I take no interest in stories of brute force. I stand in no danger of preserving my life with my fists. If I did, I'd hire some burly ruffian, some roustabout to do my fighting for me. What is physical strength to a man of this age? A man in the professions or the higher trades—the civilized man of the better type—has no need for physical strength. Then, too, the book is greatly overdrawn, too highly colored."

Mr. Brent smiled broadly.

"If you asked me why I smiled then," he stated lazily, "I'd say I was amused by your talking about a subject of which you know nothing. What do you know of the conditions the writer pictures? Eh? Nothing. And if it doesn't appeal to you, think of the thousands who've gone through similar experiences, who have lived in the wilds, who know *men* as they are without the gaudy trappings, the hypocrisies of the little civilizations. You've lived among that sort of thing all your life, and you don't know anything about anything else. A few months in that atmosphere"—he tapped the book—"would do a lot for you, Ochs!"

He sauntered out again on the deck quite as lazily as he had entered. Two girls, turning a curve, ran into him. He drew back, bowed urbanely, smiled, and they sat down, one on each side of Brent, while he talked to them. The three men in the smoking-room had watched this little proceeding. Pursey Ochs drew a long breath, then whistled.

"Well, of all the corrosive-sublimated nerve!" he ejaculated, with something like admiration. "If a large - boned, heavy - fisted, rough - speeched, hairy man had said all that to me I'd have listened with some respect. But *that!*" He gazed out again, his eyes fixed on Brent. "Why, he's the most perfect representative of all that's effete in Eastern civilization."

And indeed, looking at Mr. J. B. Brent, one was inclined to agree with

Pursey Ochs. Brent was slim, his hands and feet were small, and his waist hardly more than twenty-eight inches. He had the appearance of the supercivilized, the overnice. He was so minutely shaven that his round, full face had the appearance of being without hirsute growth. His hair was carefully cut, not a single strand out of place, the whole appearance being that of extremely careful grooming. His eyes were, for the most part of his time, half-covered by the lids so that his eyelashes touched his cheek. It was in this attitude of profound languor he was most to be found. His lips, being half the time parted in his cynical smile, gave the impression of a loose jaw and a chin none too strong. But when those lips closed, the jawbones came into sudden prominence and the chin jutted out stubbornly. Then, too, when he raised his eyes, there was a glint in their brown depths that was quite disquieting to the man upon whom they looked in anger.

He was in white flannels now, which fitted his slim form at every bend and curve, seemingly molded upon him. All in all, the casual observer would have adjudged him a dandy without any particular strength of character, and dismissed him altogether. Miss Dorothy Gordon, however, was not one of the casual ones. She came up now, having previously descended from the upper deck. Immediately she hastened toward him.

"The captain says 'can do,'" she said, as she halted before Brent and his two fair companions. Brent arose and inclined his hand toward the seat he had vacated. The girls looked on Miss Gordon with animosity.

She was a slim, graceful girl, maybe four seasons out. First of all, she was bewitchingly feminine. All her actions, everything she said, her very unconscious gestures impressed that upon the mind of the man who beheld her. Much of her charm was in her easy grace of movement, more of it in the glory of her pale-gold hair.

So she stood now before Brent, her short skirts blowing about her in the slight tropical breeze, a few strands of her hair fluttering loose and catching the sunlight. The other girls, noting Brent's abstraction, got up and continued their constitutional.

"He says it's all right, and he's glad we're to have such a perfectly delightful day for it," she said. "So in just about half an hour he's going to bring the ship around—or is it 'bring it to'?—some fearfully complicated thing like that. Anyhow, he's going to stop it, and lower the net from the ship, so as to protect us from sharks, or anything horrid; and we're to swim inside the net and have a time—such a time! My aunt doesn't want me to go; but I think she's so foolish about those things. Anyhow, they're going to lower a boat, and when we get tired we can climb in. We're only to have half an hour, so you'd better hurry and get on your bathing-suit, Mr. Brent, or you'll miss some of the time. You know it's a regular thing to do this on mail steamers when enough of the passengers ask, but they seem to be such a stupid lot this trip——"

By this time Messrs. Ochs, Hyman, and Dreen were standing near-by. "Don't you want to go swimming?" she asked brightly, and informed them as to the method. "Or are you afraid to go down in that awful-looking ocean?"

"Not much," replied Dreen.

"I should say not," snorted the eminent surgeon, Doctor Hyman.

"Huh!" derided the editor of the *Daily Star*.

"Well, then, all of you hurry and get on your bathing-suits and come along. I want you to, anyhow. It looks so selfish for just Mr. Brent and me to be swimming, and some of these mean-minded people on board will say the captain didn't have any right to stop the ship if just we two are swimming. So you do it, too. I shall be angry if you don't." She turned her eyes on Dreen. "I know you'll be a good swimmer," she said, "and you must look just fine in a bathing-suit. Oh!" she smiled a little and looked away. Dreen's chest swelled an inch, and he cleared his throat.

"Hurry!" admonished Miss Dorothy, and walked off toward the entrance to the saloon.

When Brent came on deck in his bathing-suit, he was greeted with quite a few admiring looks from the feminine portion of the passengers. Brent's slim form and rather delicate look were quite belied by his appearance in the short jersey, open at the chest, and leaving the shoulders and arms bare. His skin, while very white, showed beneath it curves and ridges of muscle; and when he leaped to the accommodation bridge, which had been let down, and the muscles were brought into play, the spectators noted this fact. The majority of the passengers were crowded on the larboard side along the taffrails of the saloon and boat-decks, watching Dorothy Gordon and Hopworth Dreen, who were already in the water below and were performing various aquatic feats for their audience.

Brent descended the accommodation ladder and joined them, the sailor detailed to keep a lookout for the swimmers making way for him on the lower steps. One of the ship's boats had been swung from its davits, and was moored to the ladder by a rope. The long, wide, wire enclosure had been securely fastened to an adjustable crane above and secured by several stanchions. There seemed positively to be no danger in the indulgence of one's desire for a swim. The day was a typically tropical one and the water tepid. Overhead was the blazing sun of mid-afternoon, its rays so charged with heat that some of the tar in the boat-deck had run.

They were very near the equator in truth, for the *Sultana*, after touching at the Japanese and Chinese ports, had left Hongkong a day behind, and had but two days to go before the vessel would reach Manila, its final destination. Miss Dorothy Gordon and her aunt were *en tour*, with the idea of circling the globe; and intended to take a peep at the Philippines on the way. Doctor Schlauss Hyman had been designated by the United States to inspect the hospitals of the Philippine civil government, and make a detailed report on the same (for which the United States Treasury would disgorge a very large fee, and all his expenses). J. Pursey Ochs, dissatisfied with the varying reports he had heard as to the Philippines, was on a little tour of inspection himself for the benefit of the *Daily Star;* while Hopworth K. Dreen was traveling for the want of something better to do. Brent had given no information as to himself or his reasons for going to the islands.

The five people in question were all splashing about and making considerable spray and noise. Ochs, breathing fatly, was taking good care not to get more than a few feet from the boat, at which, every few minutes, he clutched spasmodically. Dreen and Brent were swimming abreast with Dorothy Gordon, each one endeavoring to outdo the other. These three were excellent swimmers, Miss Dorothy having as strong a stroke as it was reported she had a firm bridle-hand for a cross-country jump. Pursey Ochs was hopelessly bad, and Schlauss Hyman seemed to take but little interest in the sport. He had come down chiefly to show that he was not afraid of the "awful ocean." So had Ochs.

To this day not one of the five can tell you how the thing happened. The sun was shining and giving out intense heat. The clouds were bluey-white, and sailed lazily through an endless vista of ultramarine. All was peaceful, hot, and languid. The following minute held in it sudden cries of warning. All at once the sun hid itself, the sky darkened, then went almost into inky blackness. The waters surged and trembled. A rod before the ship danced a whirling spiral column, increasing in height as it approached, sizzling like a miniature geyser.

"Typhoon!" people cried instinctively. The sailor on the steps yelled a warning. "Quick! Climb aboard! For God's sake, lady, come quick!"

Dreen and Brent suddenly seized Dorothy Gordon, and by sheer strength pulled her toward the ship. Something crashed. They clutched for the

nearest solid thing. All was in intense blackness. Their fingers encountered the side of the ship's boat. They clutched and held on. The waves dashed over them.

"Hold tight!" cried Brent, and there was something like anguish in his tones. "Hold tight!"

Dorothy Gordon, coughing out the black water, caught the side of the boat. Brent's arm encircled her like a vise. For all her terror and fright, she felt a curious feeling of safety. Dreen had taken his arm away, appalled for the moment by the intensity of the thing. Something parted, and the boat raced away over the seething sea. The great fog-horn of the *Sultana* was shrieking out something; the shrieks became less and less distinct. They had little time to think of things like sounds. Their arms were strained to the sockets; and had not Brent held her so tightly the girl might have lost her grip.

They seemed to be on some enormous springing board that sent them hurtling hundreds of feet in air, only to be dashed down with the same startling velocity. The water was in their noses, their ears, their mouths. Half-stifled groans and sputtering from the other side of the boat told them that there were others in their plight; and Brent, cool-headed now that he knew what had happened, recognized the tones of Pursey Ochs and Schlauss Hyman. Ochs was cursing steadily and fluently whenever the water gave him a chance, his curses ending half the time in shudders and coughing out of water. Hyman was spitting out water and praying rapidly, using long prayers from the Torah, which had come back to him in this his time of need.

But Brent had little time to speculate on what the other men were thinking or doing. He had his arm about Dorothy Gordon, and the strain upon him was severe. The others were holding on with both hands, and were consequently better off than he who had only one hand to support his weight and part of Miss Dorothy's, also. The palm of this hand was lacerated and bleeding, for he had, unwittingly, caught one of the boat's tholes and dared not release his hold for a second. His knuckles seemed to be bursting out of their skin covering, and his muscles were growing very weak and sore. Only the stern will of the man kept his hold secure.

"Keep your nerve, little girl," he shouted over and over again, above the raging tumult of the elements. "It can't last much longer. Keep your nerve. Don't faint now or do anything like that. I'm going to see you through this."

He did not say all this at once. It came in jerky, spasmodic sentences whenever he could free his mouth of the acrid water. And once he heard her answer in a low, quavering sort of tone: "I'm not going to faint. Please hold on yourself. Please hold——"

Above, the black sky lowered threateningly, and the water, equally black, hurled itself against them as a mighty general sends out troop after troop to carry an enemy's position. The tempest shrieked and stormed in their ears. Some fluttering sea-birds screamed pitifully, and, folding their wings, sank to the level of the sea, where they flew just above the waves. One with a broken pinion sank into the water and was carried high on a foam-crested wave, almost as high as he had flown.

Such a time is interminable. They did not measure it in minutes, or hours, these unfortunates clinging to the boat; but held on to life grimly, hoping for respite, hoping against hope. The boat was full of water; only its air-tight chambers prevented it from sinking. Now, when a wave caught them, they went below water each time, and came up gasping for air and taking great mouthfuls of it while they might. They could no longer hold themselves to the level of their chins. It was all they could do to hold on at the full length of their arms.

And then, of a sudden, the wind died down and became a mere rustling zephyr. Little by little, as a mill-pond which has been disturbed in its placidity by the heaving-in of a great rock, the waves ceased to rush and

roar, and began to lick the castaways gently, almost lovingly, as would pet dogs. The sky showed patches of rosy-red and baby-blue. Once again they noted that it was warm.

And then a sunbeam filtered through the clouds. A sea-mew shrilled out a joyous note. All was again the world of sunshine.

II.

Naturally, the first action of all of them was to release one hand, put it to their eyes, and get them free of their saline encrustation. Then they blinked at one another. Dorothy Gordon, following the impulse of womenkind, put her hand to her hair.

"Salt water is so bad for it," she complained.

Brent looked at her, admiration and tenderness swelling his breast and making him forgetful of his pain. "Well," he gasped, "you are a plucky kid, you certainly are!"

He shifted his lacerated hand from the boat-thole and caught weakly at the side with the other. The salt water getting into his cuts made them very raw, and they smarted and pained.

He looked across at Pursey Ochs and Schlauss Hyman, who were hanging on dejectedly, their heads down, breathing rapidly in short, painful pants. Dreen had his head against the side of the boat, and convulsive shudders shook his frame.

"Well," said Brent, "the first thing to do is to get into the boat. Miss Dorothy, suppose you climb in and try to bail out some of that water. At any rate, go first."

She gave a weak, little laugh, and attempted to raise herself into the boat, but promptly lost her hold and went back to the full length of her arms. Her head went under water.

"I can't," she gasped, as she came up. "You'll have to do it, Mr. Brent."

Brent caught the sides of the boat. The pain was fearful. He set his teeth, took a long breath, and drew himself steadily up until his shoulders were on a level with the boat-tholes, then let loose and floundered in. The boat trembled visibly. Brent got far in and found that he was standing in water up to the middle of the lower part of his legs.

"Have to get this water out somehow," he said; and began to rummage into the locker. He found what he desired, a tin bucket bailer, and immediately set to work dashing the water out of the boat. His first bucketful fell on Hopworth K. Dreen.

"Say, what the devil are you doing?" inquired Mr. Dreen, with acidity.

"Bailing the boat. And, say, Dreen, don't forget that Miss Gordon's along with us."

Dreen raised his head for the first time and surveyed Dorothy, then looked away at the horizon. He was rather a simple-minded young man, and could not exactly puzzle out what he ought to say under the circumstances.

"Fearful weather, wasn't it?" he finally evolved, turning to her.

His remark was greeted by a hoarse laugh. Mr. Pursey Ochs' stout, but no longer rubicund, countenance was in his direct line of vision across the way.

"What do you think this is?" asked Mr. Ochs, with bitter irony. "A picnic-party caught on the lake with the Sunday-school teacher waiting on the shore with the ice-cream?"

"Oh, you shut up!" was Mr. Dreen's surly response. "Nobody's talking to you, anyhow."

Dorothy Gordon noted that the voices of both men were slightly changed; that they lacked an indefinable something that they had once had. She could not explain what it was.

Schlauss Hyman looked up wearily, his beard and mustache soaked into, respectively, a triangle and a horizontal line.

"You look like a drowned rat, doc," Dreen informed him, with a malicious grin.

"Puppies generally know rats when they see them, so you ought to know," replied Hyman viciously, as he surveyed Dreen with his gimletlike eyes, now brighter than ever with pain, suffering, and mental anguish.

"And now what do I look like?" Dorothy was intent in getting the subject off a disagreeable turn, and she tried to smile bravely, although her arms pained her more than she had ever imagined anything might.

"Oh! you look all right," responded Dreen bruskly.

"Sure you do," added Mr. Ochs.

"Like a mermaid," murmured the doctor, surveying her, his eyes getting soft again. "And you are a very brave young lady, Miss Gordon."

"Sure you are," confirmed Mr. Ochs. "Of——"

"This is no Greek chorus," broke in Brent impatiently. "My arms are pretty tired. Get into the boat here, Dreen, and bail the rest of it out."

Mr. Dreen resented the tone. "I don't feel like bailing," said he. "And when you want me to do a thing, you ask me civilly, *Mr.* Brent."

Dorothy noted that Brent's jaws came together with a vicious snap. She had never shared the common opinion of Brent, and had always known of the existence of that strong chin and jaw; but never before had she seen the man look so sinister. It was but for a brief second or two, and the girl's heart almost stood still; then he reached out a hand to Pursey Ochs and bade him to his duty.

But Pursey Ochs asseverated strongly that he was unable to drag himself into the boat. Besides, he pointed out, with great sense and judgment of equilibrium, that the removal of his weight from that side of the boat would doubtless cause an upsetting.

"Take Hyman, there. He don't weigh more than a pound of candles. Haul him in."

The little doctor cast a look upon Mr. Ochs that was by no means a pleasant one; but he said nothing, only with a great tug raising himself to the boat-tholes, where he hung, red-faced and unable to get farther. Brent, with the last of his strength, aided him into the boat, then sat down heavily, his face in the throes of pain. But almost as he sat down he got up again, remembering Dorothy Gordon.

"Come," he said, getting down on his knees and stretching out his hands. "Hyman, go on the other side of the boat so as to balance it. Now, Miss Dorothy, help all you can, for I'm feeling rather weak."

By dint of their combined efforts she was pulled into the boat and sat down on one of the seats, Brent doing likewise. She looked at her pink palms now corrugated into little ridges from holding on to the sides, and, horror of horrors, found they were stained with blood. She put her hands over the side and washed them off, finding to her joy that she was not cut. A puzzled look came into her face. Suddenly she took Brent's palms in hers, and saw their fearful condition.

"Oh, Mr. Brent!" she wailed. "Your poor hands, your poor hands!"

He shrugged his shoulders, keeping the pain from his face. Looking away from her, he saw that Dreen was rocking the boat by attempting to clamber in.

"Don't do that," commanded Brent sharply. "You and Ochs are balances for one another until we get the boat bailed out. Stay where you are——"

Dreen eyed him venomously. "Who are you, to give orders?" he snarled. "I'm tired of hanging on here—aren't you, Ochs?"

But Ochs, weak and flabby as he was, possessing little strength, and in considerable torture, was above quarreling with the things that had to be.

"Forget it," he advised. "Stay where you are."

The owner of great ranch-lands in Wyoming thought otherwise, and said so.

"If you try to get in this boat until it's bailed, I'll knock you flat back into the water," said Brent coldly. Dreen surveyed the situation, found that Brent had the master-hand, and sank back.

"When we get somewhere—on dry land or on a ship—I'll fix your business, Mr. Brent," he growled.

The girl meanwhile had taken the bailing bucket from the exhausted Hyman, and was throwing out the last few

bucketsful of water. Hyman sat down, groaning, and his eyes stared away to the horizon.

"No sign of the *Sultana,*" he said.

"No."

"What's become of her? What are we to do?" The surgeon's tones were despairing.

Brent shrugged his shoulders.

"There aren't any oars, any provisions, any water—there's nothing at all!"

Brent repeated the shrug, adding, in a whisper: "It would be better not to alarm the girl too much, Hyman." He supplemented the words by a look which meant that Hyman would understand. The little surgeon ceased to speak, but his eyes were all the more eloquent.

"Naturally," Brent began, in an even tone, "the *Sultana* had all it could do to take care of itself in a typhoon. For any one to have attempted to rescue us would have meant certain death to them. Those typhoons come very seldom, but when they do, there's no human power can withstand them. We may be fortunate to be off the *Sultana.* She may be at the bottom of the sea now. Anything that offers any resistance is bound to suffer badly. We and our little boat were simply carried before the storm. We may be fifty or a hundred miles from where we were when the storm began. The *Sultana* may be more than that, and probably is, in an opposite direction. But for all of that, we're——"

They were interrupted by a sudden cry from the girl.

"Look—ahead. Land! Land!" she cried, her voice half-doubting but wishful of being joyous.

Every one of the four stared in the direction of her outstretched finger. Rising out of the sea, its white sands glittering in the fading sunlight of late afternoon, was undoubtedly land of a sort which seemed suddenly lifted into prominence as the fog-bank before them rolled away.

"Land!" said each one.

Pursey Ochs and Dreen had received permission to clamber into the boat by this time, and, weak and bedraggled, crouched in the stern. Dorothy Gordon at the bow was on one knee, her eyes fixed on the green and silver of the Promised Land.

"It's an island," she said.

The tide was bringing them rapidly in. They could see now that the island was one mass of palms, herbage, and ferns. The rocks that rose on either side of the landing-place were green with verdure. A little brook trickled down between these great rocks, making a miniature waterfall like a silver cord suspended in mid-air. Behind the rocks and on the wooded slopes grew cocoanut-palms, dragon, camphor, and sandalwood-trees.

Looking over the side of the boat as it drifted over the sand-bar, they could see the rocks at the bottom of the translucent green water, the little fishes, lizards, and leeches disporting themselves in its depths, and near the course of the boat the pale-pink of a coral reef.

Their reflections were cut short by the grinding of the boat's keel on the sand. Brent leaped out in water up to his waist, and, unmindful of his hands, seized the hawser and dragged at it. The others were quick to follow his example, and they dragged the boat high and dry on the dazzling white sands, considerably above the high-water mark as indicated by the conch-shells and mollusks.

Then they turned and surveyed one another. Four men and a girl on an island without food or the means with which to procure it, and with no attire save only the bathing-suits in which they stood.

They were silent for some time; then Brent spoke.

"It's getting on toward evening," he said. "We've got to get some sort of shelter, and we've got to have something to eat. I vote on a tour of exploration. This island ought to be inhabited. It's got a good harbor, and it's a beautiful place. The chances are that it is inhabited, and I think we'd better find out."

There was sound sense in what he

said, and, although each and every one of them felt too tired to move a step, they knew the dangers of the unprotected tropical night, with its sudden chills, its fever mosquitoes, its creeping things, and other unpleasant details. Something like a road had evidently been blazed up the wooded incline, and to this Brent turned his footsteps, the others following.

The stones and flinty rocks, the thorns, the sticking cactus all hurt his feet; but Brent knew that the thing must be done. They passed through a wilderness of orchids, sweet and sickly, and blazing at them the colors of the rainbow; parrakeets screamed at them from overhead, and monkeys chattered volubly and eyed the newcomers with disfavor.

The air was very sweet, too sweet, with the odors of the Far East, sandalwood, camphor, ylang-ylang. Brent, who knew the tropics, knew that that very sweetness spelt poison sometimes, and that he put his foot among the flowers and shrubbery at the risk of his life, for each and every one of the beautiful plants might conceal a reptile or a poisonous insect.

Human beings had evidently been this way before. The pathway was a proof of this. And when they reached the crest of the hill, they no longer doubted. For there, set in the center of a circle of palm-trees, was a very complete bungalow, built after the most approved Hongkong fashion, shingled, not thatched; with a wide veranda and colonial pillars before the door; with a brick chimney and a weather-vane, dormer-windows in the attic, and other evidences of either European or American construction. Other palms and trees had been cut down to make a garden about the house, which was laid out in beds and had neat graveled walks. But for all of that, the place had the look of desolation.

Brent dashed forward and climbed to the veranda. There was an electric bell-button, and this Brent pushed. He heard the buzzer resound throughout the house. The others joined him on the steps. There was a silence, in which all held their breath. But no response came from within. Brent, angered, hammered upon the door with the back of his hand. Again they waited, but the silence was as enduring as before. Then Brent put his hand upon the bronzed knob and turned it. The door opened easily, and Brent stood gaping.

"Do you think we'd better go in?" asked Dorothy Gordon.

"Yes," replied Brent, without further uncertainty.

"It's a devil of a thing to go into somebody else's house without by your leave," grumbled Hopworth K. Dreen.

"Never you mind about that, my boy," was Ochs' contribution. "We may be able to get a drink—and something to eat."

Brent stood back and motioned for Dorothy to enter. She did so. The others followed. The late afternoon sunlight, trickling through the palms outside, cast a greenish-golden light into the place.

The door opened in a sort of reception-hall, which had a fireplace in the center. It was furnished with a long table on which lay some books and magazines, a number of straight-backed rattan chairs, two rockers, and a lounging chair, all of green wickerwork. There was a combination writing-desk and bookcase in one corner, the bookcase having diamond-squared panes behind which glinted the titles of more books.

Brent picked up some of the volumes on the table. There were two on military tactics in Spanish, and one in German, a volume of Guy de Maupassant and another of Paul de Kock in French, an American "best-seller" of the previous year, and, paradox of paradoxes, an English edition of Harrison Ainsworth's most impossible attempt, "The Lancashire Witches." Of periodicals there were many, among which Brent noted the Paris *Figaro;* the *Matador* and *La Reina,* of Madrid; the *Kladderadatsch,* of Berlin; the *Army and Navy Journal,* of Washington, D. C., and several other American magazines of the fictional order; one

literary journal, and a copy of the Manila weekly, the *Sunday Sun*. Such a peculiar assortment was indicative of only one thing, a very cosmopolitan taste.

Brent looked up and saw that Ochs, Hyman, and Dreen had gone to explore more distant parts of the house. His eyes fell on Dorothy Gordon, who was standing near the window reading what seemed to be a letter, a flush of excitement on her cheeks. He moved a step closer, almost oblivious of the fact. It was at that moment she turned.

"I found this on the mantel," she said. "Over there." She pointed to the slab above the fireplace. "It was unsealed, and I opened it. I don't quite understand. It seems to be some sort of a letter from the people who built this place to the people whom they expect to occupy it."

She held out the letter. It was written in English, but in a curious, stilted verbiage, while the hand that traced the letters was evidently more accustomed to drawing ideographs. The letter began with a formal "To," and then followed the names of six men. Brent saw no further. He read them slowly, and with a curious persistency reread them aloud:

"Señor Don Ambrosino de Araza y Tagliono.
Herr Froehlich von Klingen.
Señor Don Bernardo Esperaso.
Mr. Charles Carr Conkling.
Señor Leon Aorto.
Mr. Moses Greenbaum."

There was a sharp ejaculation from Brent, and the paper fluttered to the table.

The girl drew a step closer, and put her hand on his arm. "What's the matter, Mr. Brent?" she asked anxiously. "I hope nothing's gone wrong."

He laughed harshly. "You heard those names?" he demanded, his eyes suddenly hard.

"Yes." Her heart was fluttering. She felt that some grim evil was impending.

"They mean nothing to you?" he asked again; but before she could answer, Dreen came into the room followed by Hyman, Ochs lumbering up in the rear.

"Say, this house is all to the good!" shouted Dreen. "There's a kitchen and cooking-range. There's some prime food in the ice-box, and all the canned stuff we could eat in three months. There's lots of good whisky, and some champagne and cigars and cigarettes, and——"

"Up-stairs there are eight bedrooms, all gotten up in extremely good taste," broke in Hyman. "And a supply of clean underlinen and pajamas in each; and, hanging up in the closets, are no end of uniforms, white and khaki cloth, with gold insignia on them that I've never seen before. There are half a dozen suits of each. This place must belong to some army officers. Look here!"

For Brent's inspection he handed him one of the tunics which he had discovered. It had red piping down the seams in front, and an imitation cuff of thin red braid, which Brent saw was detachable. The piping ran along the upper and lower seams of the collar, and to each side of the collar was fastened gold insignia, which turned out to be palm-trees in miniature, with the letters "R. F." on either side.

"It looks like a Philippines Constabulary uniform, all except the insignia," said Brent, examining it closely. "But it isn't."

"What is it, then?" demanded Dreen importantly.

"Republicas Filipinas," responded Brent, rather pale. "Which means the Republic of the Philippines; that's what those letters stand for."

Pursey Ochs laughed. "But there isn't such a thing," he objected.

"Not now," said Brent ominously. "But listen to this! Here's a letter that Miss Gordon found on the mantel. It may explain a good many things to us. Listen to these names!"

He read them slowly. Pursey Ochs gave a quick staccato exclamation after hearing each one of them.

"You recognize them, too, Ochs?" asked Brent, looking over the paper at him. "But as the others don't, I'll ex-

plain. These six men, three Filipino *mestizos* (half-castes), a German smuggler, a Jew contractor, and one nondescript cutthroat—English, American, just as you like—form what is known as the 'Philippine Junta,' and their nest is in Hongkong. There most of the schemes that bring about revolutions in the Philippines are hatched. These men give it out that they intend to make an independent republic out of the Philippines. Let's read the rest of the letter now. It's addressed to these six men. Listen:

"The house, excellencies, is built and well provisioned. No man who built the house knows where he builded, nor for what purpose. The arsenal contains ten thousand rifles from the Tokio Government Arms Manufactory, and three hundred thousand rounds of ammunition. There are also ten thousand uniforms of khaki for the common soldiers, and several hundred of all sizes for the officers, together with the many thousand of the gilt insignia. In the arsenal there are also ten Maxim rapid-firing guns, with a quantity of our Shimose explosives and shells. The canned stores will also be found there.

"Enclosed is a requisition blank, which you will please check from goods delivered, to see that all is as rendered.

"The battle-ship cannot be sent; but a merchant vessel formerly of the Maru Line has been armored, and is being sent south at this writing. She will carry, ostensibly as passengers, as many recruits for the cause as possible. She will be commanded by Captain Rolf Arundsen, who has been of service to us before, and of whom you have doubtless heard.

"Your cause is being agitated in Tokio, and ere long will bring forth more results.

"The Maru boat will carry more rifles, heavy guns, and shells."

Brent looked up. "You realize what that letter means, gentlemen?" he asked seriously.

"I've got a blamed good guess," responded Pursey Ochs.

Dreen, Hyman, and Dorothy Gordon all looked equally puzzled.

"Tell them, Ochs," commanded Brent.

"Well," began the fluent one, a little hesitant now and groping for words, "it looks like these disreputable gentlemen in Hongkong have drawn a full house for once, and are keeping the fact remarkably still. Opponent, being quite unaware of the extremely good hand held, is lulled into security, and when he wakes up he is a forlorn hope with deuces and trays."

"Speak plainly, man," said Brent sharply. "This poker stuff is all very well for a humorous monologue; but we're down to hard-pan now, and have got to do some remarkably quick thinking. Ochs has got the thing straight all right enough in his mind. This island is to be the rendezvous from which an invasion of the Philippines will be directed. This house, those buildings to the back, were built for the purposes for which the Junta intended them by Japanese workmen. These stores were furnished by Japan; also the arms and ammunition. Japan is secretly back of the whole affair. Can't you see that?"

"I must confess I don't understand, for one," complained Doctor Schlauss Hyman.

"Then you're an ass," was Brent's uncompromising assertion. "People, we've stumbled into one of the biggest situations of the age, and you're slow to catch on to the fact. Listen! I've been out in this country before. I know the Philippines, China, and Japan, the whole Orient, as well as the average man who has lived out here. I know Japan wants these same Philippines. She has an idea of extending her island empire right down along the coast of Asia. She wants the Philippines; but not badly enough to go to war with us for them. But by instigating a rebellion, and putting the United States to great losses, she can then go to the United States, and say: 'See here, those islands are no good to you. You have trouble with them right along. You are our friend. We will buy the islands from you, and put down the revolt ourselves.' Now, public feeling is pretty strong in the States about these same islands. People back there would object to any more lives being lost, and public pressure would be brought to bear which would make us accede to Japan's offer. Japan would promptly send down her army and wipe the rebellion off the map. She would then proceed to Japanize the islands,

and all would be well. Oh, she's done that sort of thing before. That's the sort of a nation she is."

He paused, out of breath. Dorothy Gordon was looking at him, her blue eyes glowing, a high color on her cheek, her hands clasped.

"Now, don't you see," he continued, "how craftily Japan has done this? She sends all her arms and ammunition down here direct, builds the house, fixes everything, then clears out. Meanwhile word has been sent to the conspirators in Hongkong that the work has been completed. They have no doubt some sort of a ship at their disposal, manned by their own dependents, and they immediately set sail for the island to await the coming of the ship from Japan with the recruits. The mercenaries manning this ship have no doubt scoured every port in the Orient for available timber, and have, say, five hundred to a thousand white mercenaries who will do whatever they are told if they are paid enough and the prospects for loot are good. The ship then proceeds to this island, and the recruits are whipped into shape for a descent on the Philippines. If word is once spread in the islands that a full-fledged revolution is in sight, there'll be no holding those little brown devils back. I haven't the slightest doubt that the brown constabulary will desert and join the rebel standard. Say Japan had provided for some thirty thousand rifles. They can get that many Filipinos who understand the art of war. What chance would our few poor regiments have against them? None whatever. And the United States ten thousand miles away! Why, I tell you that within two weeks the Philippines would become in truth the Republicas Filipinas as sure as my name is Brent. You understand now, perhaps, the seriousness of the situation? The Philippines have been ripe for a big insurrection for a long time, but they lacked the money and the leaders with which to carry it on. Planned out as this one appears to be, there's small chance of failure, unless——"

"Unless?" echoed Dorothy Gordon, her face uplifted as one who hears the notes of a battle-cry afar.

"Unless we take a hand to prevent it. We are five of us here. Five of us, good Americans all, I hope. We were blown here by accident, or maybe by Providence, who knows? And I for one intend to try to prevent these arms here"—he waved his hands toward the back of the house—"from ever reaching the Philippines, or, for that, the ship either. Are you with me?"

"Yes," came in Dorothy Gordon's clear treble. "Yes," too, from Schlauss Hyman.

Pursey Ochs looked on with a somewhat sarcastic smile. "Granting, of course, my dear Brent, that what you say has some truth in it, I'm rather inclined to think we've bitten off a little more than we can chew. How in the mischief can we prevent anything?"

"I think it's all silly rot myself," announced Hopworth K. Dreen. "You've got a great imagination, Brent. You ought to write fiction."

Hopworth K. Dreen did not know just how much he hurt himself with Dorothy Gordon because of that remark. She flushed angrily, and cast a look toward Mr. Dreen, which he would not have appreciated had he seen it.

As for Brent, the sudden feverish excitement of the moment had left him, and he looked somewhat shamefaced, as all Anglo-Saxons do after having laid bare their secret souls to some other person.

"Well," he said bruskly, almost gruffly, "we'll see what comes. You say there are uniforms up-stairs. I guess we'd better try to get into some of them. These wet things aren't doing us any special amount of good."

He made off toward the stairway, and the others followed him.

III.

There was considerable comparing of uniforms before the castaways decided which ones they would be most able to wear. It transpired that the uniforms tagged with the name of Don Ambrosino were a near fit for Brent;

Von Klingen's much the same size as Ochs', and Señor Aorto's fitted Dreen passably well, although a trifle short in the legs, while that of Mr. Moses Greenbaum was an almost perfect fit for Doctor Schlauss Hyman.

Fortunately for Miss Gordon, Charles Carr Conkling proved to be a very small man, hardly more than a boy in size, and having an extremely small waist, and so when she had slipped into the tunic and trousers, she found herself tolerably well fitted. They had searched in vain for some women's garments, but had found none, and Dorothy Gordon was far too much the true woman to make objections to what could not be helped.

When she came down-stairs, she found that it was growing dark, and, seeing a light gleaming in the back part of the house, she went toward it, and was amused by the spectacle which the lamp afforded her. Three of the men, all in uniform, were in the kitchen. Brent was opening a tin of corned beef with a carving-knife; Pursey Ochs, kneeling on some paper to prevent soiling the knees of his white trousers, was coaxing some wood into a blaze. A great pile of it, freshly chopped, had been discovered in the box, and visions of something to eat had impelled the three men to violent measures.

"Can you cook?" asked Schlauss Hyman, looking up from the ladling out of tomatoes from a can into a dish.

"Not very well," she admitted, somewhat shamefacedly, and then her eyes brightened a trifle; "but I can make some fine coffee. I know I can do that."

Brent's eyes were upon her, and she avoided their gaze. Hyman, pouring the last of the tomatoes into the dish, had seized upon the coffee scoop, and was bringing forth the same laden with the brown berry, which he placed in the nickel grinding-machine. Pursey Ochs had arisen from the floor ere this, and was contemplating with some pride, and many heaves of exhaustion, the blaze which crackled and sputtered.

"I'm going to do the cooking," said Brent. "I know how, well enough."

"Indeed, then, you are not," she said suddenly and with spirit, producing from behind her back a jar of cold-cream which she had found in the medicinal-chest, and some linen bandages. "Your poor hand is simply torn to bits, and I'm going to bind it up for you; and if I can't cook well enough, we'll have a cold supper, so there!"

"Oh, nonsense!" he responded, the roughness in his voice being, as any one might see, assumed. "You——"

But she already had his lacerated hand, and with many little "Ohs" of pity, was daubing on the cream and applying the bandages. As she worked, she told the story of how he had come by the hand.

"H'm!" grunted Ochs, who never admired openly. "Any man would have done as much, Miss Gordon. I wish I had the chance."

"So do I," murmured Schlauss Hyman.

But Dorothy was in no mood to have the feat depreciated. "You might have wanted to, you know," she admitted, "but you are not strong enough to hold on by one hand and hold me by the other. You know you're not, either of you—are you?"

"Oh, pshaw!" muttered Brent. "Don't make so much out of it, my dear girl. It wasn't because I wanted to do anything wonderful, but because I would have rather drowned than see you go under. That's the way any man feels. It wasn't a question of strength."

"I should say not," put in Dreen, from the doorway. "It was easy enough to do——"

"I noticed you took your hand away, Mr. Dreen," she said with sudden acidity. Pursey Ochs grinned. Schlauss Hyman laughed irritatingly.

"Well, what if I did?" demanded Dreen hotly. "I knew you were strong enough to hold on by yourself. Why, you've got as firm a wrist and hand——"

"Let it drop," growled Brent. "Too much palaver—Dreen, you took a mighty long time to dress. Don't you suppose you've got some duties devolv-

ing upon you? You've got to work, my son, if you want to eat——"

Dreen looked at him, an angry light in his eyes. Then he squared his shoulders, and with a side glance at Dorothy, who was preparing the coffee, he looked squarely at Brent.

"I want you to understand, first, last, and all the time, that I'll do what I please, and that I'll take no orders from you, Mr. Brent. Is that thing settled?"

"Not by any manner of means," responded Brent quietly. "We'll settle it after we've made our meal. Until then you can help or not, just as you choose."

Dorothy Gordon turned one eye from the coffee-pot to Hopworth K. Dreen. "I hope you are not going to make any trouble, Mr. Dreen," she said.

Dreen's face was very red. "Trouble! I'm not making trouble, Miss Gordon. But I won't have Brent domineering over me. Who is he, anyway, to give orders, and expect me to obey?"

"We will discuss the matter after we have eaten, Dreen," said Brent again; and this time there was something threatening in his tone. Dreen, with a half-choked word, stalked out of the room.

The castaways were very hungry, and it was a question of food far more than the cooking of it. So they lingered only while Dorothy made the coffee and opened a tin of biscuits before making preparations for eating.

The table in the dining-room had been covered by a white linen cloth by Brent; and he had garnished it with knives, forks, and plates. The discovery had been made that there was no butter, so a jar of honey had been opened and placed in the center of the table. After some stumbling about in the darkness outside, fearful of snakes and creeping things, but trying to appear sublimely unconscious of the fact, Schlauss Hyman had discovered a well, and the water from this had served to make the coffee, and to fill the water-bottle in the center of the table. Ochs came in bearing a platter of cold corned beef and toasted Saratoga chips, returning to fetch the biscuits, while Dorothy herself bore in the nickel-plated coffee-pot, and placed it at the head of the table.

Had it not been for Dreen they might have had a rather jolly supper-party. But that gentleman chose to adopt an attitude which threw the merriment of the party into repose for the while. He complained bitterly because there was no hot food, no fresh bread, and no butter. He took it as a personal affront because there were no vegetables. Schlauss Hyman wearily indicated the tomatoes.

"I mean something solid," responded Dreen sulkily.

"You," said Pursey Ochs, "are making a triple-plated, seven-boiler expansion, fourteen horse-power ass out of yourself."

"You mind your own business," was Mr. Dreen's somewhat childish retort.

"As I'm unfortunately linked in business with you at the present time, that's exactly what I'm doing," responded Mr. Ochs; and promptly proceeded to tell a tale of a cub reporter he had once employed, and who, he said, reminded him of Dreen. The story was a joke on the cub reporter, and Dreen resented the invidious comparison.

He grew hot and flushed, and banged with his fist on the table. "You cut that out, Ochs, or I'll——" he began; but Brent was already on his feet.

"Dreen, you'll remember two things. One of them is that you're at the table, another that Miss Gordon is here; and if you can't remember them, I must request you to leave."

"Is *that* so?" inquired Dreen, his ugliest look upon him. "Well, here we are, man to man, the whole lot of us. There's nobody to stop us from doing what we choose, and I choose to do as I please. How's that? Now, if there's a bigger man than me, let him say I sha'n't do what I choose. And let him prove he's a bigger man."

"Remember," said Brent very quietly, but with an ominous snap of the jaw, "that these things had better be settled when Miss Gordon is not here."

"No," said the girl. "I'm one of you. I've got on men's clothes. I've ridden cross-country as well as many men. I

can row a boat better than some, and box as well as others. So just remember that I'm one of you—and, collectively, forget that I'm a girl. I think with all of you, that Mr. Dreen's conduct is disgraceful. If we were elsewhere, we should simply keep out of his way. As he's here, we have to accept him; but I for one don't care for his conduct."

Dreen eyed her, his jaw somewhat fallen.

Brent took up the conversation. "Let it be as Miss Gordon has said. We are without organization, without a leader. There must be a head for everything; a person or persons responsible for the law being kept. Were we in the medical field, I should say for a leader Doctor Hyman; in newspaperdom, I should nominate Mr. Ochs; on the football-field, Mr. Dreen; at a hunt, Miss Gordon. But in the uncivilized wilds we come to my domain. I can do some things that none of you can do. I have been a soldier, and other things, among them an explorer. I am, perhaps, the strongest man in the lot. As the matter has been precipitated, I nominate myself for your leader, and request a seconding."

"I second it," voted Dorothy Gordon promptly. "All in favor, say aye."

Schlauss Hyman and Pursey Ochs eyed one another, then looked at Miss Gordon, who was watching them expectantly.

"Aye," said Doctor Hyman.

"Aye," repeated Mr. Ochs, although his expression seemed to betoken a mental reservation.

Hopworth K. Dreen arose from the table. His chair grated on the floor. "Well, not much," he said. "Not much."

Brent arose also, and faced him. He was a few inches shorter than the other man, and his shoulders were not nearly as broad. But there was a settled sternness to his jaw and chin that the sullen obstinacy of Mr. Dreen did not match.

"There's only one thing to do, then," said Brent quietly. "I've taken Miss Gordon's word that she doesn't want us to remember that she's a woman in these circumstances. So I tell you, Dreen, that, as the rest have chosen me for a leader, you've got to accept me. If you refuse——"

"I do refuse," growled Dreen.

"Then I'll have to thrash you," was Brent's quiet comment. "I suppose if you're thrashed, you'll acknowledge me—eh?"

Mr. Dreen surveyed him carefully, beginning at the points of Brent's canvas shoes and ending at his eyes. He laughed ironically.

"If you can thrash me, you're welcome," he said. "I don't quarrel with men who can do that. When do you want to begin?"

"Now," was Brent's prompt reply. "We'll go into the reception-hall and have it out. Agreed?"

Dorothy Gordon was on her feet immediately. "You can't fight with your hand in such a condition," she cried.

Brent shrugged his shoulders. "That makes no difference in one's hitting capacity," he averred. "I don't fight with the palm of my hand. Come on, Dreen. Miss Gordon had better remain behind. Fights with fists are rather brutal things. I don't care to watch them myself. There are some candles in the hall, I think. Come along, Dreen."

Dreen hesitated, his big body framed in the doorway. "If I thrash you," he said, "I suppose I'm to be the leader?"

"Right you are," replied Brent cheerfully. "If I'm defeated, I'll be the first to acknowledge you."

The two men left the room, and the thud of their canvas shoes resounded in the hall. Dorothy Gordon, her face pale, looked at Pursey Ochs and Schlauss Hyman.

"I—I'm—afraid——" she began hesitatingly, then burst out: "Oh, it's so unnecessary. Why don't you go in and stop it?" she demanded fiercely, turning her eyes on the two men.

"It isn't our fault," Schlauss Hyman reminded her.

"Not at all," agreed Pursey Ochs, finding his tongue. "In a situation like this, a gentleman has to demonstrate his physical superiority. The weak bow

down before the strong. Dreen was making himself disagreeable. We would have continual bickering if——"

He suddenly paused. Hyman was grinning at him.

"Remember that conversation we had about that book, 'The Wild Places,' Ochs?" he asked, smiles wreathing his face. "You said that a man who lives in this age, a civilized man, has no need for physical strength; that he can hire burly stevedores to do his fighting for him; that you were bored by the story because it didn't vitally interest you; didn't touch on your life——"

"That," said Mr. Ochs, with some asperity, "referred to far different conditions and——"

The girl shivered as the sound of a body thumping heavily to the floor was plainly heard.

"Mr. Ochs," she begged, "go in and stop them. It isn't fair, such a big man as Mr. Dreen fighting a man smaller than himself, and with an injured hand —that—he—got—by s-saving me——" her voice faltered a little.

Schlauss Hyman meanwhile had been studying the table-cloth with wrinkled brows, and looked up, oblivious of what had been said.

"'The Wild Places,'" he said suddenly. "That was written by Bauldwin Brent, wasn't it?"

"Yes, that was the gentleman's name," replied Pursey Ochs. "I take back my criticism. He very likely knew what he was writing about—and, besides, I see things a little clearer now. Far as I remember, the chap ought to have known. He's been everything under the sun. I've written him up hundreds of times. Always doing some fool thing; soldiering here in China, and in the Sudan; exploring in Africa, trying to find the Pole—and——"

"I knew it," cried Schlauss Hyman triumphantly. "I've been sure of it for three minutes fully——"

But the girl who had not heard was on her feet. "I'm going in to stop that fight," she said determinedly. "Poor Mr. Brent——"

Schlauss Hyman laughed noisily. "Poor Mr. Brent!" he cried, in bitter scorn. "Poor Dreen! that's what I say. We were fools not to have known before. Why, Brent could take care of two like Dreen. Hasn't it ever dawned on you as to who he was?"

The girl looked at him, wonderingly; and Schlauss Hyman continued: "Why, we must have all been blind. Haven't you heard of Bauldwin Brent, author and general daredevil, revolutionist, explorer, duelist——"

The girl stared open-mouthed. "*The* Bauldwin Brent?" she asked, her tongue dry.

"*The* Bauldwin Brent—John Bauldwin Brent—J. B. Brent—and all the rest of it."

Pursey Ochs began to laugh, too—laugh at his own lack of perspicacity.

"You don't mean?" questioned the girl.

Before she could be answered there was the sound of another heavy fall, and a quiet of a minute following. Then a man's footsteps were heard coming toward them.

"Poor Dreen!" said Hyman. "If he had known——"

Brent stood framed in the doorway. He was breathing a trifle audibly, but his appearance was as spotless as when he had quitted the room. His face was unmarked, and he was looking quite at his ease.

"There's Bauldwin Brent," said Schlauss Hyman; "and what's more, he can't deny it."

Brent nodded to them. "You'd better have a look at Dreen, Hyman," he said. "I think he's only stunned a bit. I was very careful not to mark him in any way. I didn't want to hurt the boy."

He came forward, and picking up his coffee-cup drained it.

"Look here," said Ochs. "I'm sorry I made that criticism of your book, 'The Wild Places.' I take it back. I know a little more about such subjects now. And—Brent—I'm mighty glad to know you."

Brent sighed. "All right, Ochs," he said. "But I was hoping you wouldn't know. People seemed to expect me, as Bauldwin Brent, to do such queer, un-

heard-of things, and to make monstrously clever remarks. I was tired of it. I'm just an ordinary sort of fellow, who abides by the conventions when he's in civilization, and my reputation annoys me." He turned to Dorothy Gordon. "It wasn't really a deception; but I'm sorry I didn't tell you at first. But, really, I was awfully tired of having people expect great things of me, and then be disappointed because I don't wear my hair long or keep a flaring mass of silk tied under a Byronic collar, or come to dinner in a flannel shirt, and show myself absolutely regardless of other people's feelings. Can't you understand how tired a man gets of being constantly watched and expected to perform like some monkey on a stick, or caged beast—or a—all that sort of thing?" He paused rather out of breath. "Anyhow, since it's out, forgive me, won't you?"

The tension of the moment was relieved by the entrance of Dreen, slightly supported by Hyman.

Dreen was rather pale, and was smiling his old, boyish smile. He was more like the Dreen they had first known when he came aboard the *Sultana*.

"Brent," he said, and extended his hand, "you did for me—did it fair, too. You could have punched me into a jelly. Nobody knows that better than I do. You let me off. I'm sorry I've been such a cad, and I hope you'll overlook it, will you? Say, I'm awfully sorry. Shake hands, won't you?"

"Of course," replied Brent; and they gripped one another's hands firmly.

IV.

Sleep claimed the tired persons of all save Brent a very short time after they drew the sheets over them and became conscious of feeling very clean and comfortable in the silken pajamas which had been left for them by their enemies the Japanese. Before they had been in reclining positions fifteen minutes, Dorothy, Ochs, Hyman, and Dreen were quite soundly asleep. But Brent was not. He had many things to think about.

Two things battled for supremacy in his mind. One of them was how he was to preserve Dorothy Gordon from harm—the other how to manage to prevent the rebellion planned from ever occurring. He felt suddenly such a weight as the ruler of a nation must have forced upon him at times. Although he did not realize just how he was going to manage it, he felt that he was responsible for keeping those arms out of the Philippines, those men from landing, and preventing the deaths of thousands of Americans like himself. He had soldiered in the Philippines, and he knew how little mercy Americans might expect at the hands of victorious *insurrectos*. He had seen the remains of many American soldiers mutilated by Filipinos. He knew of many enormities committed—enormities he dared not think of, and which are unfit for the printed page, or even the thoughts of a decent man.

What chance had the few thousand American troops in the islands? Brent was quite sure that the constabulary would prove faithless; would desert to their brown brothers with their carbines, their ammunition, their training. It was quite plain to him that the Filipinos, with thirty thousand Japanese rifles, could sweep the islands clear of *Americanos* in less than two weeks. And the United States four weeks' journey away!

He could not sleep. He arose and sat down by the window smoking cigarette after cigarette. As he sat there, he saw the stars disappear, the moon cloud, and the skies grow black. He heard the soughing of the wind and the dash of the breakers on the shore below. The night-birds shrilled warnings; there were many flutterings of wings as bats and owls and other creatures of the night flurried to shelter—even the chitter of the insects seemed to take on an alarmed note; and the wind changed from a tropical zephyr laden with scents of the jungle to a cold, fierce wind redolent of sea salt.

The sky lighted up with a flaming streak; the thunder rolled resonantly, threateningly. Rain began to fall;

great heavy splotches of it. He closed his windows.

From where he sat he could see the ocean lighted up by balls of St. Elmo's fire that zigzagged across the water; sometimes riding the crest of a great white breaker; sometimes seemingly extinguished in the gulfing void. The casements of the windows rattled. The palm-trees shed their fronds as they bent and swayed under the tropical hurricane. Frightened squawks of birds told him that death was abroad. A spray of golden hibiscus blossoms was dashed against his window in a gust of rain.

The breakers were thundering on the shore now, dashing themselves wildly, tumultuously against the sand. A tree near the house cracked and fell to earth, carrying smaller trees with it.

For hours the storm continued, and it was with the surf's thunder, the wind's howl, and the thunder's crash in his ears that Brent finally fell asleep.

He awoke early with the sun streaming in upon his face; and somehow forgot the troubles of the night before, and whistled quite merrily. He rolled up his windows, and the breath of the ylang-ylang was wafted into his nostrils. The air was sweet with the smell of early morning. Birds chirped and sang merrily; monkeys chattered; parrakeets squawked. The ground was strewn with leaves, cocoanuts, bananas, grape-fruit, and other abundance swept to the ground by the storm of the night. From where he stood he could see the fallen tree; a slim dragon-shoot.

Slipping his feet into his grass-slippers, he made his way out, attired as he was in the yellow silk pajamas that he wore, descended to the first floor, and found his way to the kitchen.

He had noted the night before that there was a little creek running by the house, upon which the Japanese had built a bath-house; and it was to this that he made his way. He found a board floor, and two huge wooden tubs fitted with faucets and pipes; one faucet marked "Hot"; the boiler attached to the pipe signifying that the faucet could easily be made to verify itself by building a fire under the boiler. But Brent had no use for hot water. He preferred the cold.

He went back to the house to get some soap and a towel, and then remembered Pursey Ochs, who had probably never taken a bath in cold water in his life. He ran up-stairs, and awakened Ochs after considerable trouble; and that gentleman followed him down-stairs, carrying soap and towel, and rubbing his eyes sleepily.

"I will say for the Japs that they're cleanly little beggars," said Brent; "and it was mighty nice of them to remember this bath-house."

He plunged into the wooden tub now half-full, and soaped and rubbed himself, dashing the water over himself in the ecstasy which a cold-water bather finds in his matutinal ablutions. Ochs watched him rather enviously, and started the water in his tub, hardly realizing that it was cold.

When Brent was out and was rubbing himself into a fine glow, Pursey Ochs discarded pajamas and plunged into the tub. The next moment there rang through the bath-house and the surrounding grounds the shriek of a man who has been wounded bitterly; who had been deceived, decoyed, and betrayed. Ochs leaped up, chattering, and would have gotten out of the tub had he not observed the malicious grin on Brent's face.

Let it be remembered that Pursey Ochs was a man of determination. He sternly subdued his chattering, and with trembling hands proceeded to soap himself and dash the cold water all over him. Several times his hands, numb with cold, lost the soap, and he was in imminent danger of having a cramp; but when he stepped forth from the tub, he rubbed himself with an appearance of dignity, casting meanwhile oblique glances at Brent, to see what effect his actions had.

"Ochs, you're a brick," said Brent admiringly. "You've got nerve. I didn't take my first cold-water bath half so calmly."

"Who said it was my first cold-water bath?" growled Pursey Ochs.

Brent had no reply ready, and he remained silent.

After the rubbing-down process, Mr. Ochs was surprised to find himself in a state of beatitude, and when both men had gone back to the house and dressed themselves, Pursey became almost kittenish.

"Come," said Brent, "we'll go down and see what's happened to our boat on the beach. Maybe, too, we can pick up some crabs or turtles on the beach after the storm. Are you with me?"

"Count me in," replied Pursey Ochs; and they raced one another down the slope and to the beach.

The first sight that met their eyes was an astonishing one. There, stranded high and dry on the coral reefs of the bar, was a schooner of some two hundred tons burden, her masts broken, her spars gone, her decks swept clean. They stared in astonishment for some minutes at the black hulk which had come upon their vision with such suddenness. Pursey Ochs was the first to recover, and his eyes sought the beach.

"Look there," he said, with some awe in his tone.

Brent looked and saw. Sprawled out in awkward attitudes were the bodies of six or more men, some half-buried in the sands, one of them propped in a sitting posture against a great camphor-tree.

"Good Lord!" said Brent; and moved toward the bodies. Remembering, he looked at Ochs.

"We've got to get rid of them before Miss Gordon gets a chance to see," he said.

Ochs nodded.

The first man was quite evidently a Jew. He had the enormous hook-nose of the more marked of his race, and there was something about the set of his jaw that confirmed the idea. His eyes were closed. He wore a quantity of jewelry on his fingers, an enormous gold watch-chain with a diamond pendant across his waistcoat, and a diamond pin secured by a catch in his water-soaked blue scarf.

An idea came to Brent. He felt in the dead man's pockets, and drew out a packet of papers. They were water-soaked and mostly illegible; but one letter had been written on a typewriter with a copying-ribbon, and then press-copied, so the letters were perfectly clear:

Mr. Moses Greenbaum,
Hotel King Edward,
Hongkong, China.

He stepped back suddenly, clutching the paper in his hand. Then he felt the man's heart. Moses Greenbaum was quite dead.

Ochs was examining the other bodies, and shouting at Brent. But Brent did not hear him. He went from one to another. There was the tall, lean Spaniard, whom he knew instinctively to be the *mestizo,* Araza y Tagliono; here the fat, bulky form of Von Klingen, the German smuggler; a little farther apart, elegant even in death, girlish, almost effeminate, his blue eyes staring guilelessly at the heavens above, the renegade Anglo-Saxon, who was known throughout the Orient as "Chirping Charley," and feared as few men were feared; he whom his parents had christened Charles Carr Conkling. It was hard to believe, looking at his slim form and pale, delicately featured face, that he was such a scoundrel.

A little farther away, twisted into a strange shape, was the fair-skinned Aorto. There was an evil, agonized leer on his face now. The man who sat against the camphor-tree was the third *mestizo*—a *mestizo* indeed this one with swarthy brown skin and lowering eyebrows. His mouth was open, his jaw loose, his ferret eyes staring. Near him lay a lascar sailor, clutching the belt of a Chinese. A man in a torn uniform with faded gold braid had his head buried in the sand at the lascar's feet. In all, nine bodies lay there.

Brent began to cast off his clothes. "I'm going to swim out to the hulk, and see if there's any one aboard," he said quietly. "You go along the beach and see if you can find any more bodies."

A few minutes later Brent was lifting his naked body hand over hand

through the water, the sun gleaming on his white skin. Ochs watched his speedy course in admiration, then began to make his way up the beach at a run, searching for more flotsam which the sea had cast up.

Brent reached the hulk, and caught at a port-hole, swinging himself up and gaining a foothold. The schooner was tilted on her beam-ends, and when Brent reached the deck, he found it no easy task to keep from slipping. All about him were torn timber, wrecked apparatus, fragments of sail-cloth, rope, and iron fittings. He found the wheel smashed, the pilot-house broken in, the boats blown from their davits.

He started to descend the companionway, and his foot struck against something soft at the top. It was a man's body, his head crushed in by the falling of a heavy piece of timber. The cabin had three or four feet of water in it, in which floated the body of another man done to death in some mysterious fashion. Brent clutched the companionway, and ascended to the deck again to breathe the pure air.

The forecastle was deserted; and so was the rest of the ship. Brent dived into the sea again, narrowly missing the coral reef, and swam ashore with all promptitude.

He found Ochs waiting for him with the information that another sailor and two Chinese, evidently servants, had perished also, and were lying a little way around the south bend.

Brent got into his clothes, while Ochs, by his instructions, returned to the house to fetch spades. When he returned with two, they set to work and dug a great trench, into which, after removing the jewelry and papers, they cast the bodies, and shoveled in the sand, making it firm with many blows of the blunt instruments. Brent stood back and looked at Ochs.

"Fate has played us a turn to-day, Ochs," he said; and his voice was very grave. "On us five rests the responsibility of many of our countrymen's lives, and the integrity of the island possessions of our country. I'm an unworthy enough man; but you've chosen me for your leader, and I'm going to do the best I can——"

He paused.

"Six of the men we have buried formed the Junta of Hongkong. They are dead and buried now. The men who come from Japan probably do not know them. So we five become the Junta, assume the names of those dead men, and play their parts to prevent our country's loss——"

Instinctively he removed his cap, and sank to the sand on his knees. His head was bowed.

"God help me to save my countrymen's lives, to preserve my country's possessions," he said; and his tone was that of a man praying.

Pursey Ochs, iconoclast and agnostic, was suddenly moved by his emotions.

"Amen," said he fervently. And then, ashamed of himself, he blushed and coughed several times.

V.

They gathered some mangos, some bananas, and a sort of grape-fruit, which Brent called *pumelo*, on their way back, intending the same for the morning meal; and when they reached the house, they found that breakfast was prepared. Hyman, Dreen, and Dorothy had, by their combined efforts, produced coffee, broiled bacon, and a sort of flannel-cake, made from the wheaten flour, which Dreen had discovered in the pantry. The fruit added to these appetizing articles; they made a most satisfactory breakfast; every one declaring that the flapjacks were prime, especially when garnished with plenty of honey. Dorothy, however, was sadly aware that their compliments of the cakes had in them something of personal feeling for the maker, for quite a number of them were burned, and she knew it.

Breakfast over, Brent and Ochs told the story of their morning's discovery, and impressed their companions with the fact that they must get used to their new names.

"Ochs here is Herr von Klingen,"

said Brent. "Fortunately he speaks German. Hyman is Mr. Moses Greenbaum. Miss Dorothy is Charles Carr Conkling, and I'm sorry enough he was such a disreputable fellow. Dreen here is Señor Leon Aorto. Can you speak Spanish, Dreen?"

"Very badly," replied Dreen.

Brent sighed. "We'll have to make the best of it. Fortunately I'm good at Spanish, and can talk enough for the two of us as Don Ambrosino de Araza. I must say"—he had the ghost of a smile on his face—"that there are very few people who can boast of such disreputable characters as we have assumed."

"Or maybe it's only that those gentlemen were found out," remarked Pursey Ochs, with great disbelief in the goodness of mankind.

When they left the table, Hyman took a look at Brent's lacerated hand, and dressed it again with some medicinal salves he found in the chest, binding it up with cotton lint, and advising Brent not to use his hand any more than he could help. Dreen was left behind with Miss Gordon to make the house tidy and clear away the breakfast things, while the other three set about an exploration of the grounds.

Although the arsenal and barracks were not visible from the house, they were a very short distance away, built on the slopes of the island valley; the arsenal upon the near slope, the barracks upon the far. With the keys which they found in the house, the men entered the arsenal and found what they expected—case after case of modern rifles, box upon box of cartridges and high explosives, kegs of the dreaded Shimose powder, marked in huge red Japanese ideographs, meaning, no doubt, that care should be taken in the handling. Four Maxim rapid-fire guns, in sections, were stowed away in packings of cotton and excelsior, their chubby brass noses seeming complacent and in no way deadly. The uniforms were packed in huge green chests, one piled upon the other. There was but little room to move about in the arsenal, for all its huge size; so many of the implements and accouterments of war were stowed away there.

Entrance to the arsenal was gained by a very complicated mechanism, involving the use of three or four keys, which unlocked padlocks, slides, and threw back the fastening of bolts. They were careful to see that the building was securely locked before they left it.

The barracks did not prove especially interesting. They were two long, low buildings, with a space of some fifty-five yards between them much resembling a street, for the trees had been lopped away within the enclosure, the shrubs, greenery, and gorgeous growths uprooted, and their places filled by the sand of the seaside, ground in with a heavy rolling-machine. In every detail was seen the minute care and accuracy of the Japanese builders. All was as it should be, in neat and regular form; and save for the dust that had accumulated since the leaving of the Japanese, all was beautifully clean.

The barracks were provided with cots of regulation army make—canvas stretched on four horizontal poles, and supported by four vertical ones—one blanket and one sheet apiece; a comb, a piece of soap; a couple of towels and a scrub-brush; also two suits of clean, coarse underwear, and one pair of white cotton pajamas.

"There's no use in talking," said Brent, with admiration, "the Japs are rotten morally, but they're the cleanest people in the world—and they look on it as a necessity. Look at that outfit for a soldier——"

Below, there were a huge cooking-range, several smaller stoves for the same purpose, and great wash-tubs for linen, and huge boilers. In every respect, the place was ready for occupancy. Back of the first barracks and between that building and the second one were the wash-houses, which were provided with large wooden tubs.

Coming back to the bungalow from the inspection, they found that the house had been swept and put in order by Miss Dorothy and her stalwart assistant, Dreen. They were fanning themselves after their exertions, using

the huge blue aprons about their waists for the purpose, while their heads were ornamented by turbans made from towels. Dorothy beat a retreat at the entrance of the other three; and Dreen laughed boyishly. He appeared to be enjoying himself.

Dorothy had found a clock among the stores, and had set it by guesswork when she arose that morning. Hyman and Dreen, taking measurements of the shadows and judging the position of the sun, amended her guess, and set the clock at ten minutes past ten.

"Who's a good shot in the crowd?" asked Brent.

Dreen adjudged himself worthy of that title.

"Better take a gun and try to shoot something for the next two meals, then," was Brent's remark. "As for Hyman and myself, we're going to make some sort of a tour of exploration to see what this island's like. We mayn't be home for lunch, Miss Dorothy," as that young lady appeared, denuded of turban and apron. "And if we're not here by two o'clock, don't you wait for us. Ochs, you stay behind with Miss Dorothy. Dreen will go out and try to bag some game."

So the party broke up again.

Before making their tour of exploration, Brent and Hyman had to patch up the ship's boat, which, in spite of its sheltered position, had been somewhat damaged in the storm of the night before. They had, fortunately, discovered some oars among the supplies; and the boat once fixed, they set off on their journey.

They returned about six o'clock, when the sun was beginning to go low on the western horizon. They had followed the shore of the island for a great distance, and were of the opinion that it required more than a day's journey in a rowboat to circle it. They had rowed in one direction for a long time, and, seeing no curve which would lead them to believe that they were coming back again, they turned their boat the way they had come.

Several times they had gone ashore and investigated several creeks and inlets, and had gone a little way into the tropical forest; but they had very little information to show for their day's work; and Doctor Schlauss Hyman's hands were blistered from using the oars.

Dreen had been very successful in his hunting, and had come back at five o'clock with a brace of wood pigeons, a parrakeet, and a young wild pig, the bringing of which over his shoulder had stained his white clothes with blood and ruined them for all time.

"I saw some antelopes, too," he told Dorothy; "but one of them stopped and looked at me, sort of pathetic-like, you know; and, honestly, I didn't have the heart to shoot—I just didn't. Though," he added regretfully, "it looked very juicy and tender."

He advanced himself a few pegs in Miss Gordon's estimation by that ingenuous speech.

Pursey Ochs proved himself the hero of the hour by suddenly coming to the front and offering to roast the wild pig. He had much experience in that line, he said. He told them some funny stories of political barbecues in which he had assisted, and then sent Dreen off to dig for yams—"sweet potatoes," he called them—which he told Dreen were to be found growing under a certain dragon-tree. Dreen returned with the yams and washed them about the time that Mr. Ochs had prepared the pig for roasting.

The three of them then went out beyond the house, and Pursey Ochs directed Dreen to dig a hole. The pig, wrapped in green leaves and surrounded by "sweet potatoes," was placed in the hole, the fire was built, and Mr. Ochs seated himself on a soap-box, stick in hand, with which he would every now and then test the tenderness of the pig. It was still roasting when the explorers returned from their voyage, and there was much excitement among the other four as to the pig's condition, Mr. Ochs issuing bulletins at intervals of ten minutes.

At last the perfect roast was announced, and Brent and Dreen came

out bearing a huge platter, upon which the young pig was placed and triumphantly borne into the house and to the dinner-table.

Dinner over, they were quite gay over the events of the day; but the conversation soon took a more serious turn, and the talk drifted to what they should do when the ship from the north arrived. Before ten o'clock they went to bed.

Thus began their life on the island; and this life was disturbed not at all for a full week, during which time they settled down to a routine that still held in it all the elements of novelty. They gave up the attempt of exploring the island, deciding that it was much larger than they had expected; and Brent spent much of his time teaching Ochs and Hyman how to shoot straight.

They made a rifle-range, and erected a huge board with a bull's-eye on one of the little rocks in the cove; and the newspaper editor and surgeon made the most of their opportunities and ammunition, learning how to use a revolver and rifle with equal facility.

Brent and Dreen evolved a series of physical exercises for their weaker companions, and tried to teach them to wrestle. Ochs and Hyman worked like Trojans to overcome their years of sloth, regardless of the aching backs, necks, and arms which the exercises brought forth.

Brent cut some heavy sticks from lignum-vitæ-trees, and trimmed them down into tolerable imitations of single sticks; and with these he bouted, for partners having Dreen and Dorothy, until the other two had sufficiently mastered it to take a hand.

They had no trouble in sleeping. When they went to bed, each one of them was healthily tired out. Between exercise and cold baths, Pursey Ochs lost flesh rapidly and gained muscle. He felt his arms each day, and was encouraged by the hardness they were acquiring, although when he looked at the enormous thews and sinews of Dreen and Brent, he was inclined to be discouraged.

The housework was equally divided among them, and the place kept very neat and clean. After many abortive attempts at cooking, they began to acquire some skill in the culinary art, most especially Dorothy Gordon, who had a woman's quickness for any sort of domestic work. Miss Gordon did not regret her situation in the least.

"If I only had a horse," she murmured, "I would be perfectly happy."

She knew well enough that her aunt was too thoroughly selfish a woman to weep very long over her loss; and, as that aunt was her nearest relative, she felt sure that no one was undergoing any particular pain.

So their life went on until the morning when Brent came in late for breakfast, a pair of binoculars in his hands. His face was tense.

"Come," he said. "Look toward the north, Ochs." And he handed him the glasses.

All left the table to go to the veranda. Ochs lifted the binoculars. He gasped a little as he took them down.

But there was hardly need for glasses, for a thin little trail of smoke was going upward from the China Sea, and was visible to the eyes of the others.

"She's headed straight for us," said Ochs. "It's the ship from Japan." His face was very serious for the moment, but his was a nature which pretended to take things lightly. "On with the dance," he quoted, in his lightest tone; "let joy be unrefined. Oh! but this is where we begin to reap a crop of merry young hell. Beg your pardon, Miss Dorothy. Guess those flannel-cakes'll get cold if we don't stow them away."

He went back to the dining-room, and continued to eat as though nothing troubled his mind. Brent looked at Dorothy Gordon.

"Dorothy," he said very quietly, "it's come, as you and I and all of us know it must come. You've got a difficult part to play—I know what it means to you. You'll be thrown into the society of men whose conversation is not fit for women's ears; and you must forget it. The man whose name you have assumed was a rogue of the worst de-

scription—nothing will be too vicious for these people to say to you. But remember we're playing the biggest game in the world—the biggest game in the world. We're playing for our country's honor, for the lives of thousands of Americans. No sacrifice is too great if we can win—I'd sacrifice anything—and I know you would, to——"

"I—I'd try," she said very low, and looked at him queerly, then with a slight hysterical laugh went back into the house.

Brent turned to Dreen and Hyman. "Fellows, we're up against it," he said.

The others nodded gravely, and watched the smoke trickling upward from the China Sea.

"The mines are laid to blow up the arsenal," said Brent presently. "Remember, when the necessity comes, any one of us who sees it first will take the responsibility of touching off the match. Those rifles and that ammunition will never reach the Philippines, at any rate."

They nodded again, still watching the smoke. There was a new look in the eyes of each. It was the look that comes to those who must play great parts in the world's tragedy.

VI.

"And now, gentleman," said Captain Rolf Arundsen, twisting his enormous yellow mustache—which had given rise to his sobriquet "Walrus" Arundsen—and glaring about him with his single blue eye. "Now that we know each the other, some explanations we should make. Eh?"

Both hands went to the mustache, and its spiked ends seemed to be veritable tusks of yellow ivory. The blue eye, mild and uncomplaining like a little child's, was frowned upon by the heavy brows, the whole facial get-up forming a most incongruous picture.

"Sit here, Captain Arundsen," said Bauldwin Brent in Spanish, pushing forward the largest chair.

The blue eye was suddenly turned upon him. "You speak Danish? No? German, then? No? But English?"

"Si, Señor el Capitan," smiled Brent.

"Then," announced Captain Rolf Arundsen, "it is English we will speak. We all speak English, is it not?"

"You twy to speak it," said Lanier, sneering.

"So, is it so?" replied Rolf Arundsen explosively, his mild blue eye performing remarkable gymnastic feats, while his glass one stared stonily at the antics of its mate. "So, is it so? But it is not that I speak like the children they speak, Mr. Lanier; like the little babies that cannot say the words."

Lanier, a handsome, dissipated man of some thirty years, was the first officer, and cordially hated "Walrus" Arundsen. According to the custom among the adventurers of the Orient, he, too, had been given a nickname which he despised, and which had risen out of his unfortunate trick of turning his "r's" into "w's," and adding a "th" when such an appendage was unnecessary. Lanier had fought this mannerism all his life, but had never conquered it; and he would rather have been called anything other than "Lisp" Lanier.

It had been some time now since the ship had found a safe anchorage, and the five adventurers had put out to meet her, introducing themselves to the officers as the Junta, minus the Señor Esperaso, "who had been drowned." It was not without some trepidation that they had made their assertions, fearing as they did that there might be some one on board who would know the Junta by sight and dub them liars. But, thanks to the fact that the externals of all of them were to a certain extent the same as the men whose parts they played, no suspicion was aroused. Every one in the Orient had heard of the effeminate dandy, Chirping Charley Conkling; of the rubicund Froehlich von Klingen; the Jew, Moses Greenbaum; the lean Spaniard, De Araza; and the *mestizo*, "El Colorado" Aorto [Aorto the Red], which had been developed into "Reddy" Aorto. Dreen's Titian curls surmounting his large head filled the picture admirably.

"First of all," grunted the Swiss mercenary, Colonel Gustave Pfferkorn,

"we've got to get those ragamuffins of mine ashore." He referred to the refuse of the Chinese and Japanese ports which he had recruited for service under the Republicas Filipinas. The ship's boats were made ready to take them ashore, an officer in each boat.

The supposed Junta leaned over the rail and watched the disembarking of the recruits. Seldom had Bauldwin Brent, familiar as he was with the lowest type of mercenary, seen such a villainous aggregation. To the others, save Hyman, whose practise had taken him among the lowest class of Polish Jews, the sight was amazing.

There were discharged American and English soldiers in remnants of their uniforms held together by strings and pins, unshaven and unkempt, their faces of the lowest type which the Anglo-Saxon knows; greasy, treacherous-looking Italians and Greeks with earrings in their ears and long knives in their belts. Brent noted one of the Greeks in an altercation with a big English soldier for a place in the boat. The Englishman struck him heavily and knocked him backward. Brent saw the look of the Greek, his yellow teeth showing in a ghastly smile.

"He'll do for that 'Tommy' for that," meditated Brent.

There were stolid, beefy-looking Germans, some bewhiskered Russian deserters in boots, a great number of Chinese in the uniform of the Imperial Army, Spaniards, Portuguese, Eurasians of indeterminate ancestry, the scum of all nations, dirty, ill-kept, villainous, some five hundred in all.

Colonel Pfferkorn, with a riding-crop in hand, superintended the disembarkation, not scrupling to use the crop whenever one of his recruits jostled another or tried to enter a boat which contained too many. His officers, numbering ten, were just as mixed as the soldiers; two wore the uniform of the French Foreign Legion, and evidently had belonged to the brigade stationed in Cochin-China; three more were in the dress of the Imperial Chinese Army, and looked like Norwegians; two more were attired as infantry lieutenants of Siberian Cossacks; one had the scarlet jacket of an English sergeant; two more were in plain khaki tunics and were nondescript. All the officers betrayed one universal trait, familiarity with the sort of brutes they were dealing with, and distributed kicks, curses, and blows among their men with great impartiality.

The "army of occupation" having landed, Colonel Pfferkorn went in the last boat with Schlauss Hyman to show him the way to the barracks.

The vessel commanded by Walrus Arundsen had once been a merchant ship of one of the great lines plying between Japan and the United States, and had been purchased by Japan for use as a transport during the war. She was heavily armored, and had a gun-room of great capacity. The brass nozles of rapid-firing guns peeped out from under canvas coverings on her decks. Had the same nozles been elevated instead of deflected from the port-holes of the gun-room below, there would have been an ominous array. She had been rechristened the *Valkyrie*, evidently by a happy thought of Arundsen's; and while she was a ship in no condition to meet an armored cruiser or a battle-ship, she was quite capable of harrying a coast town or giving battle to gunboats and torpedo-destroyers.

She was manned entirely by Chinese except for the navigation and gunnery and engineering staffs. Her boatswain, master-at-arms, carpenter, and other minor officers were all Chinese. Her gun-captain was an ex-gunner in the American Navy, a Norwegian by descent, and also a dipsomaniac: a man who had made the highest averages, but whose continual sprees had brought about his reduction from warrant officer to petty officer, until he was finally disrated to the ranks again. After serving out his enlistment in the forecastle, he had quitted the navy with a bitter hatred for the United States. The other gunners were Germans.

The chief engineer was a Scotchman named MacTavish. He had three assistants—MacCullom, Raeburn, and El-

lison, all hailing from the banks of the Clyde. They were the only decent men of the lot. They took no part in the councils, and ate at a different table in the saloon. They were there to run the engines. They hardly knew the reasons for the expedition.

With the navigating staff it was different. There was the first officer, Robert Lanier Daingerfield, familiarly known as "Lisp" Lanier, a graduate of the Naval Academy, at Annapolis, and who had won his lieutenancy in the service by sheer hard work, aided by a gallant feat performed off Morro Castle when he was an acting ensign, just out of the academy. Lanier had been dismissed from the service for cheating at cards three years before; and hated his own country cordially.

The second officer was the fourth son of an English peer, who had been kicked out of the British Navy for some reason unknown. He was a round-faced, smoothly shaven, clean-looking person with a slight limp like a string-halted horse, and a red slash of a scar across his intensely white forehead. His upper lip was too short, and his brilliant teeth were continually in evidence. He passed under the name of "Prince Edward" among his confrères, but he signed his name "James Phillips," just as Lanier signed his "Henry Lanier."

The third officer was an Irishman, Brian O'Shane by name, a graduate of the merchant marine, and a former R. N. R. man, whose ticket had been "dirtied" and command taken away for having been drunk when his ship went on a rock. He was a small man, with fiery red curls, which he oiled daily in a vain attempt to keep under subjection; and an enormous, fog-horn voice. His hands and feet were out of all proportion to his height, and he was generally known as "Hoofer" O'Shane.

The fourth officer was a Dane and a crony of Arundsen's, who called himself Christian, but who belied his name. He was an incompetent navigator; but a splendid handler of men. He had a pug-nose, and three of his front teeth were missing.

It was Christian who, as officer of the deck, had been left in charge of the ship; and the other navigating officers, the chief gunner—the Norwegian-American, Sturm Sturmson—Colonel Pfferkorn, and the five supposed members of the Junta were now assembled in the living-room of the bungalow to hold a council of war.

Brent had seen to it that there was a plentiful supply of glasses, Scotch and rye whisky, seltzer, and several bottles of cocktails. Boxes of cigars and cigarettes lay about in profusion, along with many boxes of safety-matches.

"You know, I am believing," said Captain Arundsen, "that it is by orders that it is you, gentlemen, to whom I report, most especially the Señor De Araza. Your orders, when they are given, shall be obeyed most promptly. It was that I bring my ship here, and also the gutter-rats as passengers. This has been done; and the further commands I now await."

Brent smiled amiably. "I have no order to-night, captain, except that you and your officers remain to dinner with me. To-morrow we will go more seriously into the matter."

"And I," said Colonel Pfferkorn, "have been designated these ruffians in the barracks to train. Hear them, now!" He lifted his hand for silence that the shrill yells, curses, and cries from the barracks might be heard. "Them I shall train, it is most assured. But the time it will take—I do not know. At present they are very filthy. I would ask that the Señor De Araza permit that a uniform be given to each man. I shall see that it is kept clean. I have understanding that there are many uniforms in the arsenal."

"Greenbaum," said Brent, speaking to Doctor Hyman, "I give you here the keys to the arsenal. Go with Colonel Pfferkorn and have him summon some of his soldiers to aid you. Remove the number of uniforms necessary. But" —he looked at the colonel—"I think it best that no arms be distributed among them as yet."

The colonel, a large-framed man, with a huge, red nose on which a wart

disported itself, nodded emphatically over his gold-rimmed spectacles. "Yah," he affirmed contemptuously. "There are many cases of arms aboard the *Valkyrie,* but I do not trust those fledglings. Come, Herr Greenbaum."

Walrus Arundsen lighted a cigar, and dispensed some information. "It is known to you, of course, Señor De Araza, that another ship, under command of Captain Thorwald, leaves Japan within several weeks with a cargo of arms and more men, if possible. You have heard?"

"We have asked and have hoped," returned Brent non-committally.

"They come," reasserted the Walrus, spitting profusely on the floor. "Until then, perhaps, we do nothing."

Brent shrugged his shoulders.

The late afternoon was creeping on. The vessel had anchored at twelve o'clock, and the disembarkation of the troops had taken time. "Prince Edward" Phillips lighted a cigarette and looked extremely bored. Brian O'Shane had gotten Pursey Ochs in a corner, and was telling him a story which tickled the risibilities of the man from St. Louis. Dreen was listening, with ill-concealed weariness, to the tale of Sturmson, the ex-warrant officer, who, with many calls upon the Deity, was explaining that he was an innocent man. Lanier had managed to seat himself next to Dorothy Gordon; and the girl, pale but determined, was pretending to listen to him, although her mind was far away.

Lanier's touch on her shoulder awakened her from her memories. "Day-dreaming, Conkling?" he asked, laughing unpleasantly. "I should think you would have a good deal on your conscience, though, from all I've heard."

"What do you mean?" asked the girl.

Lanier laughed again. "Oh, I believe it's consistently recognized that you're the worst scoundrel in the Orient, Mr. Conkling," he said. "You remember the case of that girl from——"

"Never mind," said Dorothy Gordon stiffly.

The man surveyed her. "I was prepared, to some extent, for your appearance, you know," he continued, easily insulting, "but I hardly expected to find so innocent a face——"

"Oh, stow it!" replied Dorothy, borrowing a phrase from Mr. Ochs.

Lanier got up. "As I'm going to stay for dinner, and the captain's sent for his cook and boys, we've got plenty of time before dinner. I wish you'd show me the grounds roundabout. Will you?"

"Why——" For a moment she hesitated, then, with a scowl: "Oh, very well!"

They passed through the French windows to the veranda, and down the graveled walk to the spring. Here Lanier deliberately motioned to Dorothy.

"Sit down," he said.

"I thought you wanted to see the grounds," she began.

"Sit down," he said again; but she faced him angrily. "I'll do as I please," she asserted, and started away.

He caught her by the shoulder. "I have something very important to say."

She turned, a sickly fear in her eyes, and sat down on the plank. He stretched himself carelessly at her feet, and took a cigarette from a gold case. He offered them to her, but she refused. He lighted his.

"I might as well say, to begin with," remarked Lanier casually, "that I know Charles Carr Conkling personally, also Von Klingen and Greenbaum."

He paused, and blew a smoke ring.

"Also Miss Dorothy Gordon," he resumed.

Her brain seemed afire, her fingers shook, and her body seemed to ache. She tried to speak, but her mouth was dry, and her tongue, somehow, was not under her control. The white hand which she stretched forth trembled.

"No one else on board does," he continued, looking keenly at her.

"You—you traitor!" she gasped. "You shameful traitor! Oh! what a cur, what a cad you are!"

"Why?" he asked coolly. She did not answer. "I've kept better faith

with you than ever you would have done with me. When I recognized you, and failed to recognize the men introduced as Von Klingen and Greenbaum, I said nothing. My actions betrayed nothing. I did that, Dolly, for you!"

She said nothing. Her body was shaken with convulsive sobs. Was this to be the end, after all? When they had hoped for so much; when they had meant to do so much. "No sacrifice is too great for country," she remembered Bauldwin Brent had said. If she could only get this man out of the way.

Slowly she began to regain her composure. There was a revolver in her hip pocket. If she could get that out, and kill Lanier. He was a traitor, and deserved death. He was not popular with his captain, and Charles Carr Conkling's reputation was well known. Everything would fit in so well.

She must! Again she said: "No sacrifice is too great for your country," and her hand stole to her hip pocket. But before it came out, Lanier's lean fingers had gripped her wrist in a vise, while his left hand plucked the revolver from the pocket and put it in his own. He leaned back and regarded her with admiration.

"Dolly," he said, "you've got nerve. You're the bravest, pluckiest girl I ever knew. And so you'd kill me, would you? Well, bless me, if I don't admire you for it, you little devil!"

Her face was hard.

"See here, Dolly," said Lanier Daingerfield, his tones softening. "What's the game you and your men are playing? How did you get here, and what do you mean to do?"

"Do you think I'd tell you, you traitor?" she cried bitterly.

His face darkened. "In what way am I a traitor? Didn't the United States kick me out of the navy, and deprive me of my citizenship? Didn't she renounce me? And what did I do? Oh! well, it's a wretched story. If I hadn't struck the captain after!—but, then, what's the use? I had to have an occupation, didn't I? I was disgraced. Not a decent man I knew would speak to me, and not a decent woman—except you, you little angel of mercy! You were then. I won't forget that day when I went down Charles Street with everybody I knew cutting me, and you stopped and spoke to me, and told me you were so sorry, and hoped I'd bear up and go somewhere else and be decent. That did keep me decent for a long time, I can tell you. But what chance did I have? I was discredited. No one would give me a ship. I served for awhile in the Brazilian Navy until they got on to my disgrace and fired me out. Then I drifted over to Chile, and served in their navy. The United States admiral at that port gave me away, and I was cut loose again. Then I came out here, and found that the only thing I could get was the command of some smuggling ship—and I've been at that ever since. And then this chance cropped up—and I took it. What is the United States to me?"

"Your country," she replied.

He shook his head.

"Dorothy," he said slowly, his lips making the name almost pathetic, "I didn't get the chance before to tell you how much I loved you——"

"Don't!" she said, holding up her hand.

"I didn't get the chance," he pursued doggedly. "But just the same I did love you, and I love you now more than ever. I've carried a picture of you all these years. Stole it from my cousin Jim. Here it is." He unfastened his tunic and felt within his shirt, from which he presently dragged out an oval case held by a thin silver chain and encased in chamois. He snapped open the case, revealing a picture of a very young girl in a white dress and with her hair braided down her back. "You remember that, Dorothy, don't you?"

"You have no right to it," she said. "You should give it to me."

He laughed scornfully. "Much chance of that!" He put back the case, buttoning his tunic. "Now, Dorothy, suppose I should promise not to betray you; promise on my love for you—not on my honor, for I guess I haven't any—would you tell me?"

"No," she said.

His face darkened. "Remember, I haven't as yet done anything to my country. I'm giving you a chance now, and making my last try to be decent. If I'm tried too far I might tell the others that you folks are not the Junta at all. If you tell me the true facts of the case, I may throw in my lot with you—may help you. At all events, I promise not to betray you. Take your choice!"

Her face brightened slightly. "You might help us a great deal—if you wished," she said, and her eyelashes swept her cheek. She knew her power over men, she knew the proper poses to assume to set their blood tingling. There was a sweetness in her tone. Lanier's cheek flushed.

"I will help you," he cried hotly. "The others can go hang! Tell me."

In a very low tone she told him the whole thing as it had happened; the shipwreck, the landing on the island, the finding of the dead bodies, the resolve to thwart the expedition.

"And now," she said pathetically, "we are at your mercy. If you betray us!"

"I sha'n't betray," answered Lanier slowly. "I will help you. What were your plans?"

She knew now her best course was to tell him all. She explained that they had hoped to disable the ship, blow up the arsenal, and, somehow, get a message to the authorities in the Philippines. He listened intently. When she had finished he was in a brown study. For some time he sat there, his hands clasping his knees, rocking to and fro abstractedly. Presently he looked up at her.

"Dorothy," he said, "I've a better scheme than that. We dine ashore tonight. While the captain and the other officers are getting drunk, I, with your companions and yourself, can seize the ship. One must remain behind to keep the captain and the others quiet. The crew are Chinese and devoted to me. The assistant engineer in charge is my personal friend. The officer of the deck, Christian, can be overpowered. Then we can up anchor, and away. The man who remains behind can blow up the arsenal. After that he must take to the woods, and wait until we show up with help from the Philippines. Dolly, I'll do it"—his voice sank—"on one condition."

Her slender form shook and trembled. She knew what he was about to say. She tried to cry out, to protest; but her lips seemed frozen.

"On one condition," continued Lanier. "The condition that you promise to marry me."

She said nothing; but as she sat there the trembling departed, and only the coldness remained. She saw that the scheme propounded by Lanier Daingerfield was one which could be carried out without a hitch; she saw that through him the rebellion would be nipped in the bud, and the United States saved disgrace and the death of thousands of her sons. If she refused, what, then? Lanier had promised not to betray them; but he would be cognizant of their attempts, and no doubt would thwart every one of them. They would be helpless, like bound people.

"No sacrifice is too great for your country." Brent had said that. Brent! And she loved Brent. For the past week he had been her life, her soul. She had feasted upon the sight of him, the sound of his voice, the words he spoke. And, somehow, she knew that Brent loved her; and she had been waiting in happy trepidation for the time when he would tell her so.

Her face was very white when she arose. "I can't answer you now," she said. "Give me an hour."

He arose, also. "An hour be it," he said. "I've waited years for you, Dolly. An hour more can't make much difference. With you I guess I'll be a different sort of a chap—but I had given up all hopes of that!" He took off his cap. "An hour, then, Dolly."

"I will speak to my companions," she said, "before I tell you," and left him, going up the path which led to the rear entrance of the house.

Brent was still in the reception-room with the others. She entered and put her hand on his shoulder.

"I want to speak to you for a moment," she said, in her manliest tone.

Brent took his feet from the stool and got up. "Come up-stairs," she said, "to the rear porch."

It was nearly nightfall. The sun had sunk into its western resting-place, leaving its reflection behind it, which stained the horizon blood-red. Above were the many pinks and crimsons, whites and blues, which come with the sunset. The soft zephyr of tropical eventide swayed the palm-trees, and brought the odor of the ylang-ylang to them. The chatter of the monkeys and parrakeets was very subdued, sleepy, and solemn, for it was the time for their rest. A bird of paradise yawned sleepily, and, spreading its gorgeous plumes, emitted its unlovely note, and flew lazily to its nest. Out of the distance came the sad, sweet tones of a nightingale.

"Brent," she said quietly, "Lanier has recognized me for Dorothy Gordon. He also knew Greenbaum, Von Klingen, and Conkling."

Brent jerked out an exclamation, and sat down heavily.

"He is a disgraced naval officer," she went on. "I met him four years ago. He was well thought of then, had been promoted for bravery or something. He paid me some attentions, sent me candy, books, and flowers, and often came to see me. I liked him very much. I was a little hero-worshiper, and I thought him quite a hero. But I was disillusioned before I had known him two months. He was discharged from the navy, and his disgrace made public. He cheated at cards and then struck his superior officer, and, so they say, tried to kill him. I only saw him once afterward—on the street that was—and I was so sorry for him that I stopped and told him I was sorry, and —all that, you know——"

"Bless your kind little heart!" cried Brent.

"And, now—well, I've persuaded him to join us."

"Bully for you——" began the man; but she held up her hand.

"He has promised to bring our plans to success."

Briefly she outlined Lanier Daingerfield's scheme for seizing the ship.

Brent regarded her solemnly. "It's our salvation," he said, "our salvation." He caught both her hands in his. "Dorothy! Dorothy! Your country owes you more than it will ever know—and I—Dorothy!"

"Yes?" she half-whispered. "Yes?"

He only pressed her hands more fervently. And she, knowing that she had but little courage left, hastened to the climax.

"Lanier is not doing this for nothing," she said, her voice breaking in the middle. "Only on condition that I promise to marry him! Only on that condition!"

Brent dropped her hands, and stood back, his jaw loose, his eyes staring. Then the jaw grew hard and the eyes flamed. With a sudden, quick movement, he caught the girl in his arms and held her so tightly to him that she felt her life was being pressed out of her. Yet, for all of that, she did not utter a sound.

"No, no, Dorothy; I—why, you're mine—mine—mine. You know you're mine. You're mine."

She breathed, gasped out: "Yes, yours, yours, Brent, dear. I am yours —you know I am yours," and began to cry softly.

His fierce kisses rained upon her lips, her eyes, her hair.

Presently she released herself, still holding her handkerchief to her eyes.

"If you care for me how can you tell me what you did?" he cried, a fierce jealousy awakening within him. "Did you care for this man or——"

She looked up, her eyes pitiful. "Brent, dear, it is the only way. You said there was no sacrifice too great to make for our country. And I am making the greatest sacrifice. For I love you, I love you very dearly, Brent, very dearly."

The man's face was haggard.

"It is the only way out," said the girl, her voice breaking again. "If I do not give him my promise he will not help us, and will try to prevent our plans being carried out. If I do not

promise we cannot save our country, as we hoped to do. I would not have had the courage to think of the promise, had you not said that no sacrifice was too great for country. But—and so I am making it, Brent."

There was a long silence, then: "Sweetheart," he said, and his voice had in it a rare, sweet quality which she had never heard before, "I am honored, made better, purer, by loving such a girl as you—the bravest, truest little woman that ever lived. No matter what fate has in store for me, I shall always love you. I had other plans, but fate has intervened. Our country demands a sacrifice. It shall have two—yours and mine."

Her arms went about his neck, and he kissed her again.

But presently they drew away from one another and looked each into the other's eyes, seeing only despair there; and the woman rose to her feet.

"I shall go—and tell him now," she said.

"Yes," he replied dully. "Yes."

Darkness had overspread the land. The light had gone out of the world and out of their lives. The plaintive notes of the nightingale seemed nearer, more distinct.

VII.

When Brent had got a firm grip upon himself again, he arose, and, very pale-faced and thin-lipped, descended to the first floor. He must get rid of the other officers for a short while for the purpose of getting his own people together. The easiest solution of the problem presented itself in the smell of cooking which came from the kitchen, where the captain's steward and boys were preparing the dinner.

Brent reentered the reception-hall. The bottles of whisky were half-empty, the place was thick with tobacco smoke. He stepped forward.

"Captain Arundsen," said he, "and the other officers. Dinner will soon be ready. Perhaps you would like to wash up a little before dinner?"

"It is so," said Captain Walrus Arundsen, removing his feet from the table and rising. "To wash is what I desire."

"There is water in the bedrooms," said Brent. "Come, captain and Colonel Pfferkorn, and you, Mr. Phillips and Mr. O'Shane and Mr. Sturmson."

Lanier entered with Dorothy Gordon as he spoke.

"Will you come and wash up before dinner, Mr. Lanier?"

Dorothy shook her head at Lanier.

"Presently," he said carelessly.

The five others followed Brent upstairs to the different bedrooms. Not one of them was entirely sober, and they welcomed the idea of cold water. Brent led each to a different bedroom, and closed the door; then speedily got down-stairs again.

Ochs, Dreen, and Hyman were in the reception-room stalking about, their hands in their pockets. Lanier talked to Miss Gordon in a corner.

"That's a swift lot of gentlemen," said Mr. Pursey Ochs. "What I call very lecherous in their ideas—lechers, in fact. Not that I take to myself any great purity of mind, but I do not rake up the muck-heaps for the purpose of making a quiet, intellectual afternoon. So——"

Brent nodded. "All right. We haven't got much time to talk. Mr. Lanier! Come over. Miss Gordon has given me to understand that you are with us, and she has also informed me of your scheme. I approve. This is Mr. Ochs, Doctor Hyman, and Mr. Dreen. Mr. Lanier has consented to aid us in our cause, and I feel sure you can trust him——"

Lanier nodded. "You can trust me," he said briefly. "My scheme is to seize the steamer to-night and make away with it. The Chinese crew will do what I say. They're mostly off my old ship, and I got them their places here. The officer, Christian, we'll have to blanket. The engineer in charge—old MacTavish, the chief engineer, is sick—is named Ellison, and he's a friend of mine. The other engineers, McCullom and Raeburn, are decent chaps, and will be all right after awhile. We'll

have to lock them in their staterooms until we get out of port. Now, this is what I propose, and I must talk quickly, because there's very little time. You ply the others with all the liquor you can, and try to get them drunk—though you'll have a hard job. Well, about nine o'clock I'll get up to take a breath of fresh air, so will all the rest of you, one at a time, all except one. You'll join me. We'll take the captain's boat to the ship, and carry out the scheme. As soon as we get enough steam up, we'll start. When we're under steam, I'll give three hoots of the siren. The man who stays behind will have to keep the officers away until that time—keep them away, somehow—because if they got loose and alarmed the soldiers, there'd be the deuce to pay. Now, thats' all, I think. Once under way, we'll make straight for Manila at the limit of our engines, get a couple of war-ships, and hustle back here to settle matters. It's up to you as to who the man shall be who'll stay here. He's got to take a lot of chances; and he'll very likely be hunted like a criminal by all this refuse on the island. I forgot to add that he'll have to blow up the barracks if he doesn't want these men to be armed and put up a fight when the United States cruisers show up——"

"We have laid the mine to the barracks," said Brent, "and I will see that they're blown up as soon as you sound the siren. I'll also see that none of the officers escape or make any noise until I hear that siren's whistle——"

"You!" cried Dorothy Gordon.

"Yes," replied Brent. "I'm the man to stay. I've had more experience in living in the wilds than the rest of you. I can shoot straighter, I'm physically stronger, and I can live in the woods. The man who stays behind will have to have some experience at that, you see."

"But *you!*" There was a note of agony in the girl's voice. Lanier Daingerfield looked at her sharply.

"I agree with Brent," he said. "He's the best man for it. Let him stay behind."

"Oh, that's settled," responded Brent, with an appearance of carelessness. "I was elected the leader of this party, and I delegate the place to myself. I'll take care to get ready a bag for myself having lots of food and ammunition in it before we sit down to dinner, and I'll be well armed, and—— Sssh!" he cried warningly.

"Scatter! Separate, you people! They're coming down. Dreen and Hyman, you stay here and look after them for awhile. I've got to pack up a little —and——"

He disappeared in the semidarkness outside. Pursey Ochs followed him. Dorothy Gordon slipped away to her room, leaving Lanier Daingerfield behind.

Pursey Ochs caught Brent's hand. "Somebody's dealing us a royal flush," he said, "but you got a tray hand."

"Ochs," said Brent, "look after the girl, will you? Look after her—and, Ochs! see when you reach Manila that she stays there—that she doesn't come back with the ships. Will you see to that, Ochs?"

There came a strain of anxiety into the newspaper editor's voice. "Do you think you'll peter out?" he asked.

Brent shrugged his shoulders noncommittally. "I want you to promise, Ochs. I might not have the chance to ever speak to you again, and I want you to know that there's not anything in the world for me—except Dorothy Gordon! And I can't go with her because I must stay here. We have some hard roads to travel, Ochs, sometimes, and a man doesn't whine. And I've gotten to like you—and I know you'll look after her. I don't trust this Lanier overmuch—and not with her at all. You see, she's sacrificing herself to get him to do this. He's doing it for a price. He knew her years ago—and the price is herself. And she bought him with that, Ochs."

Pursey Ochs wrung the other man's hand silently. "I'll look out," he said. "I—well, she doesn't care for me, Brent, and she does for you—but nobody ever did love a fat man! Still, I suppose a fat man can love, if he

chooses—and I—well, I'll keep my eyes peeled, Brent, and if anything happens to you—well, there's nobody except her that I think more of—and, so-long."

Ochs' voice was a little husky. He suddenly released Brent's hand and pushed off into the grove of palm-trees.

Under the very eyes of the captain's steward and boys who were preparing the meal, Brent extracted several tins of biscuit, some cans of meat, and some limes. Taking these to his room, he placed them within a shooting-bag which he had constructed out of canvas for the purpose of carrying game. He filled up the rest of the space in it with cartridges and bird-shot, and buckled it tightly, leaving it on his bed. From the wall he took down his shotgun and filled it. That would be necessary for shooting game.

He stripped off his tunic and washed his face and hands, then strapped about his waist his cartridge-belt containing two holsters, the same belt being one of a number in the arsenal. He examined his heavy .45's, ejected the cartridges and replaced them. Satisfied with the working of the guns, he shoved them into the holsters, which he left open. After washing his hands again, he put on his tunic over his warlike array, and took the blanket from the bed, folding it neatly and strapping it on the outside of the game-bag. Then, propping his shotgun against the bed in close proximity to the bag, he blew out his candles and went down-stairs.

It was not very long before all were sitting at dinner. Brent saw to it that five magnums of champagne had been brought up, with instructions to the boys to cool them in the well as they were needed. In addition to this there were cherry and apricot brandy, and Japanese saki, not to mention the indispensable Scotch and rye, and the seltzer siphons.

The dinner consisted of many courses, skilfully cooked by the Japanese steward, who had once served on an American man-of-war. In some way he had produced soup, fish, an entrée, a roast, a salad, and dessert; and as these courses were served with long intermissions between (thanks to Brent's orders) there was plentiful time to imbibe frequently and deeply, which every one at the table seemed to be doing, although the six conspirators were pouring most of theirs into their plates or on the floor whenever the chance presented itself.

They finished the dinner proper by half-after eight, and a pleasant amusement occurring to Phillips, who had hitherto said little, he shot the cork off one of the bottles of champagne, amused at the geyser which streamed up to the ceiling. The boy promptly poured out the wine, and was ordered to put the empty bottle back in place, where Phillips riddled it with the shots from his revolver. The sport appealed to the others, and they shot at the champagne-bottles in sheer, drunken abandon, taking no count of the fact that some of the bottles were full.

"We can—er—drink as fash as we shoot," hiccoughed O'Shane, gulping at his glass and holding it out for more from the broken-necked bottle.

The room was heavy with the smell of tobacco and burnt powder, above all the reek of the spilled liquor. Out of the noise and turmoil nine o'clock struck ominously. Lanier Daingerfield unostentatiously withdrew from the table and touched Dorothy's arm.

"Come," he said.

She arose and stepped to the doorway. Looking back, she saw Brent's eyes wistful, pathetic, resigned.

"I must speak to Brent for a moment," she half-choked, to Lanier. "Wait for me outside." She coughed loudly, to hide her emotion. Her eyes and a backward motion of her head invited Brent.

He got up, and they stepped together into the anteroom. "It is only for a minute, Brent, dear," she said. "I am very brave; but I couldn't leave you without a good-by. I have so little left in the world now, that I could not give up that good-by. So kiss me, dearest, and—that's the end of it all, I suppose."

He bowed over her hands. "Good-

by, sweetheart. There is no one but you. In this life or the next, only you."

"Dolly," came a voice from outside.

He kissed her, and without words she went away, leaving him with bowed head. He stood there for several minutes, then, with a certain decided movement, drew himself up stiffly and went back into the dining-room.

His absence had evidently not been noted. Walrus Arundsen was standing on his chair, wobbling to and fro and spilling his champagne, and giving a speech on the subject of lovely womanhood as studied by him from the tropics to the frigid zone. In his broken English, with fragments of all other languages mixed in, the effect was decidedly grotesque, and Pursey Ochs, whose sense of the ludicrous defied all personal feelings, was shaking with laughter. At Brent's reentrance, he nodded to Ochs, who became grave again, and presently arose and went out, gripping Brent's shoulder in goodby. Dreen performed a similar action in leaving, and Schlauss Hyman muttered something of a semiaffectionate nature. Presently all were gone but the enemy.

But the diminution of the jovial company did not appear to be a cause for worry. Arundsen began to troll out a drinking-song in which the others tried to join; but the eccentric voice of the Walrus, added to his frequent flatting of his notes, prevented any adequate swelling of the chorus. He was shouted down by the fog-horn voice of Hoofer O'Shane, who, his forehead shiny, his face perspiring, and his red curls waving defiance, began to hiccough "The Wearing of the Green," after which he made an impassioned speech against perfidious Albion and all connected with her. This aroused the ire of Phillips, who was drunk enough to forget that he had forfeited his right to be called a Briton.

"Damn' Irish—always making a bally row," stuttered the Englishman. "Don't know when they're jolly well licked. We licked 'em jolly well."

"Ye lie, ye sphalpheen!" shouted O'Shane unsteadily; but Phillips was too intent upon his own discourse to notice him.

"Always looking for a bally row," continued Phillips, waving his glass and spilling some wine on Colonel Pfferkorn, who was slumbering peacefully in his chair. "'Fore we gave them the rightabout, always rowing among themselves. Then all combined to row with us. Rotten race—always talk, nothing but talk."

"I'll show ye the sort of talk," began O'Shane; and his fist whirled toward the Englishman, who stood staring vacantly and waving his glass. Brent caught O'Shane's arm and held it tightly. O'Shane attempted to shake it off, but found that he was pinioned. He turned, swinging his left hand.

"Take thot, ye naygur!" he shouted, and aimed a blow directly for Brent's face. Brent struck up the arm and caught the other hand. The spirit of cruelty was in him. Perhaps he had suffered so much that night that there was within him a savage desire to make others suffer. The attempt of O'Shane to strike Phillips, who was quite helpless in his vinous state, aroused his anger; and the epithet of "naygur" was adding fuel to the flame. Brent knew he was playing the part of a *mestizo;* and knew also that his skin was very brown from long exposure to sun, wind, and rain. But he was from Virginia, where a man may call another anything but that, and be better off.

At all events, the latent savagery in Brent awoke, and for the first time since his bout with Dreen, he let his strength have play. But with Dreen it had been different. Brent had endeavored not to hurt the football-player. He was careless with the offensive, bullying Irishman. He smiled what his negro nurse of the old days had been known to call his "white laugh," a combination of a sneer and a smile without mirth in it, his eyes all the while cold and hard. His steellike fingers twisted the Irishman's wrists around, until O'Shane's eyes bulged and the veins in his forehead stood out. Drops of cold perspiration fell from his face, and he was deathly white.

He stood it for perhaps a minute, then shrieked "Och! It's murdher ye're after," and gave a violent, convulsive effort to free himself. But Brent, still smiling, turned the wrists still farther.

"Get down on your knees, and take back the 'nigger' part of it," said Brent.

The Irishman's bones seemed about to crack. With a prayer to the Virgin, he sank to the floor.

"It's not meaning it I was," he half-shrieked.

Brent released him with a contemptuous gesture, and resumed his seat. The others had been quite silent during the affair, and it had sobered them up somewhat. O'Shane chafed his red wrists, casting oblique, evil glances at the man who had worsted him so easily.

"And this is what ye call hospitality?" he growled. "Ye have us to dinner wid ye, and then it's a fight ye're wanting. Sure, and it's a hospitality I'm not liking, for one."

He looked around the room thick with smoke, and discovered the absence of Herr von Klingen. His eyes took in casually the fact that Greenbaum, Aorto, and Conkling had also vanished along with Lanier.

"Sure," he continued spitefully, "it's hospitality of which ye should be proud! But one of the hosts still remaining at table; and he assaulting the guests!" O'Shane got to his feet again. "To the devil wid such hospitality! I'm going back to the ship."

Brent got up. "You're not going yet, Mr. O'Shane, I hope?"

"I am, thin," returned the Irishman, moving toward the door.

By a quick turn Brent put himself between the Irishman and his means of escape.

It had been more than half an hour since the other conspirators had left the room. Surely by this time they must be near the end of their work. His ears were strained anxiously for the sound of the siren.

"I can't let you go yet, Mr. O'Shane," said Brent pleasantly. "The night is young, and there is yet a number of bottles which we have not opened. Come, will you leave while there's good liquor to drink and good fellows to drink with? That's not like an Irishman."

"No," cried Phillips, with a hoarse laugh. "Thash not like Irishman. Not like Irishman 'tall."

"I'll be going, thank ye," returned O'Shane stiffly, and stepped forward. "What! ye won't let me?" He turned to Walrus Arundsen. "Captain, are ye seeing that four of yer hosts have quitted the table, and that yer first officer's gone with them. Is that the sort of hoshpitality——"

He swayed a little, but steadied himself. Walrus Arundsen, goaded into a rage by the words, got on his feet.

"We go—we go, all of us. Now we go. Come, let us go, all of us—now—yah! pig!" And he struck the snoring Pfferkorn lustily on the back.

Pfferkorn opened his eyes sleepily, and Phillips, reduced to childish horseplay by his drunkenness, sprayed the seltzer on the countenance of the rubicund Swiss.

Pfferkorn, with an exclamation of disgust, mopped his face with his handkerchief, and, taking off his gold-framed spectacles, wiped them carefully. His sleep had left him perfectly sober.

"Come on," said Phillips. "We're going—back to ship——" and let the seltzer spray upon Sturm Sturmson, who was also in a comatose condition. The Norse-American jumped up suddenly, and his fingers played in and out of his tawny hair. He wiped his face in a bewildered sort of way.

"Whas'r matter?" he inquired thickly.

"Going," replied Phillips, solemnly staring at him. "Going to ship—to pride of wavsh—Britannia ru'es the wavsh, and all thash sort rot—thash joke—laugh—O'Shane's a rotter—he wansh go back ship—I wansh stay——"

"It is to go," announced Rolf Arundsen, who, after a nice calculation of equilibrium, had succeeded in getting his bearings, and was steering a tolerably true course toward the door, only to be confronted by Brent.

It was a scene which will always

stand out in Brent's memory—the long, low-ceilinged room with the table covered with a cloth stained with wine and strewn with cigar-ashes, overturned and broken glasses, sodden cigarettes, and burnt-out matches; the floor running with spilt wine, the broken bottles lying everywhere and crunching under the boot-heels of those who walked; a long trail of smoke circling about the ceiling; and the candles burning low in their sockets.

The windows were open, and the moonlight cast a ghastly light on Phillips, who stood balancing himself in the rays, dapper as ever, not a strand of his hair disordered for all his drunkenness, the red scar standing out sinister on his white forehead. Walrus Arundsen's yellow mustache hung limp and reeked of liquor; Brian O'Shane, always red of hair, was now also red of face; Sturmson's tunic was unbuttoned, showing a dirty shirt underneath, which was also soaked with perspiration; and Colonel Pfferkorn looked like a good-natured schoolmaster out of place.

"It is to go," said Walrus Arundsen, facing Brent.

"Do not go yet, captain," pleaded Brent, following the pacific course as long as it was possible. "I do not wish you to leave me yet."

"It is to go," repeated the Dane stolidly.

"No," said Brent.

They stared at him. Brian O'Shane laughed mockingly. "Faith, he's the laddy to try that strength of his!" he said. "He's too strong for me, but not strong enough for the lot of us. Come, is it that we all wish to go?"

"Yes," shouted the others, angered at opposition.

"Well," jeered O'Shane, "the Spaniard, here, thinks he's strong enough to keep us here. We'll be showing him. Come, the lot of yez! One, two, three."

There was a rush altogether. O'Shane, who led it, was upon Brent in a moment; but not before Brent's hands had come from under his tunic, and O'Shane found himself looking into the black, ominous circles of two .45's.

"You'll stay until I let you go," said Brent quietly. "If a man tries to leave before I give permission, if he tries to draw a weapon, I'll shoot him dead. Hands up. Get 'em up a little quicker than that. Up, I say!"

Sturmson's and Pfferkorn's had gone up instantly; after a little hesitation, Arundsen's and Phillips' followed suit. There was only O'Shane, who, with his hands in his side pockets, stared defiantly.

"O'Shane," said Brent, and his tone was vicious, "you'll put up your hands or I'll shoot to kill. What I say goes."

Suddenly the Irishman laughed. "He's making a fool out of us. A Spaniard! I'm thinking he's not much of a Spaniard. Ye heard the fine Yankee tongue of him, thin. We've been a pack of fools. I've been misdoubting this crowd ever since I saw thim. That Conkling was no man—I knew the same. I'd been suspecting—and now——"

"Put up your hands!" said Brent.

"I will," answered the Irishman, "that way." His hand went to his hip pocket swiftly, and he jerked out his revolver. But before it had done more than dangle in his hand, there was a staccato report, and a red mark showed on his forehead. He gasped suddenly, and his knees bent under him, then he fell sprawling to the floor.

Brent's face had not changed. He watched the smoke circle around the room, smelt the powder, knew that he had killed the Irishman. But he was listening for only one thing, the hoot of the siren.

"He's dead," said Phillips, suddenly sober, looking down at the Irishman.

"Yes," replied Brent, in a matter-of-fact tone. "Just as any of you others will be if you don't keep your hands over your heads."

No one spoke after that for some time. The drunkenness was leaving the men. They were growing quite sober. None of them knew why Brent wished them to remain, why O'Shane had been killed; but they all knew the number of deaths that lurked behind the circles of those ominous weapons,

and they had faced danger too often to court certain death.

And so they stood, motionless and silent, save for an occasional shifting of position and the scraping of feet across the floor. Outside, the insects of the night made their queer noises and occasionally an owl hooted. There was another noise, too, the sound of the puffing of steam, to which Sturmson was listening intently.

Suddenly, out of the stillness came the harsh, shrill note of a siren. There was a pause, and it was repeated. Another pause, and it came for the third time. And the silence fell again.

Each man had started when the siren shrieked, each, except Brent, whose face wore a smile that was almost a happy one.

"Gentlemen," he said, "in a moment I will leave you. You will not return to your ship to-night. She is now on her way to Manila. I may tell you that I and my companions are not members of the Philippine Junta, but citizens of the United States, who have determined that their country shall not suffer through the machinations of the country which hired you. The ship has gone to Manila to get assistance. Until then you can make yourself comfortable in this house. I turn it over to you. I also say good-by. But keep your hands up until I get out of the door."

He slipped up his tunic and shoved one of his revolvers back in place. With his free hand, he extracted the key from the door, and stepped outside, still keeping the revolver leveled on his enemies. The next second the door slammed and the key was turned in the lock.

Brent shoved back his second revolver and sprang up the stairs to the second landing. He grabbed his bag, blanket, and shotgun. Almost instantly he dived down the stairs again and out of the door. He skirted the gardens and the bath-house, and made quickly to the crest of the hill separating the house from the arsenal.

His hand groped in the earth for a moment, then he lifted a cigar-box, which showed a ball of cotton soaked in oil, which was tied to the end of a long, black fuse, soaked in the same material. He struck a safety-match cautiously, shading it with his hands to attract no attention, then ignited the ball of cotton.

It burned brightly, communicating with the fuse. Brent watched the flame dance on its way up the hill and disappear over the slope. He stood quite still, leaning on his shotgun, the bag and blanket slung over his shoulder. His eyes were kept on the dim outlines of the arsenal.

He waited perhaps some five minutes, his muscles tense. Then there was a mighty roar, and he clutched at a tree for support, his rifle falling to the ground. The earth swayed beneath him, the din was tremendous.

Then, from the arsenal, came a brilliant, blinding red flame that seemed to obscure earth and sky together. He watched it, dazzled.

Then silence and blackness followed; and the shrill curses and oaths of frightened men were wafted out on the evening air.

Brent, knowing that he had done his duty, and that now his life alone was to be considered, struck off for the path which they had made toward the other side of the island.

VIII.

Lanier Daingerfield stood in silence for several moments after Dorothy joined him. The muscles of his face were working, and it was with difficulty that he kept back a flow of words. Presently he turned and looked at the girl in the moonlight, frail, slight, boyish in her white uniform, the moonbeams lighting up her yellow hair.

"What did you say to Brent?" he asked quietly.

She turned swiftly on him. "What is that to you?" she replied, with spirit. She was in no mood to be questioned on the subject which had made her heart sick.

"Are you in love with Brent?" he questioned slowly.

"I have promised to marry you; that should be enough," was her answer; and she walked several paces from him.

"Dorothy!" he said, and his arms went about her.

"The others are coming," she cried. It was hard to keep some semblance of gladness out of her voice; but he was far too egotistical to see that. He released her as Pursey Ochs came out of the house, stepped from the veranda, and came up to them. He was followed by Dreen and Hyman.

"We're all here," was Lanier's curt greeting. "And we'd better lose no time carrying out our plan. Come."

There was little said. They followed him down the wooded slope, stumbling over tree-trunks and through tangles of vine and herbage. Once Hyman's foot was caught, and he stumbled down; but he caught himself, and was on his feet before the others noted it.

They came out into the moonlight again, and the black hulk of the wrecked schooner on the reef loomed up under their gaze. The moon had made a silver maze of the waters, and ever and anon little fishes leaping to the surface threw out their trails of liquid phosphorescence like the coloring of an orange against the silver. Out to sea, the *Valkyrie* seemed a thing suspended in the magic waters, her few lights glimmering like the baleful eyes of some monster of the deep.

From the barracks came the sounds of noise and revelry. Brent had seen to it that there had been several barrels of rum broached, and the soldiery had done the rest. They were shouting out some sailors' chorus now; and the enchanted distances softened their rough notes into fairy melodies before they reached the ears of the listeners:

> See there she stands and waves her hand
> Upon—the—quay,
> And every day while I'm away
> She waits—for me,
> And whispers low when tempests blow
> For Jack—at sea,
> Yo-ho, boys, yo-ho-ho!

The glamour of the scene was upon them. They stood watching the cobwebby shadows of the forest, swinging, pendulous things of shade; and then away to the moonlit waters. The music out of nothingness was like a charm. The soft drone of the night insects supplied the orchestra.

Lanier Daingerfield, by virtue of his leadership, was the first to pull himself together, and his eye traversed the stretch of white sands. "There's the boat," he said, and pointed a little way up the beach. "And there are those lazy Chinese rascals fast asleep in the sand. Come along."

He ran ahead, his shadow bobbing before him like an attendant elf disporting itself on the sands. They followed his flying tunic, and came up breathless while he was shaking the four Chinese sailors out of their slumbers. Once awake, they were quite active; and when the four had clambered into the boat, the sailors rolled up their trousers and waded out, pushing the boat before them. Out of the shallows, they climbed in, and adjusted their oars while Lanier held the tiller-ropes. The still water, cut by the sharp prow, bubbled up little waves of fire.

The accommodation ladder was still down when the boat dashed up to it; and a sailor scrambled down from deck to receive their flying rope, which was made fast. The five conspirators clambered out on the ladder.

Lanier had left Dorothy to her own devices, and was talking to Dreen. "You look like you could strike a good blow with your fist," he said. "And you'll have to do it, because I don't want to hurt Christian. He's not a bad sort. I'll go up to talk to him; and while he's engaged with me, you give him a right-hand swing behind the ear. You understand?"

Dreen nodded affirmation, and they scrambled on deck. The officer of the deck was pacing to and fro, his hands behind him, a short pipe in his mouth. "Now," said Lanier.

At the sound of their soft shoes on the deck, Christian turned and raised his hand in salute, then gravely paced up and down as before. Dreen and Lanier approached him, and the latter laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Hello, Chrishun," he said, with drunken familiarity, a condition which he was very well able to assume.

The Dane turned and stared at the lurching form of his companion, but did not remove the pipe from his mouth. Dreen slipped behind him.

"Too much schnapps is not goot," he said sententiously, letting twin clouds of smoke pour from his wide, upturned nostrils. He took the pipe from his mouth and spat.

Before he had replaced the pipe, Dreen, lightly balancing himself, launched out in the deadening pivot-blow, and, turning on his heel, caught the Dane behind the ear with the full force of arm and body. The pipe fell to the deck and rolled over, the hot ashes smoldering, while Christian dropped limply.

Lanier trod out the ashes, and, picking up the pipe, knocked out the remainder of its contents and thrust it back in Christian's pocket. "He's keen on that pipe," said Lanier, and shook the Dane roughly. He did not respond.

"Come, we'll carry him to his cabin." Lanier caught Christian's feet, while the other took his head. The members of the party and the Chinese sailors on watch looked curiously at the proceeding. Pursey Ochs lighted a cigar and stared away at the lights twinkling on the island. None of the conspirators were overfond of blows delivered from the back.

As Lanier emerged on deck, he shouted for Lim-Sha, the boatswain, and one of the Chinese sailors hurried below and awakened that dignitary. Lim-Sha shuffled up in pajamas and grass-straw slippers, sleepy-eyed and with a look of injury.

"Wantchee me, claptain?" he inquired, still with his injured air. Lim-Sha had been boatswain on Lanier's old ship, and it was a constant source of anger to Walrus Arundsen to hear his first officer referred to by the title which, on the *Valkyrie,* he felt that he alone should bear.

"Yes, Lim-Sha," replied Lanier briefly. "I take command here now. We go away chop-chop. Catchee all crew, swing up boat to davits, take up ladder, get under way. You savvy?"

"Yes, master. Me savvy." Lim-Sha asked no questions. He worshiped Lanier, and made the Chinese crew do likewise. Lanier's orders had far more effect than Arundsen's.

"Now?" asked Lim-Sha, moving away.

"Qui-qui," returned Lanier briefly. "You send three piecee firemen to engine-room, too. Qui-qui."

As the boatswain hurried off at an accelerated gait, Lanier turned to Pursey Ochs.

"Armed?" he asked.

"Two guns—Colts. Both loaded for bear." Mr. Ochs was learning brevity in this hard school.

"Come on, then." He moved off. "The rest of you stay where you are."

The two men plunged into the semi-darkness of the deck-saloon and down the broad, brass-covered stairs to the level of the cabins. Passing down the passage, Lanier turned a door and exhibited a pair of winding, spiral steps for the benefit of Ochs, said steps leading down into a maze of machinery of brass and steel. The machinery was working ponderously, slowly, and the place below was hot.

On a small chest at the bottom of the stairs sat a man in a thin, white rowing-shirt, a pair of white trousers, and white shoes. He was playing solitaire, and keeping one eye on a brace of dirty stokers who stood before the roaring furnace which produced the power to make these engines things of life. At the approach of the two, he looked up.

"Hello, Ellison!" said Lanier. "She's still under steam, is she?"

"She is," returned the Scotchman, a clean-looking young fellow, for all his surroundings, with a close-clipped, sandy mustache. "And a sinfu' waste of guid coal it is, mon. I thought ye were roistering on shore."

"I've got orders to get the ship under way, and make for Manila," returned Lanier. "Don't wait to get up enough steam, Ellison. Just let her go with what little you have until we're a

bit away from the island. Then we can anchor, and you can get all the steam you want——"

Ellison eyed him suspiciously. "Are ye joking the noo, Lanier?" he asked.

"Devil the joke!"

"Then ye must know I canna get the ship under way wi'oot orders from the captain and my chief—and he that ill wi' the fever that Wallace MacCullom, who is somewhat of a sawbones, can do naught with him, and I'm fearing the auld man's near to death—wi' ye roistering on shore," he added.

"I've brought a man aboard who can cure him," said Lanier, suddenly remembering Hyman. "A regular doctor he is, although I didn't know it until to-night. But now, Ellison, here's your three firemen. Set them and your stokers and coal-passers to work and get up the steam. Quick, man! I've got my orders, and I haven't time to lose."

"I canna," replied Ellison stubbornly. Lanier nodded to Pursey Ochs, who interpreted his gesture and acted accordingly.

It is a moment that should not be forgotten, for it marks the downfall of the Pursey Ochs that was—that law-abiding, fight-hating, peace-loving Ochs who had thundered against imperialism, against the force of arms, against strength or brute force. This was another Pursey Ochs, who was some thirty pounds lighter than the peace-loving one, not to mention some degrees harder; this was a lawless Pursey Ochs, who had a cheery smile on his face while he trampled upon all that he and the *Daily Star,* of St. Louis, had held sacred; for it was with his customary cherubic smile that Pursey Ochs thrust the cold muzzle of a Colt under the ear of William Ellison, and held it there.

"I just hate to do it, Elly," said Lanier apologetically. "But orders are orders, and you've just got to start the machinery, and that's all there is to it. Take your choice, or have a pellet jingle against your brain-pan. It's just as you like. I'll give you two minutes to decide in."

He pulled his watch out by the fob, and held it in his hand. Ellison said nothing, scraping at the oil-stained floor with the point of his canvas shoe. The byplay was hidden from the stokers and firemen around the angle.

Lanier snapped his watch-case shut, and looked questioningly at Ellison.

"I'll do it," growled the young Scotchman. "It's no' canny for a man to lose his life when he has but yin forbye. Tak' yon bit pistol from ahint my ear—I'll do it."

"Right," said Lanier. "You've got sense, Ellison. I'll just leave this gentleman here to keep you company in case you get lonesome. What's the use of putting back the revolver, Ochs? It looks better in the light. You understand—I trust Mr. Ellison; but if it should chance that my trust is misplaced, I know I have you here."

Pursey Ochs grinned his comprehension, and fondled the Colt, keeping one gimlet-eye acutely alert for any trickiness from the canny Scot. Lanier went up the corkscrew stairs and disappeared at the top.

Ellison was giving instructions in a tone of voice very different from the mild one he had used in the conversation. The stokers, firemen, and passers were quickly on the alert, and the engine-room became a scene of activity. The great fires half-smoldering crackled under the coal heaped upon them, and breathed out blue flame, which presently became a hot, roaring red again. Valves squeaked and emitted steam. Rods worked up and down with the energy of rattans plied by angry schoolmasters.

Through it all, Ellison sat with his hand on the indicator, and the bell-tube communicating from above swinging close to his ear. Twice Lanier from the bridge shouted down instructions to him; and twice he made the angry reply that he was not yet ready.

In an interval he turned, and, for the first time in the red glow from the furnace fire, Pursey Ochs got a good look at his craggy forehead, his insignificant nose; his eyes, one brown and one blue, and his shock of hair. To

say he gazed in wonderment was to put it mildly; and to add that Ellison's gaze was quite as surprised and shocked was still to be inadequate.

When Ochs got his breath, he managed to gasp: "Bruce Gillespie! Bruce Gillespie!" Then: "What in the name of the lamb's hindfoot are you doing out here, you disreputable scavenger?"

To which the erstwhile Ellison replied quite as courteously: "And ye, ye fat tub, what are ye? Am I worse off for a wee drappie of whusky, or are ye that degraded, J. P. Ochs?"

"Right you are," replied Pursey Ochs. "It's myself I am, though not fat—only a trifle stout. How are you, Disreputability?"

The two shook hands, and Gillespie eyed the other dubiously.

"But for all that my love for you surpasseth that of any man, I'll have no hesitation in dislocating your mental pabulum, my chick," remarked Ochs cheerfully, glancing down at the revolver.

Gillespie gave another order; and cursed two firemen with such lustiness that they fell to trembling.

"And now," said Pursey Ochs, "what in Heaven's name brought the wealthy manufacturer of calamity carts down to running an engine on a pirate—hey? When I left St. Louis there was the big sign still over the Gillespie factory: 'Go Gassing in a Gillomobile,' making the moon look insignificant; and thousands of your mortuary machines making mischief for the morgue. What's the matter?"

Gillespie gave some more orders, and did not reply. When he did, it was sadly. "Whusky, my friend; whusky," he said. "I went adrift in San Francisco, and when I awoke I was shanghaied on board a ship for Japan. They robbed me of my money, and I landed wi'oot a groat. I went to the consul's, and told him who I might be, but my clothes were against me, and he laughed at me, and hinted I had a drappie too much. Sae there was naught to do but gain a poseetion of some kind, which would gi' me enough siller to mak' mysel' look respectable, and tak' me back to 'Frisco; so, being a first-class marine engineer, I applied, and was taken on this ship—and so ye have it."

He stared at Pursey Ochs, and shouted something back to Lanier through the tube.

"And what of ye?" he asked. "Ye, the mon of peace, who would ha'e yer country gi' up warr entirely! Ye wit' a pistol trained upon a peacefu' mon!"

He continued to stare at Ochs, whose eyes dropped beneath his gaze, and who was, for once, at loss for an answer.

Meanwhile, the boatswain, Lim-Sha, had brought the crew out of their bunks, and the anchor-chain was slowly warped up, and the great piece of steel brought to deck. Lanier on the bridge shouted his instructions, while Dreen, Hyman, and Dorothy stood at different points of the ship, revolvers in hand, to use if necessary. From the cabin of the imprisoned engineer Raeburn came a frantic clamor; but Wallace MacCullom, the other, was too busy with his feverish chief, old MacTavish, to bother about the uproar outside. He had long ago decided that the rest of the officers were godless; and was not surprised at any uproar they might make.

Christian, also, who had come out of the swoon brought on by Dreen's blow, was making vigorous attempts to get out of the cabin in which he was confined, but with no success.

The crew had been under Lanier's commands before, and Lim-Sha had taken Lanier on trust. It was not for them to ask questions. The great engines down below were throbbing and pulsating—the ship quivered at every revolution.

"Stand by," shouted Lanier; then down the tube: "Full speed ahead."

Slowly, with many snorts and puffs, the great ship plowed out toward the sea. Lanier, catching the siren-rope, pulled it hard. The raucous note came forth, followed by two more.

Dorothy Gordon in the excitement of the moment ran to Dreen.

"We're moving. We're moving. We're going—at last."

"Yes," said Dreen; and his tone so-

bered her. She looked back toward the island. The lights glimmered in the bungalow. In that same bungalow was the one man for whom she cared—the man she had given up, and who had stayed behind to die. Her eyes filled with tears.

"Brent, Brent!" she moaned.

Borne out on the still breeze of the night came the sound of a pistol-shot.

IX.

There was no sleep for the adventurers that night. Lanier as the only navigator of the lot was forced to keep the bridge through the long hours, while the others had little desire for sleep, fearing as they did a recapture of the vessel. The stealing of the *Valkyrie* had been such a bloodless affair, that they doubted almost that it had really been done.

They pulled steamer-chairs out of one of the storerooms, and reclined on them, their revolvers ready to hand. They could hear the crack of the machinery, the guttural chants of the Chinese sailors, and every now and then a vigorous protest from Raeburn and Christian.

Some two hours after putting out to sea MacCullom made an outcry. Dreen went to see what was this new cause for uproar.

"There's a fever-stricken man in here," said MacCullom through the keyhole. "And I've run out of ice for him forbye. Wull ye na' let me oot?"

Dreen went below to fetch some ice, and notified Hyman on the way. The doctor, ever keen to use his professional skill, went within the chief engineer's cabin, and was soon issuing orders to the astonished MacCullom.

"No wonder he has the fever," shouted the little doctor. "It's a wonder he didn't die under such treatment. You must be crazy."

"What do ye ken of the fever?" asked the astonished MacCullom.

"I am Schlauss Hyman—Doctor Hyman," returned the other with dignity; and the rest of his night was spent with MacTavish; and when the dawn came the old man had become conscious again, and his temperature had been reduced some twenty degrees.

Ochs was very busy in the moonlight with a pencil and pad. He was writing a long despatch, which he was going to send to the *Daily Star,* of St. Louis; and his mind was abstracted as he framed the same, endeavoring to get in all the necessary details without unduly increasing the income of the cable companies, who received press matter from Manila at seventy-five cents per word, gold. Dreen was talking to Dorothy, but she did not hear what he was saying. She was thinking of the man back on the island and the single pistol-shot.

Presently she got up and went to the other side of the ship, where she was alone. The moonlight shone upon her as she clasped her hands over the rail —the gentle, soothing moonlight that somehow seemed to bring her nearer to the man she loved.

After awhile she returned to her steamer-chair, and fell into an uneasy sleep.

At dawn the steward brought up some toast and coffee for those on deck, and they gulped down the warm fluid and ate the toast gratefully. Pursey Ochs, who had been writing and crossing out all night, thrust his manuscript into his pocket, and made away with two orders of toast and coffee, and then lighted a great black cigar. He was looking as fresh and rosy as though he had had a comforting sleep.

Dorothy asked the steward to show her to a cabin, and she went within, ordering a bath as she did so. When she had bathed, reattired herself, and arranged her hair, she came up on deck again. When Lanier saw her from the bridge, he called Lim-Sha and bade him take several sailors and fetch out the rebellious Christian.

Christian was brought out very sulky and sleepy-eyed, and brought up to the bridge, which Lanier still paced. The latter gave him good morning and bade Lim-Sha stand back with his men.

"Now, Christian," said Lanier cheer-

fully, "the nose of this vessel is turned toward Manila. We shall arrive there to-morrow some time. If you prefer to go into Manila a prisoner, and be handed over to the Philippine authorities on a charge of conspiracy, just say so. If you want to throw your fortunes in with us, you will go scot-free, and probably get a reward for being a good boy. If you refuse, I shall lock you up, and keep you locked up until we get to Manila. Then you'll be landed in Bilobid prison. Take your choice, my boy. I'd like to have you. You're the only other navigator aboard, and I'm tired of being on the bridge all the time."

The fourth officer eyed him for some time, then he nodded his head: "Vat choice is it you give me?" he inquired. "It is no choice. Am I a vool? Nein. I vill take my watch."

"Good boy," said Lanier encouragingly; and told him the story of the seizure. "But remember, Chris, if you so much as alter the course of this vessel by half a point, I'll clap you in the black hole, or my name is Jones."

"Am I a vool?" returned Christian again.

Lanier followed Lim-Sha below, and gave the Chinese instructions to watch Christian. He came up to Dorothy.

"I have conquered," he said exultantly; "for your sake, Dolly. To-morrow we will be in Manila. I'm going below now to get some sleep. I will see you later."

The day sped on uneventfully. They breakfasted at eight, after which Pursey Ochs and Dreen played with quoits on deck, while Dorothy tried to read a novel which she found in the saloon. Hyman was still hovering over his patient, and found only time to take a bath and snatch some breakfast. At one they had "tiffin" and the pleasure of Lanier's company. He was in white duck trousers, and a blue, brass-buttoned, gold-braided coat.

Lanier relieved Christian on the bridge, and Christian came down, but avoided any companionship with the others.

All in all it was an uneventful voyage. Nothing happened of any consequence—the crew was well-behaved. Raeburn and MacCullom, the engineers, when released that morning, showed themselves very tractable, and took turns relieving Ellison in the engine-room. Ochs and Ellison (or Bruce Gillespie) spent much time together arguing religious questions; and as both had remarkable faculties for keeping their tempers, they had long sittings of moment.

Mid-morning they entered Manila Bay, and passed Corregidor by ten o'clock. The quarantine station at Mariveles detained them longer, and the customs authorities the longest, inasmuch as their papers did not in the least correspond with their destination. The papers stated that the *Valkyrie* was bound from Nagasaki to Singapore with assorted notions and farm-machinery; and when the machinery was found to be rifles and carbines, the customs authorities looked askance.

"See here," said Lanier, to the inspector of customs who had come aboard, "I can't stay here and explain all this to you. This is a very serious matter, and I've got to see the general commanding about it. Take possession of the ship, and I'll leave one of the officers aboard. The rest of us must go ashore."

The customs man consented to this, and put his cutter at the disposal of Lanier and his companions. At the customs dock they were forced to take a rowboat to get to the other side of the city, where lay Fort Santiago; and some fifteen minutes later they stood in the anteroom of the commanding officer, division of Luzon.

They were admitted presently, and faced a smooth-shaven, ruddy-faced man with gray-black hair and a military mustache, twisted upward after the fashion of the kaiser. Lanier involuntarily saluted, and the salute was returned gravely. The general eyed their uniforms, now somewhat the worse for three days' wear, and looked at them curiously.

"General," said Lanier, "my name is Daingerfield. This is Miss Dorothy

Gordon, Mr. J. P. Ochs, Doctor Schlauss Hyman, and Mr. Hopworth Dreen——"

The general involuntarily straightened in his chair. "Eh?" he exclaimed; and put on his gold-rimmed eyeglasses, which he had held between thumb and forefinger. He looked them over critically. "Are you—why, of course you are—you are the passengers who were lost from the *Sultana*. I am happy, indeed, to see that you were not drowned."

He had been on his feet since Miss Gordon's name was mentioned, and now he offered her his hand. He shook hands with all the others, and then smiled quizzically. A new thought came to him.

"But where," he asked in some alarm, "is my good friend, Mr. Brent? Don't tell me that he is lost."

Dorothy's eyes filled with tears. "We don't know yet, general," she said; and put her handkerchief to her eyes.

"I think," said Lanier, "that the sooner we tell the story, general, the better. Mr. Ochs can tell you the first part of it, I the last. Go ahead, Ochs."

Ochs, in short, terse sentences, denuded of his customary embellishments, told of their being cast away, of their finding the island, of the reading of the letter—here, at the mention of the names, the general sat erect—of the arsenal, of the dead bodies, their resolve to play the parts, the coming of the *Valkyrie,* and their welcome of it.

"Mr. Ochs," said the general, when the gentleman from St. Louis brought his narrative to a close with a wave of his hand toward Lanier, "you tell a story that"—he was highly agitated—"that would seem——" The general turned to Lanier.

"General," said Lanier Daingerfield, "I was an officer on the *Valkyrie*. I accepted the position in Japan. When I did so, it was with the idea of somehow thwarting the ends of the expedition." Here Lanier lied, and the others knew that he lied. "On my arrival at the island, I recognized Miss Gordon, and she asked me to help her and her companions. I consented. We seized the boat that night and came here. The crew is Chinese, and is devoted to me. Our only regret was that we were forced to leave Mr. Brent behind to see that none of the officers left for the ship until we had her under way."

The general was on his feet. "Then Bauldwin Brent is still on the island! I trust we shall be in time to save him. He saved my life at Malolos——" he spoke very gravely.

After the silence that ensued, the general spoke again. "Miss Gordon and gentlemen, you have done your country a great service; one that cannot be adequately recognized. I will call my staff together now, and we will decide what plans to pursue." He touched a bell, and a clerk entered.

"The transports *Samar* and *Leyte* are still at the dock, Sarment?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Telephone immediately to the quartermaster that under no circumstances are they to leave to-day; and ask the quartermaster to come to my office at once. Telephone the navy-yard at Cavite, and ask for Lieutenant-commander Colcourt, of the *Arizona;* and ask him to step over here. Then if you can, get the admiral on the wire and tell him I would like a few moments' conversation with him."

He waved his hand, and the clerk left the room.

"You will arrange with the customs officials with regard to the *Valkyrie?*" asked Lanier. "Remember that she is an armored vessel, and if you put a gun-crew aboard her, and some naval officers, she can do a lot of good."

"I'll remember that," said the general.

He seemed absorbed for the moment, then he turned to the five. "You can do little now except wait until we have our conference. I should advise your going to the Pacific Mail Office and claiming your luggage and valuables, and then going to the Oriente."

Ochs paused at the door. "General," he said, the newspaper man coming uppermost, "I am wiring the entire story to the St. Louis *Star* this morn-

ing. May I ask that you give no information to newspaper men until to-morrow morning?"

"Certainly," replied the general. "But be mild in your strictures upon Japan—remember that we can't afford to have an open rupture yet with the ungrateful little beggars." He looked as though his language would not have been so moderate had Miss Gordon not been present.

It was Dorothy who paused now, and regarded the others with some embarrassment. "I wish," she said, "that some one would go to the Pacific Mail people and get my suit-case with the green labels. It has the dresses I wore aboard the steamer. And can't you put a room at my service here to change in?" she asked of the general. "I don't care to walk into the Oriente in these clothes."

"Your clothes and valuables are not there, Miss Gordon," said the general. "Your aunt went back to Hongkong on the same steamer, and took all your things with her."

Dorothy's face clouded. "Then"—and she hesitated painfully—"some one will have to buy me some clothes, and trust me until I can wire home to my bankers and get an answer."

There was a chorus; but Dorothy accepted the general's offer. She took the five ten-dollar gold-pieces and bade him good morning. The five left with the general's instructions to return by three o'clock, and to be ready to sail at six that evening.

Dorothy got into a carromata outside, and told the others that she would meet them at the Oriente. She had previously asked the general's advice as to where to go for clothes, and her carromata finally rattled down the Escolta and stopped before what looked like a country store, selling everything from shoe-strings to steam-plows. There were a number of male clerks, and several American women. Dorothy put herself into the hands of one of the latter, and emerged some little while later in crisp duck clothes, a white lace hat, canvas pumps, white stockings, and a white parasol and gloves, leaving instructions to send more of the same to the hotel.

When she arrived at the hotel she registered; and took lunch later with her four companions. All eyes were upon them, and their lunch was several times interrupted by the visits of the reporters of the local papers, with inquiries as to the way in which they had evaded death. Ochs, true to his news instincts, had rehearsed them in what to say, and they replied that they had been picked up by a vessel going to Singapore.

Lanier tried to draw her apart after lunch, but she went to her room, and did not rejoin them until it was time to return to Fort Santiago. It was intensely hot in the sun of noonday, and the street was almost deserted. When their carromatas rattled into the courtyard of the fort, they were saluted by a sleepy-looking guard.

They found in the general's office an array of notables gathered about the table. There were the admiral commanding the South Pacific Squadron; the commandant of the navy-yard; several naval officers; the quartermaster-general; the colonel of the 289th, and one of his majors, and several of the general's aids.

Several muchachos put chairs for them to join the group, and handed them ice-water in thin glass goblets, after which they retired. The admiral, looking suddenly at Daingerfield, spoke:

"You were Lieutenant Robert Daingerfield, were you not?"

"Yes," replied Lanier Daingerfield, holding his head erect. "Discharged from the service for conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman. But I am here to serve my country to-day, admiral, even if I am deprived of my citizenship."

The admiral remained silent, pulling at his beard. Briefly the general commanding outlined the plans which the council had decided upon.

The admiral would provide officers, gunners, and marines for the *Valkyrie*, which would also carry two companies of the 289th; while the transport *Samar* would carry the other battalion and a

half. Majors Fenpenny and Chisholm were to command the first and second battalions respectively; Colonel Parr to command both. Lieutenant David Phelps, of the U. S. S. *Manitou,* would take command of the *Valkyrie,* with Lieutenant Briggs and Ensigns Hurrt and Collins. Lieutenant-commander Alfred Colcourt, commanding the *Arizona,* would make up the fleet with his vessel, carrying its usual complement of men and an additional complement of marines commanded by Captain Wagner. The fleet was to sail at six o'clock that night, and Daingerfield was to act as pilot.

"Do you wish to go back or remain in Manila?" the general asked of the others.

"Go back," returned the others in chorus. The officers smiled; and Ochs turned to Dorothy Gordon.

"You are not to go back," he said, with an appearance of calmness.

Dorothy eyed him so scornfully that he wilted, and did not reopen the subject.

When they had passed out of the room, and gone below to their carromatas, Lanier Daingerfield helped the girl to ascend. Before she knew what he intended to do, he had jumped in by her side and bade the driver proceed to the Church of Saint Beateria.

"But I must hurry back to the hotel," said the girl. "And make ready to go——"

"You are not going back," said Lanier firmly.

She looked at him for a moment, then called to the *cochero* to stop.

"I gave you no right to influence my actions," she said. "And I *am* going back on the *Valkyrie.*"

"Then," he said desperately, "you must go back as my wife; and that is why I want to go to Saint Beateria."

The carromata had stopped, and the slit-eyed *cochero* was peering in at them.

"You intend to go back on your promise?" asked Lanier fiercely.

She shook her head. "Only I must wait until all has been accomplished," she said. "There is no manner of use in your protesting. I will not marry you now."

He poured out a long declaration of love, to which she listened unmoved. "When we return to Manila," she replied immovably. *"Cochero,* Hotel Oriente."

The carromata rattled off. Lanier spoke not a word during the journey. When the carriage drew up, he looked at her sadly.

"Very well," he said. "I suppose I can wait. I've waited so long, anyway."

They went into the hotel together.

X.

Brent gained the slope of the hill after an effort which was half sheer determination. The prickly branches scratched his face, the tangled thickets tore the upper parts of his legs. He staggered behind a dragon-tree, and sank down to the ground, his wound bleeding profusely. His eyes, weary, hopeless, sought the sea. It was calm and pitiless under a glaring noonday sun, stretching away for countless miles toward the blue horizon. There was no sign of a sail.

He ripped from his tunic another long strip of white drill, and, tearing part of this off and doubling it, he placed it over the bleeding place, where a bullet had entered his side early in the day. This accomplished, he bound the strip about his person, tying it tightly with several knots. He panted for air, and drew in long breaths of it.

He was a pitiful figure, and yet somewhat of a heroic one. The three days through which he had passed had been eventful ones for him, and had left him the wreck he was. The night of the blowing up of the arsenal and the stealing of the *Valkyrie* he had spent in peace; but that was the last night of rest for him. Early the next day the man hunt had begun, and he, the hunted, even in his own misery, had time to reflect that as he was now, so must have been the countless little red foxes to be in at whose death he had

ridden the hounds often in his native Virginia. Virginia!—it was a long way off. He doubted that he would ever see it again.

But, after all, it hardly mattered. Dorothy was not for him, and there was very little in life now that he had tasted the full sweetness of love, and the cup had been rudely snatched from his lips. He wondered why he did not wait and give himself up to his pursuers; why he did not allow them to take him; but something, the love of life deep within him, had kept him on his way. Once or twice he had exposed himself to their bullets, with the result that he had received that wound in the side. If they had killed him, it would have been well; but he did not care to be wounded again.

The wound was giving him the most fearful pain. The bullet had torn its way through the fleshy part of his side, and had come out at the back—the place where it had come through had been cauterized and brought together by the burning of the bullet itself; but the place of entrance was raw and bleeding, and the pains of burning assailed him. He had lost quantities of blood. He was very weak.

He had abandoned his shotgun the day before, because it was too cumbersome to carry. He hardly dared shoot anything because the sounds of his shots attracted his pursuers—that was how they had first discovered him. Now they were all on the chase, the whole five hundred or more; spread out in a half-circle; a drag-net which he could hardly hope to escape. They had driven him relentlessly around, and were forcing him back to the south end of the island, where lay the barracks and the bungalow. Once they got him there all would be soon over.

Brent was a brave man; but he shuddered at the thought of what these human savages might do when they had trapped him. He it was who was responsible for their plight, the failure of their expedition, and the loss of all chances of loot to which they had been looking forward with avidity. They knew their time was short, and they had determined to punish him before their end came.

Even now he could hear the crackling of some brush below the slope of the hill; and he knew that some of the party was in the underbrush. He had little to fear from them except at close quarters, for there was a scarcity of ammunition among them.

He knew that the ship's officers and Colonel Pfferkorn's staff carried revolvers; but none of them wore cartridge-belts, and each revolver carried only six shots. Most of the ammunition of the ship's officers had been exhausted in the playful attempt to shoot the champagne-bottles full of holes on the night of the dinner; and Brent had counted twenty shots fired at him. That left hardly more than forty shots in the possession of the enemy, while he carried a cartridge-belt which had held fifty cartridges.

It was fortunate, not only for the rescuing party which must come, but also for himself, that he had blown up the arsenal before any arms had been distributed. The rest of the arms and ammunition were aboard the *Valkyrie,* which must have, long since, reached Manila.

Brent's face was haggard; deathly pale. His tunic was in rags and tatters; the linen shirt and collar which he wore hardly better. His trousers were full of enormous rents, showing the skin underneath, bleeding from innumerable cuts and scratches. He reached down and pulled up his long hip-boots, buckling them tightly above the knee. It was fortunate that he had worn these the day of his flight.

He tilted his white pith helmet over his eyes; and, lying full length behind the dragon-tree, glanced down the barrel of his Colt. It was impossible to go farther at the time—he was exhausted and weak. The sun had made him giddy—his wound was like to make him delirious.

The crackling amid the brush continued; and out of the clematis-blossoms below, the heads of several soldiers showed. When they got a little farther toward him, Brent saw that

there were six of them—a Greek with a long knife; three English "Tommies" with *cocobolo* wood clubs; an Irish-American deserter in the United States Army khaki, with corporal's chevrons; and a nondescript in one of the regulation uniforms which Pfferkorn had distributed. The latter carried an iron thole-pin which he had picked up somewhere.

Brent looked down his revolver-barrel, sighting it, and felt sorry for them. Several times he lifted the revolver; and hesitated after lifting it. Presently he summoned up his breath, and shouted to them:

"Keep back there, you six! Keep back! I've got a gun trained on you. Don't be fools. I don't want to kill you."

At the sound of his voice, the Greek and the nondescript scurried to cover; but the English soldiers and the Irishman stood their ground, looking upward from where the voice came. Presently one of the cockneys began to swear in choicest billingsgate.

"Ah! blast me! 'oo's afryd? Wot price me for such a rotter? I s'y, you come out o' that there peaceablelike, and give up. We ain't goin' to 'urt you, are we, Bill?"

The other grinned, showing blackened teeth. "Lord love yer, no! We ain't goin' to 'urt yer, old pal."

They continued to advance up the slope, "Bill" winking at the first speaker. "Come, now, give up peaceablelike, and yer don't get 'urt," soothed the third cockney.

"Come on, 'Amstead 'Eath," said the Irishman, speaking to one called Bill, and with an attempt to parody his speech. "Are ye carrying yer courage wid yer, or did ye l'ave it to home in yer other trowsies. Get the ould badger out of his hole."

He started forward with a rush.

"I'll shoot to kill," came from Brent sternly. "Stand back there, you Irishman, or I'll kill you."

The Irishman with a foul oath rushed on. There was a vicious crack like a whip-lash, and the Irishman threw up his hands and rolled down the hill. The three Englishmen took a spurt and rushed forward almost to the base of the tree behind which Brent lay. In a moment those brutal clubs would be laid over his head. He did not hesitate, but fired three times, quickly. Two of the Englishmen went down; but the third staggered on. Brent finished him with a hole through the forehead, just in time to see the Greek wriggling up behind him, his long knife gleaming viciously. The shot from Brent's gun broke the teeth that held the knife, and the Greek went over on his back.

Brent lay still, unmoved by the slaughter. This was but requital. The hunted was showing his teeth. He had given the men a chance, and they had refused to take it. Had he not killed them, they would have finished him. Coolly he loaded his revolver and tested it; then counted the cartridges in his belt. He had only thirty left, counting the ones in his other revolver. Thirty cartridges between himself and the end!

But it had ceased to become terrifying. There was down within him now but one resolve—to make them suffer for his capture. He would be no weakling easily captured. They should pay for his body very dearly if they wanted it; so dearly that they would regret their desire. Rightly used, every cartridge meant a man. He snapped his teeth, resolved that they should be rightly used.

The wound was aching, throbbing, like a severe toothache—every now and then assailed by a crawly, creeping sensation, as though something were tickling it; then bursting forth into intense raw pain so great that the tears stood out in his eyes. The heat of the day oppressed him—the flies buzzed about him irritatingly. His eyelids, heavy for sleep, persistently blinked; but by sheer force of will he kept them open.

He could hear more of his pursuers crackling in the underbrush now; and he knew that he must seek a new location. The hill was open from too many sides. They could soon surround and

take him before he used his thirty cartridges. He must seek some open place of concealment.

He had but one way to go—back to the bungalow. They had spread out their lines so that for him to attempt to cross the island was to attempt the impossible. Below the hill he found a deer-path leading a few paces from the beach, and winding in and out of the trees. It was easy to traverse; and he was hidden from his enemies for a space until they should double on his tracks. There were some trained woodsmen among them; he suspected the American deserters for that; one grizzled fellow especially, who might have seen fighting against the Apaches, and, whoever he might be, had kept keenly on the trail since first they had sighted him.

Slowly Brent dragged himself along the deer-path. It was growing late in the day, and all that was necessary was to keep them off until nightfall came. Then they could not follow his tracks, and he would be in comparative safety. Already the sun had gone down, a great glistening ball of red in the west; only a small segment of its upper rim showing above the waves. At a space unsheltered from the sea, Brent looked again with hopeless eyes; but there was no sign of a ship.

Ever and anon he heard the hoarse cries of his enemies beyond him; and they seemed to be drawing nearer. His mouth was parched, and he longed for water. But he had not seen a stream that day, and knew of no means of obtaining the precious fluid. A fawn crossed his path, regarding him with startled, puzzled eyes; and, as he raised his head, it fled into the jungle depths. Once he saw a huge python, coiling and uncoiling about the limbs of a massive camphor-tree; but the sight failed to even horrify him.

Suddenly, by sheer intuition, he paused, and looked upward. There, spitting and mewing on a branch above him, was a panther-cat crouched for a spring. The glaring eyeballs, the upturned fur of the enormous feline, gave him only a dull, passive interest. He wondered as he watched in a disinterested sort of way if the panther would be able to kill him by one spring; and his eyes sought those of the cat, and found them. The panther arched its back, and glared at him, the ruff of white fur about the neck bristling; and the whole attitude one of quivering intensity.

As Brent watched, a queer thing happened; the panther's eyes were withdrawn from his, and the tail sank, drooping; the back lost its arch, and the fur resumed its normal position. Spitting with something like disgust, and trembling as though with fear, the panther turned tail and sprang for another branch. Brent watched it disappear, wondering why it had not sprung at him; he did not know that the cat had looked into the eyes of one devoid of fear, and was itself afraid of such a being.

Brent kept on his way, not hurrying or particularly caring what happened. He still heard the shouts behind him, and every now and then the throbbing of his wound gave him such pain that he was forced to stop and hold his hand tightly against it, fancying that by the action he was assuaging his pain.

The red rim of sun had disappeared and the afterglow was on the land. Out of the stillness came the sound of a shot, and a cartridge whistled close to Brent's ear. He dodged behind a tree, his eyes seeking sight of the one who had attacked him; but the forest was silent, and gave no sign of man. Brent waited, fingering his revolver.

Then, as if by a concerted movement, men burst forward on all sides save the one toward the sea. It was an unbroken line, planned craftily. Brent had no place to flee now save only the sea itself. The faces of all nations, evil-eyed, sensuous-lipped, looked upon him. Mechanically, as one who has something to do which is quite useless, Brent lifted both revolvers from his holsters, and fired with unerring aim. A number of men fell. Another cartridge whizzed his way, and imbedded itself in the tree. The men pushed onward, whirling their clubs. From

where he stood, Brent could see Colonel Pfferkorn waving his sword and shouting to them. He shot at him; but the colonel remained untouched.

There was but one thing left to do. He had not time to load again. Without words, he turned quickly, parted the bushes, and dashed into the thicket leading toward the beach. He emerged standing on the crest of the bank, a drop of some thirty feet to the sands below. He gave it no thought, lowering himself on the sand-bank, and clutching at the sand as he whirled downward, trying to break his fall. He landed at the bottom badly shaken up; and, turning, saw his pursuers hesitating at the jump. A bullet whizzed by him again, and splashed up some water in the sea. He stood on the white sand in the afterglow, a fair mark for a decent marksman.

But he wasted no time in remaining so. He tightened his belt and holsters, threw off his ragged tunic, and ran forward, wading out into the waves. The hulk of the wrecked schooner lay still on the reef. If he could gain that!

As he reached his armpits in the water, a bullet clipped a lock of hair from the side of his head. He hardly noticed it, striking out with all his might and diving under water. He was a man whose body had been taught to obey his will; now for the moment his wound ceased to ache, and his old strength seemed to come back to him. He had made up his mind to reach the hulk of the schooner; and the hulk of the schooner he *would* reach. He came up gasping for air, and again heard several shots, but was not concerned.

He struck out boldly, and then went under water for the second time, swimming with all the might of an overhand, racing stroke. Up to the surface again, with the hulk only a rod or so away; and he completed the distance without diving under water. A shot spattered against a bulkhead but some distance from him. He caught at a rope, which, rotten through a week's contact with water, broke, and threw him back—again he clutched at a porthole, and drew himself upward on the slippery deck, crouching down behind the wreck of the pilot-house.

Suddenly by a spirit of wild bravado animated, he drew himself up, and shook his hand at the gathering on the shore. "Yah, yah!" he jeered at them; and the wind blowing to shore carried his mockery to them. Among the pursuers lined on the white sands, there were some who found it in their heart to admire the solitary figure in the dripping clothes and jack-boots who had eluded five hundred, and who, even in his darkest hour, was not afraid of them.

Some one fired; but the zigzag of the water confused the aim. A sea-mew squawked a plaintive note as it circled over the black hulk, and somehow seemed to bring to Brent realization of his pain and suffering. He sank down behind the boat-house.

Presently the crowd on the beach began to thin out in spite of the violent haranguing of Colonel Pfferkorn. By twos and threes they made their way off and toward the slope leading to the bungalow and barracks. As the darkness fell, the crowd lessened until there was no one there at all.

And Brent, crouched down behind the bulkhead, was shivering in the cool air of evening, while the wound throbbed and pained until he felt he could no longer contain himself, but must shriek aloud demoniacally. The salt water had gotten into the wound, and it burned and scorched.

All around him he began to see queer things. The sea seemed to hold strange monsters lurking within its depths, and he felt he must watch carefully lest some one of them devour him. Recollection came to him of the dead sailor floating in the water of the cabin, and he called to him, "Sailor! Sailor!" several times; and laughed a grating, mocking laugh.

To laugh and to call out hurt his parched throat; he remembered his desire for water, and knew that was back of all his pain. The water about the ship tempted him. At first he resisted the temptation, but as his sanity broke down, and his mind was given up to

the unreal things of his imagination, the water seemed delightfully cool and inviting. He crawled down painfully, and swung over the side, taking great gulps of it, then crept back to the deck again, chattering senilely. The dead sailor down in the cabin seemed, unaccountably, to come to life, and came to him speaking of commonplaces; but he drove him away for an enemy.

There was present in him a great distrust of all things, and as the salt water which he had drunk began to fill him with a thirst more maddening than before, he saw phantasmagoria about him, and felt the cold hands of vampirian monsters. He shrieked to them, and bade them leave him; but they clung about waving their skinny fingers. He carefully reloaded his revolvers, dry now, chuckling to himself in his madness. They did not know he had the power to drive them away; but he would soon undeceive them. He fired wildly, and they disappeared. He chuckled again.

As the darkness settled upon the land, the moon came out, a shining silver crescent in the western sky. By its light, Brent could see a boat putting off from shore. He knew that it contained enemies, and spread out his cartridges on the deck, bottom up, counting them as a child counts his lead soldiers. The boat drew nearer, and Brent saw a confused mass of men huddled within her. He fired point-blank. He had forgotten his pain and agony now. He was mad, quite mad, and full of the demoniac desire to kill.

The boat, impelled by the lusty arms of the rowers, brought steadily up under the bows; and the head of a man swung up from over the rail. Brent fired; another head and another shot, and Brent, no longer cautious or caring, poured out his shots right and left as a child fires off crackers on the Fourth, amused by the noise he is making.

But in spite of his fire two men swung aboard and toward the pilot-house. With a swing of a club, Brent's revolver dropped from his left hand; and, infuriated and amazed, he hurled the other into the man's face. A gleam of steel descending like a lightning's flash, and Colonel Pfferkorn's sword whizzed by him. Brent sprang forward, grabbing at the hilt—the blade tore his hands, but he wrested it from its owner, and the next second slashed it across Pfferkorn's body.

The oncoming press stood back amazed at the sight of the madman, his hair in his eyes, his teeth showing wolfishly, his eyes wild and dilated. Another man fell, his head severed at the neck.

A man struck at him with the *cocobolo* stick, breaking the sword half-way. Brent jammed the broken blade into his enemy's open mouth, and the man stumbled back to the sea. The shortened blade was launched straight for the breast of Sturm Sturmson, who had rushed at him; but sudden fear seized Sturmson, and he sprang into the water.

"The man's mad—mad," he yelled. "He's mad. Give me a gun—a gun——" and his mouth was full of water.

Two shots rang out, and that was the end of their ammunition. Whether or not the madman felt them no one had a chance to see, for he had dropped the sword, and seized a great mass of wood and metal on the forward deck—the steering-wheel, which had been torn loose by the storm. With the strength of his madness, he lifted it up and hurled it into the boat. The men within leaped suddenly, and the boat was crushed like an egg-shell.

Brent, picking up the broken sword, grinned wolfishly at them over the side. The attackers struck out for shore with all their energy. The attack was ended.

Brent stood up straight, and with a wild glee attempted a sailor's jig with poor results. The next moment his fancy changed, and he was gliding into a waltz—a waltz,

"Slumber on, my little gipsy sweetheart,
Slumber on——"

He put his hand to his eyes. Where had he heard that? Some one had sung it—and—Dorothy.

With the return of his senses came the great reality of his pain. He stag-

gered back, shading his eyes from the moon. Then the sword clattered to the deck, and he rolled down the companionway and lay stretched out on the stairs.

XI.

The pink iridescence of dawn was on land and sea when the three vessels comprising the fleet which had sailed from Manila cruised off the lee shore of the island, looking for a place to anchor. One was found some few miles up-shore from the bungalow, and the gigs containing the commanding officers of the battalions and the ships put off from the other craft to the *Arizona,* where a council of war was held.

There were no sleepy ones in all the thousand men aboard the ships. All were eager, tense, waiting for their commands. At the termination of the council, the *Valkyrie* took aboard the other companies which went to make up Major Fenpenny's battalion, and steamed off for the extreme south shore of the island, while the *Samar* with the remaining battalion, under Major Hugh Chisholm, steamed away to the extreme north. Pursey Ochs accompanied the latter, and Hopworth Dreen went with the *Valkyrie,* each to act as guide for their respective battalions. The *Arizona* anchored, and her marines and jackies disembarked, the marines under the command of Captain Llewelyn Wagner, U. S. M. C.; the sailors in charge of Lieutenant Severy Quinn, U. S. N.; both detachments numbering together two hundred and seventy-five; and under the guidance of Schlauss Hyman.

Colonel Parr had accompanied Major Fenpenny's battalion; and it was he who had planned the mode of attack. Fenpenny and Chisholm, landing at the extreme north and south, were to form in long lines of skirmishers, and, if possible, to complete a three-quarters circle about the island, the lack of information concerning the island's circumference preventing any accurate prognostication as to whether this could be done. This would, at all events, give a spread of eight hundred odd men, all armed, surrounding part of the island, and steadily advancing toward the center to prevent any attempted concealment on the part of men on the island.

Meanwhile the marines and jackies were to spread out in just such another skirmish-line, with the exception of twenty who were to go to make up an officer's patrol, and, if possible, a patrol bearing a flag of truce. Ensign Gilroy was to have charge of this patrol, and was to approach the bungalow with it.

The marines in their scarlet tunics made a brave showing as they disembarked from the *Arizona* for the shore, the blue-bloused, brown-legginged jackies looking somber by contrast. They landed, the sun of early morning glittering on their bayonets and gold braiding, and even reflecting soberly from the brown barrels of the sailors' carbines.

Immediately they formed in skirmish-lines, and spread out along the white-sanded beach while Ensign Gilroy and his twenty were left in the center of it. Dorothy Gordon, with Lanier Daingerfield by her side, watched them wistfully. She and Daingerfield had been transferred from the *Valkyrie* when that vessel sailed toward the south, a half-hour before; she for her personal safety, and Daingerfield because it had been decided that his sphere of usefulness would be greater as adviser to Commander Colcourt.

"Attention—to the left—dress! Right about face, by twos—to the right—wheel—march!" came indistinctly to those on the *Arizona* from shore. It was Ensign Gilroy speaking to his men. The peace patrol passed the skirmish-lines, following the lead of Schlauss Hyman, and disappeared around the curve which concealed the path leading to the bungalow.

Schlauss Hyman marched first; following him came Gilroy, a great piece of white bunting tied to his sword and held aloft. The sailors moved briskly, and they reached the woodland path. Suddenly Hyman halted. The black hulk of the wreck confronted him.

"It looks to me," he said, after he

had lifted his glasses to his eyes and stared steadily at the dismantled hulk, "as though there were some people there. There's a man standing against the pilot-house, and two, three, four lying face downward on the deck. Don't you think you'd better look into that, Mr. Gilroy?"

The young officer, elated by the chance which had been given him, was missing no opportunity. "I see them," he said. "No, I don't need the binoculars. Surest thing you know. Here, Martin!"

His command had been halted when Hyman spoke, and now stood resting on their arms. The sailor addressed stepped forward and saluted.

"Martin, you're the best swimmer aboard the *Arizona*. Here's a chance to prove your nerve. Strip quickly and swim out to that hulk. We'll keep our carbines trained on her. Shout out to the people aboard that if they shoot we shoot, and we've got their range. Then climb aboard and see what's doing. Come back immediately and report to me."

Before Ensign Gilroy had said more than the first few words, the sailor, Martin, had begun to strip; and within a space of two minutes his clothes were in a heap on the sand, and he had saluted and plunged into the water.

Six of his companions, in response to Gilroy's order, were on one knee, their carbines trained on the hulk. The wind brought Martin's challenge faintly, but no answer; and the next moment they saw his naked body dragged upward and aboard the hulk.

The sun glistened on his wet skin as he moved to and fro on the deck, for the moment lost to view when he knelt to examine the bodies. His stay aboard was brief, and they saw him shoot from the deck in a graceful curve, launched toward them. He swam easily and powerfully to the shore, shook himself, and wiped the water out of his eyes, then saluted Ensign Gilroy.

"There's four dead men aboard and one man mighty badly wounded, sir," he said. "The man standing against the pilot-house fell backward, shot through the head. He's just stiff. There's three more dead, one's got his windpipe cut clean through, another's been stabbed through the lungs, and the third's been batted over the head with something—skull's crushed in. And the fellow who looks like he done it all's cut up pretty bad, got about forty-eleven cuts, three shots in him, and a baste on the head, too. There's a piece of a sword lying near him where he fell, and a bunch of cartridges spilled over the deck. Must have been a devil of a scrapper, begging your pardon, Mr. Gilroy."

Schlauss Hyman stepped forward impetuously. "What sort of a looking man was the last one, Martin?" he asked.

"Kind of good-looking, I guess; sort of thin-featured, 'cept for his nose, and that sticks up a little. Got eyelashes like a woman, long and——"

Hyman gave an excited cry. "Mr. Gilroy, that's Bauldwin Brent!" he cried.

"Gee!" said Martin, with something of awe. Every sailor and soldier in the Orient knew the name of Brent.

"Brent—eh?" said Gilroy. "Well, now, by all that's holy, we've got to get him off! Martin, put on some of your things and hustle back to the *Arizona*. Tell 'em to send off a boat and fetch Mr. Brent, and you go with the boat. Hurry, man!"

"Yes, sir," replied Martin, saluting again, and pulling on his underwear. He followed this with his pants and shoes, and, catching up the remainder of his gear, fled hurriedly toward the *Arizona*.

Gilroy gave his command again, and the party set off up the hill toward the bungalow. All was silent about the place. After having made a reconnaissance of the grounds, they entered the house single-file; and Gilroy crammed the white flag in his pocket.

"No use," he said briefly. "The beggars are probably asleep, and we don't need it."

He stationed ten of the men below, and the others followed him up the

stairs, each with directions to enter the different sleeping-rooms. What they had seen below amply justified them in believing that the people of the bungalow had no thought of their early coming.

The floors of both living-room and dining-room were littered with beer-bottles; the tables were stacked with bottles nearly drained, containing whisky, liqueurs, champagne, and other beverages. The glasses stank of stale liquor. The kitchen revealed an array of pans and pots, greasy and unclean.

The whole establishment was one to sicken the heart of a decent housekeeper, the chairs scratched and muddy where feet had rested, the walls marked with the imprints of dirty hands. Some of the furniture was broken and lay in a corner, along with a table-cloth and a quantity of napkins. Cigar and cigarette butts reposed in coffee-cups, and lay strewn on the floor, along with paper spills and burnt-out matches. It was plain that this crew had been making what they could out of adversity.

In the room which Gilroy entered Walrus Arundsen lay, his mouth wide open, exhaling a smell of intoxicants. Gilroy awakened him rudely with several thumps on his bare chest, and he started up with a roar of rage. Gilroy gently pushed him back, and the Walrus groaned and felt his aching head, blinking his sleep-heavy eyes at the young naval officer. At the sight of the United States uniform, he started up with a great oath, and Gilroy calmed him by placing the cold muzzle of a navy revolver under his ear.

"Do you surrender?" he asked calmly.

The Walrus eyed him with animosity and grunted. "Do I surrender, is it? Vot—with that upon my face—yah! Vot! am I a fool—or vot? Though in mine sleeping-clothes, I have belief I not make satisfactory prisoner for my rank, young man. Time has been vhen you vould salute an officer of the Danish Navy—vich same I has been. Me, Rolf Arundsen."

He sighed deeply, and asked that Gilroy turn his back while he dressed, as he was a modest man of retiring disposition.

"No fear," laughed Gilroy. "Not a chance. Slip into your togs, and be quick about it, Captain Arundsen."

Gilroy assisted him in finding some clean underwear, socks, and canvas shoes, and helped him into a clean, white drill uniform; then, taking his parole, he slipped his revolver back into his belt and marched the redoubtable Rolf Arundsen into the hall, where were already assembled Colonel Pfferkorn, James Phillips, and Sturm Sturmson. Later, one by one the different officers of Pfferkorn's staff, save the four who slept at the barracks, joined the array, and were put in charge of ten of the detachment.

The men suffered capture without a struggle. They had no ammunition, and they knew that, under the laws of nations, it would be a hard thing to find them guilty of a serious crime. So they accepted their position with equanimity, having in fact far more solicitude for their aching brows than for their captive position.

Colonel Pfferkorn was in rather a bad way from his wound received at the hands of Brent, and was suffering from much loss of blood. Schlauss Hyman, ever eager in his profession, wanted to examine the wound; but Gilroy forbade it until they had returned to the ship.

"We've got to take a look at the barracks," he said.

But the two men whom he had posted as flankers outside told him that this was not wise when he suggested it. One of them had already crept near the barracks and reported that the whole forest was alive with the soldiers of Pfferkorn; that they were armed with heavy clubs, and were prepared to make a sturdy defense. Gilroy considered the matter, and decided that as he had bagged the important prisoners, he would return to the ship.

"I say, old man," came in the tones of James Phillips, "there's some beggars out there on that hulk in the harbor that may be in a pretty bad way. One of your own people, the bally Ameri-

can, Brent, gave the lot of us a tough fight, and laid us out with a light spar anchor. I don't know whether he's dead or not; but he went sheer, stark raving mad. On my word, simply terrifying! Now, if you'd send a boat——"

But a boat had already been sent. Martin, eager to distinguish himself with his important news, had not waited for a boat to take him back to the *Arizona,* but had swum out to her in his underclothes, with the rest of his gear on his head, and after climbing aboard had breathlessly addressed the officer of the deck telling him the story. Dorothy Gordon, turning, had heard what he said, and turned deathly pale.

"Mr. Harding," she cried. "Oh, Mr. Harding! please — quickly. Yes, I know that is Mr. Brent, from his description—quickly!"

Lanier Daingerfield watched her, a frown on his face, which deepened into a scowl. He said nothing, but stood aloof, smoking.

Harding hurried off to speak to Lieutenant-commander Colcourt, and within a very short time a boat was lowered. Dorothy caught Harding's arm.

"Let me go!" she pleaded. "Please let——"

"Sorry, Miss Gordon," replied Harding. "But I—well, it's really impossible, you know. There"—and he breathed a sigh of relief as one of the ensigns dropped into the boat and she was shoved off—"you see, it's too late now, anyway——"

The girl turned an agonized glance on Harding. "What else did the man say—did he say Mr. Brent was alive?"

"Yes," replied the embarrassed young officer, trying to speak in a soothing tone. "He's alive — and — yes, he's alive."

He excused himself, on the grounds of some duties, and hurried away. Dorothy, her hands clenched, leaned heavily on the rail, watching the gleam of the sun on the upturned paddles as the boat drew nearer and nearer to the hulk.

It seemed that they would never return. She could only distinguish vaguely that they lifted something into the boat, then remained to adjust something more, and pulled off. When they were some distance away, some one touched a match, and, with a great roar, and amid clouds of white smoke and sea-spume, the hulk vanished from view. When the waves settled, there was no sign of her. She had been torpedoed.

Slowly, it seemed, the boat drew back from the hulk, and approached the ship. Several sailors leaped on the accommodation ladder, and several in the boat passed them something wrapped in sail-cloth, which the first two bore tenderly up the ladder. The girl rushed to the side and encountered them.

"Is he alive? Tell me, is he alive?" she moaned.

They moved on, stolid, but perturbed. The young ensign doffed his cap to her.

"He's alive," he said gently. "But the surgeon must see him at once."

He, too, made off with all haste. Dorothy hurried to the doctor's office, Lanier Daingerfield following and gnawing at his straw-colored mustache. The doctor was not in his office. He was attending to the wounded man in the sick-bay, the steward told her.

"Try to be calm, Dorothy," said Lanier Daingerfield. "The doctor will——"

She did not hear him, only sank down, covering her face with her hands. She heard another boat rattle against the side, and knew that it must contain the "peace patrol." She got up, drying her eyes, and went on deck to find Hyman. The prisoners were the first to come aboard, and were led away by the sailors to Commander Colcourt's cabin, Ensign Gilroy following, after dismissing the others of his men.

The girl caught Hyman's arm. "Doctor," she cried, "they've brought Brent aboard, and he's wounded. Doctor, doctor, please, please save him! You can! I've heard so much of what you've done—and he was your friend. Save him—for my sake—for—doctor, can't you understand?"

Hyman quieted her with that rare sympathy which physicians sometimes

have at crucial moments; and hurried below to find the patient. Dorothy waited, crouched down in a chair which had been brought on deck for her, while Lanier Daingerfield stood off still smoking, and occasionally looking at her. He was swallowing hard.

After a time that seemed an age, Hyman came up and took the girl's hand. "Miss Dorothy," he said, "you must be brave. You must have faith. I and the ship's surgeon will do all that can be done. For I promise you I will not leave him until I have pulled him through—or he is—— Well, you understand. If he does not live, it will not be through fault of mine."

She stared at him with horror-stricken eyes. "But — you — know — whether——"

Hyman shook his head sadly. "I don't know, Miss Dorothy," he said simply. "You must have faith. No, you cannot see him now. No one can see him except me and the ship's surgeon. You must wait—and maybe—— Well, I don't know much about prayers, but there can't be any harm—and if ever a man needed prayers——"

He paused abruptly and went away without looking at her.

Meanwhile, the campaign on shore had begun. Fenpenny's battalion and Chisholm's were slowly drawing a drag-net through the forests and the jungle through which no men could pass. Early in the morning Chisholm's first company encountered a detachment of fifty of the derelicts, and ordered them to lay down their arms. As but twelve of the company's men were visible, the derelicts showed fight, and charged with their clubs. They were almost annihilated.

Soon both battalions encountered many more detachments, sometimes larger, sometimes smaller. Some showed signs of fight, and died for their folly, others submitted, and were made prisoners, and marched on with the attackers, deprived of their clubs, and their hands tied with their own tunics. Sometimes they were in pitiful detachments of twos and threes, and showed the white feather by groveling before the conquerors.

At noon Fenpenny's battalion reached the barracks with their prisoners. Before two o'clock Chisholm had made a junction with him, and they sent forward a white flag to the barracks, bidding the hundred ensconced behind the walls of the first building to surrender.

But the derelicts, suspicious and afraid, refused to surrender, and there was nothing to do but train the brass rapid-fire guns upon them. These had been lugged from the *Valkyrie* for just this purpose; and they tore great holes in the building, threatening its thorough annihilation. The derelicts, alarmed, called for mercy, and came out to surrender.

The campaign was over—almost a bloodless one for the American troops. They had lost but two men and had only six wounded. The derelicts' casualties of dead had not been counted; they probably numbered one hundred. Of wounded, they had twenty, which were taken to the *Arizona* to be cared for.

The prisoners were confined in the second barracks, which had been unharmed; and the soldiers took up their residence there, also, some of them bunking in the ruined barracks, also. The officers appropriated the bungalow.

The work was over for the day. But that night was to bring the council of war which was to decide what was to be done with the prisoners.

The *Samar* and the *Valkyrie* had returned before the campaign was over, and were anchored on either side of the *Arizona*. All the officers dined aboard the ships that night; but it was decided to hold the council in the living-room of the bungalow, and to this end the Chinese stewards of the *Arizona* were sent to sweep up and garnish the place.

At eight o'clock all was in readiness, and the boats put off from the ships to the shore, containing the senior officers of the ships and the regiments, including the captain of the transport, Lanier Daingerfield, and Ochs, Hyman, and Dreen.

The consultation was a long one, marked with many speeches from all parties. But the decision reached was generally agreed upon by all.

It was that Colonel Parr should remain on the island with his two battalions, and the *Samar* should lie at anchor with the *Arizona* to guard it from the second ship expected from Japan, and, if necessary, give battle to the ship. All that they had been able to wring from Arundsen was what he had told the others: that a second ship, armored like the *Valkyrie* and under command of the blackguard adventurer, Thorwald, was expected at any moment. Thorwald had an evil reputation for everything but fighting; but in that he was acknowledged the peer of any naval officer, for few had forgotten how he fought his ship when he served as a captain in the Chinese Navy, and engaged two Japanese cruisers and conquered them.

The *Valkyrie*, meanwhile, was to proceed to Manila with the reports of Commander Colcourt and Colonel Parr, conveying the official prisoners for trial at Manila, and to ask that another cruiser be sent. She was to sail at dawn.

And it was at dawn next morning that they conveyed the senseless body of Brent aboard the *Valkyrie* before they awakened Dorothy Gordon. She, too, was awakened later, and told to go aboard. It was Lanier Daingerfield who called her.

When the *Valkyrie* was leaving the island behind in the morning mists, she caught sight of Schlauss Hyman, very white-faced, clinging to her rail.

"Doctor Hyman," she said slowly, and he turned and looked into her eyes.

"He is conscious," said Hyman. "The worst is over. I have operated—I think successfully. He keeps calling for you, and I suppose you must go."

He led the way down the saloon steps to the second officer's cabin, which had been given up to his patient. Lanier Daingerfield followed her, although she did not know it. Hyman opened the door and went within. Presently he came out and bade her enter. She went in, leaving the door ajar, and Hyman continued on his way down the passage. Lanier Daingerfield stepped to the door and listened.

The cabin was very dark. Only the gray-pink morning mists lighted it through a half-shuttered port-hole. The smell of anesthetics was heavy in the air. In the far corner she could see something framed in white, a face that appeared gray in its pallor. One thin, wasted hand was stretched out to her.

She dropped on her knees and carried the hand to her mouth.

"Brent, Brent!" Her voice seemed choked, her breath came in little gasps. "If you knew—you have suffered, I know, I know, but I—I have suffered, too, sweetheart, ever since I saw your dear body brought aboard. And now—it tears my heart to see you there so pale, so weak—and—Brent, Brent, never, never leave me again. Oh, I love you so, Brent, dear. There is nothing for me if you are dead."

"Hush!" he choked out hoarsely, almost inaudibly. "You have promised—the other. You must not—tell me. Although it is what I want to hear, although I would go through all this again to hear it—you must not tell me. You must not tell me. You have promised—promised——"

He turned his head away, coughing, his frame shaking convulsively. In spite of his determination, a moan of pain escaped him, and he fainted sheer away.

For a time the girl remained on her knees, his limp hand in hers. Then slowly, as if in a daze, she got up, and looked down at him.

"Brent," she said, and felt his pulse. Somehow she knew he had fainted.

"I shall kiss your dear face just once again," she said, not knowing she was speaking aloud. "Just once, and then—then I will remember what you have taught me. I have promised *him*. He saved us, and kept his word. I shall try to make him happy. So, Brent, good-by."

She bent over him and kissed his cold lips. Lanier Daingerfield, outside, drew

himself up stiffly, brushed his eyes with the back of his hand; then his attitude suddenly relaxed, and he walked away with bowed head.

The girl came out very pale and erect. In answer to her bell-ring, a steward appeared, and she told him to fetch Hyman.

"Mr. Brent has fainted," she said, holding herself straight, somehow; then, as the doctor passed within, she sank down in a heap, and sobs shook her slender frame.

XII.

As she entered the little room of the Ermita Hospital, where Brent lay convalescing, the sick man's face lighted up, and he held out his thin hand.

"I have such news for you," she said. She unwrapped the tissue-paper from her bundle, and revealed glorious, long-stemmed crimson roses.

"For me—those!" he said unsteadily. "Why, Dorothy, how did you get them?"

"Lanier got them," she answered. "He had them sent from Hongkong on ice. Telegraphed for them." As she spoke, Lanier Daingerfield, immaculate in white flannels, entered, holding his soft Panama hat under his arm, and smiling.

For a moment a scowl passed over Brent's face, then he stretched out his hand toward his rival.

"If was awfully good of you, Lanier," he said. "I'm very grateful to you both for your kindness to me since I've been laid up. Let me see—it's two weeks, now, isn't it?"

"Two weeks and a day," nodded Dorothy.

She was in white duck, and one tiny white-shod shoe peeped out from amid masses of tucks and laces, as she sat on the chair beside him. Her blond hair exhaled the perfume of the violet-beds, and her pink-and-white skin shone in the rays of the sun as they trickled through the shade of the bamboo-tree by his window. But there was a sadness in her clear eyes, and lines about her mouth which showed that the Dorothy of to-day was not the Dorothy of the P. M. S. S. *Sultana.*

"You said you had news?" hinted Brent.

"Yes," she replied. "But Lanier understands it better than I. He'll tell you all about it."

Lanier tossed his Panama on the table, watching Dorothy as she arranged the roses in a long, green-veined glass vase.

"Why, yes," he replied. "The *Valkyrie* came in again yesterday, and there was a council held last night by the governor, the commissioners, and the senior officers of the army and the navy."

"But what news did the *Valkyrie* bring?" asked Brent impatiently.

"Oh, I forgot! The second ship, called the *Dragon* and commanded by Thorwald, came down to the island three days or more ago. You know they sent the battle-ship *Manitou* to the assistance of the *Arizona,* and when the *Dragon* showed up, they fired on her and demanded her surrender. She refused, and showed fight—Thorwald was always reckless. Well, one of her shots destroyed a gun-top on the *Manitou,* and that made the old man sore. So he ordered the *Arizona* to open fire coincidentally with him, and they tore the *Dragon* up. Somehow, one of their shots hit the *Dragon's* magazine, and blew her sky-high. There wasn't a man saved. So, as far as that's concerned, that finishes the second ship.

"But, of course, the government was puzzled as to how they were going to punish those five hundred men on the island. Well, the council last night, acting on the suggestions of Parr and Colcourt, decided that they would simply leave them on the island, send them some agricultural implements, and make them work for their living."

Brent nodded. "It was the wisest thing to do," he said.

"The engineers got off," continued Lanier Daingerfield. "Thanks to my evidence. So did Christian, though he didn't deserve to. The Chinese, of course, weren't implicated. That's really about all there is to tell, old man."

He got to his feet, and picked up his Panama, which he twisted between his hands.

"I ought to say," he began again, with considerable hesitancy, "something that I should have said before. I don't know how it was that I was such a cad as to try to—well, I can't account for a lot of things I've done. I don't know why I cheated that night. Of course, I needed money, but I must have been crazy—and then, to strike my superior officer—but, anyhow, that hasn't got anything to do with you."

He paused, breathing hard, and took out his cigarette-case. He offered Brent one, but Brent smiled a refusal. "Doctor won't allow it," he said.

Daingerfield fingered the unlighted cigarette, and looked out of the window. "I drove a bargain with Dorothy." He was trying to speak without emotion. "A rotten bargain. But it wasn't really so rotten, because I thought at the time that she cared a little for me, and didn't really care for any one else. And I've always loved you, Dorothy, and always will, I guess. So—well, fate seemed to play into my hand, and I took it. Dorothy promised to marry me——"

He squared his shoulders defiantly.

"But—I didn't know then, Brent, that Dorothy was in love with you. She is. She loves you better than—well, I only wish that there was enough to me to make a woman love me that way. She didn't tell me so. She didn't ask to be released. But I've seen; and, not being a blind fool, I've understood. When you remained on the island, when you were found and thought dead, and then—when Dorothy went to you after you were conscious—I know it was a mean thing to do, but I listened—yes, and I heard—it only confirmed what I thought."

He still looked steadily at Brent.

"But, you see—I'm not exactly a cad—and I love Dorothy too much to make her miserable. And so—I release her utterly from her promise to marry me. I refuse to marry her. And, Brent, will you shake hands, and let me say you're a lucky dog?"

In the silence that followed the two men clasped hands.

As they stood there, silent, they heard the rattle of carriage-wheels outside, and presently the sound of some one coming up the steps and down the hall. There was a knock on the door, and Pursey Ochs entered, his face wreathed in smiles.

"Read them," he said, extending three blue cable envelopes toward Brent, Dorothy, and Daingerfield. "They're personal congrats. from the Great White Father who sitteth in Washington, and they say that as patriots we collar the Roquefort, and are all the coliander."

They were reading the despatches. Daingerfield's suddenly dropped from his hands, and he stared blankly at Ochs. Presently he stooped down, picked up the slip, and handed it to Ochs.

"Have I got a delusion, or what? Read it."

J. Pursey Ochs looked at him curiously, and then at the slip.

DAINGERFIELD, Hotel Oriente, Manila.
Excellent service rendered removes stain of past misconduct. Your name replaced active list navy lieutenant first grade.

It was signed with the name of the President.

With their congratulations in his ears, Daingerfield, crushing his Panama hat between his hands, staggered out of the room, Ochs following him with a steady hand upon his shoulder.

But the girl, forgetful of everything except her great happiness, turned her eyes to the man she loved.

"Sweetheart," she said; and the thin arms of the invalid went about her neck.

"It's the same beautiful dream I dreamt before," he murmured, and his tones had the gladness of springtime in them. "The same beautiful dream—but, sweetheart, I sha'n't wake up this time—I sha'n't wake up."

Outside, a bird sang as though he would burst his little throat with the melody within him.

How Christmas Came to Ocos

By Charles Steinfort Pearson

Author of "Romances of the Race Course," Etc.

A Christmas story without a setting of leafless trees and snow-covered fields and stormy skies is rather a novelty; and there is novelty in the plot as well as the setting of Mr. Pearson's clever Christmas contribution

MULHALL, United States consular agent, storekeeper, and hotel proprietor at the little Central American port, sat inside the *cantina,* looking out at the dreary prospect. His glance took in the Pacific, which beat with sullen, insistent swash on the sand in front. Also he could see for miles up and down the beach, as straight as if laid out with a ruler. Overhead the rain dropped with a roar on the tin roof.

Suddenly Mulhall brought his chair down on the floor with a bang. A figure approaching up the strand had caught his attention. The fact that it was a white man, and one whom he did not know, was what aroused the American's interest. He was acquainted with every American, German, or Englishman in that section.

"I never saw that chap before," said Mulhall, noting the tottering steps of the tall, gaunt young man who strode wearily up.

The rain poured from the coatless, barefooted figure, and the consular agent saw that the fellow was panting in spite of his slow pace.

"Don't stand out there. Come in," the American ordered, with a gesture.

The man obeyed, leaning against the door-post for support.

"English. Mental trouble as well as physical. First stages of fever." This was the wireless telegraphic report which passed between the consular agent's eye and his brain.

"Good Lord! I don't think I ever saw anybody wetter than you are," was what he said. "Shipwreck?"

"No," said the newcomer; and stood waiting, as if further questioning would fall as a blow.

Mulhall asked no other questions.

"You look as if a little red liquor might help you," he suggested instead.

Both food and drink were given, and then the stranger begged that he might be allowed to rest. "Anywhere at all. I can't tell you how tired I am," he stated.

There was no suggestion of whimpering; just plain, matter-of-fact statement. Mulhall found a bed, and the Englishman threw himself into it. He remained there for a couple of weeks or so, for the fever which the American had predicted seized him. Much of the time he was unconscious, and Mulhall heard a woman's name often mentioned.

Now, that was how Richard Vaughan "dropped into" Ocos. Mulhall interpreted some of his story from the lines of his face, and the way in which he would sit motionless, head bowed. Mulhall had a story of his own—he had not left the breezy State of Montana to experience the almost deadly climate of the Central American coast for his health.

After the Englishman had survived the fever attack, and had come to look like what must have been his old self, Mulhall concluded his charge "sized up" well. A typical Briton, he was twenty-six or seven, smooth of face, with eyes as blue and keen as those of

the Westerner himself, and well set up. Moreover, he could look his benefactor full in the face.

The American was an older man, square of jaw and figure, with tawny mustache, and that glint in his eye which betokens the fighter. His manner was rough, for Mulhall had seen rough times in Montana, but he was kind-hearted.

"Feelin' better, pard?" he asked one morning when Vaughan appeared to have gained his strength.

The young Englishman nodded, and for the first time something like a smile came over his trouble-harassed features.

"A man even in the last stages, which I am not, couldn't help feeling well with such a friend and such treatment. I feel fit to go to work at anything," he remarked, with a sudden show of animation, rising and facing Mulhall. "It would help me to forget," he said fiercely.

"Sit down, pard. Too much excitement in C. A. ain't good for nobody. Now, another thing, there are too few white men down here to be 'mistering' one another. My first name's Henry—'Hank,' for short. What might yours be? Now, mind, I haven't asked you where you came from, or how you arrived, though that's a seven-year mystery. I just naturally want something to make me feel like I'm addressin' a partner when I talk to you."

"Richard's my first name—Dick, between pals," was the answer.

"Course you can read an' write, Dick; an' figure?" Mulhall asked anxiously.

Vaughan's answer was vastly reassuring.

"I don't believe a schoolmaster could make me fluke with any problem in arithmetic," he said gravely. "When I was at 'varsity——"

He stopped with a sigh.

"If you've got any accounts you want made out, and others kept straight, I'm your man," he said.

Mulhall's delight was evinced by his rising from the chair and slapping his companion on the shoulder.

"You're a Heaven-sent treasure, Dick," he exclaimed, standing feet wide apart and eying Vaughan with evident admiration. "The only thing that worries me is keeping my bills O. K. I do a bigger business with my store, hotel, and *cantina* than you would think."

Vaughan found that Hank Mulhall had not overstated the case, but he had no trouble in keeping the accounts straight. The planters, on whom the American depended for business, grew to like the quiet, obliging young Englishman who was installed as the consular agent's assistant. To all questions as to where he had come from he turned a deaf ear.

Hank felt that Vaughan possessed grit, a quality which in his mind made up for any other shortcomings the man might possess. Nor was the American in error, as subsequent events proved.

A Pacific port directly on the ocean demands a long pier. The pier at Ocos was the feature of the place. It was covered over so as to furnish suitable storage for the sacks of coffee awaiting shipment; but at the ocean end it was simply a bare platform of boards, screened by an awning, with the donkey-engine, and queer cage in which passengers were hoisted up from the lighters running to the ships; for, owing to shallow water, the ships did not come close to shore. A fixed ladder ran from the top of the pier down into the water.

It was the custom of the port residents when off duty to stroll to the end of the pier and rest there, sheltered from the sun by the awning. An ocean breeze always blew there, and the sight of the green water, and the sound of it slapping continually at the piles, gave the suggestion of coolness.

Fishing was good, too. Almost any time, when the tide was right, one could catch a fine mess of bonitas. When one felt more energetic than usual, it was possible to hook a ten or twelve-foot shark. The water abounded with them.

It had been an exceedingly hot day, with the thermometer up near the hundred mark. Business was at a stand-

still. All those who could were making the pier their resting-place. Among these was Mulhall, Vaughan, and Fledderman, the "factor" of the pier, who also was the agent of the railroad, owned by a German company.

Fledderman was a more sociable Teuton than the general run of those transplanted to the tropics. Mulhall had been his especial crony, before Vaughan's advent, and now he took a liking to the consular agent's pard. The fact that soon after his advent Vaughan had paid not the slightest attention to Fledderman's inquiry: "How did you ket to Ocos? Zum air-ship, eh?" had not made an enemy of the big-hearted German.

"Vell, it's klad I am dat mine vife an' de chiltren are avay in dis heat," remarked Fledderman casually. The wife and three children were guests of a planter fellow countryman.

"Dere iss a shark. He iss a pig fellow, too, iss it not so?" he remarked suddenly.

His stubby forefinger was pointed to where, above the water, a telltale dorsal fin moved along, just revealing a glimpse of the long, dark body beneath the surface.

"I haf heard it said dat a shark a man will not addack; I know petter," Fledderman stated verbosely, eyes still fixed on the fin. "I vould not give a pfennig for a man's life out dere. I myself haf seen——"

He was interrupted by a scream, followed by a splash in the water at the side of the pier. Three of the four natives fishing lazily from the side of the pier had risen and were gesticulating wildly. From down among the piles came a gurgling cry. The natives were shouting that Ernesto had dropped asleep, fallen in the water, and was drowning.

"Himmel! If he don't trown, de shark has him alretty," shudderingly ejaculated Fledderman, turning his back. Men were running wildly to lower a boat from where it hung on the davits.

Vaughan and Mulhall were standing together. The Englishman, peering over the side of the pier, caught a glimpse of a face half-crazed by fear; saw the arms beating about wildly. Ernesto could not swim. Vaughan's shoes were kicked from his feet, and he poised himself.

"Here, don't be a fool; stay where you are," said Mulhall, seeking to detain him.

Vaughan dived downward, splitting the water some twenty feet below.

"You men! What are you so long about that boat for?" roared Mulhall, in an agony of fear for his pard.

"Lower away there!" he yelled. "Vaughan's gone overboard after that darned native!"

"Ach! Den dere is two dett," muttered Fledderman huskily, backing to the center of the pier, and covering his face with his hands, as if to shut out the gruesome spectacle of two men torn to pieces by sharks.

The rowboat hit the water with a slap. Mulhall had assisted in lowering, but was not in it. Now he ran to the edge, and looked over.

What he saw was Vaughan, holding the unconscious form of Ernesto with one arm, swimming toward the end of the pier, where the ladder descended.

Mulhall saw also, not one fin, telling of the hideous, bloodthirsty sea-tiger underneath, but four or five. No longer the big fellow moved along stealthily and slowly. The giant shark was darting hither and thither, as if prey had been scented, but not yet located. His fellows were moving about rapidly.

All this Mulhall's glance took in with exceeding swiftness; his brain weighed the possibilities of the rescuer being able to attain safety before the monsters would rend him like a lamb in the jaws of wolves.

"Make for the ladder, Dick!" he yelled. "Let Ernesto go, and make for the ladder! Drop him, I say—it's your only chance!"

Vaughan wasted no time or breath in words, but Mulhall knew from the hardly perceptible shake of the head that he had comprehended. He saw the Englishman swimming steadily onward with his unconscious burden.

With a fierce oath outwardly at his friend's obstinacy, though inwardly Mulhall came as near praying as ever he did, he rushed to the ladder and dropped down it, urging the men in the boat to hurry. Over his shoulder he saw Vaughan only a few yards away.

His eye swept the water. Not a hundred feet behind the swimmer he saw a shark's fin. Once more Mulhall called with all the power of entreaty of his rough nature for Vaughan to hurry. His eyes were not on the swimmer, but on the dark yellow membranous object which clove the water behind in zigzag, erratic fashion.

Another couple of yards for Vaughan! Mulhall, a plainsman, could not swim, but he risked his life by leaning outward at an almost impossible angle, to catch and hold the rescuer and rescued.

Another moment and Mulhall had taken the burden from Vaughan; was assisting the Englishman up the ladder.

"Quick, quick! Higher up; higher!" he yelled, his face blanching at the sight of something Vaughan did not see. But the Englishman felt rather than saw the agitation of the water as a huge shape flashed by like a phantom, no more than a couple of handbreadths from where his feet were resting on the barnacle-covered ladder round. It was Mulhall who saw the immense shark, deprived of its prey, sweep past on its side, mouth open.

When the boat slipped under, just in time to receive the three, two other shapes swept by like shadows; so close that two of the rowers shrank back in fear. One had felt his oar scrape the side of a man-eater.

"Of all the fool tricks! Of all the fool tricks! You're true grit, though, pard!" That was all that Mulhall saw fit to remark, when all were safe on the pier.

"If id vass in de faderland, an' de kaiser heard of it, a decoration he vould haf," panted Fledderman, his usually red face an unhealthy pink, mottled with leprous-looking spots. "Iss id dat you vish to t'row your life avay, man, man?" he demanded. "And for de most vorthless native in de place!"

"I couldn't see a human being drown like that," said Vaughan simply. Whereat Fledderman muttered something about "schnapps," and tottered off the pier, shaking his head as if he could not comprehend.

Even Vaughan himself could not deny that Ernesto was one of the most good-for-nothing of the natives. But when the *ladino* had recovered fully from his mishap he cared for but one person in the world. His devotion for Vaughan was doglike.

It was not that the Englishman talked to him, or paid attention to him more than his wont. Vaughan rarely spoke unless it was to chat with the Fledderman children—Katrina, aged twelve; Lena, a dainty nine-year-old; and little Otto, a sturdy young Teuton of seven.

The children doted upon him. This was somewhat of a source of annoyance to Don Pancho Ortiz. Ortiz was a Central American, nephew of Secretary Ortiz. He was a nasty-looking, vermouth-drinking fellow, with a yellow face and shifty eyes. Fledderman did not like him, though the factor had given him the position of assistant factor for policy, and because he was the most available material. Don Pancho knew that Fledderman did not like him, and sought to curry favor by attaching the children to him. They would none of him.

Craftily suggesting to Ortiz that the work was too much for one man, Fledderman engaged Vaughan ostensibly as assistant to the assistant. In reality he intended Vaughan to supersede Ortiz soon.

Fledderman flattered Ortiz, so that Vaughan took the position without exciting his suspicion. The natural result followed. Vaughan did the work; Ortiz loafed and strutted about, posing.

It was on account of this that Mulhall saw his pard in his first outburst of anger. Vainglorious from vermouth, with which he regaled himself and a native planter, Ortiz boasted of "my subordinate, Ricardo."

Mulhall heard the boast, and Vaughan chanced to happen along just in time to catch the remark.

For a moment Vaughan seemed to struggle with himself. Then he made a rush for the braggart.

"Thunder!" he jerked out, standing over the frightened, undersized assistant factor; "has it come to this, that I should be called *your* assistant? Assistant to such as you, and for people to believe it?"

Words failed him, and he stood raging over his cowering victim.

Ortiz understood English, and he could not mistake Vaughan's attitude. It was so full of menace that when he did manage to speak it was in a whimper.

"You misunderstood me, Señor Ricardo. You no un'erstan' ze Spanish," he said.

His explanation did not seem to affect Vaughan, who presently turned, and without further speech strode from the place.

"Better mind how you speak of your betters, young man," said Mulhall. "A man that ain't afraid of sharks would eat up a shrimp like you in no time. Call him *Mr.* Vaughan from now on, and when he's around step lightly as you would for a rattlesnake. Hear me!"

Ortiz heard and heeded. He hated Vaughan, and also he feared him.

It was not long before Fledderman discovered that Ortiz was holding back shipments of coffee for certain steamers, whose officers paid him well for his discrimination. Promptly he kicked Ortiz bodily from the place. Vaughan was given full charge; and not only did he discharge his duties faithfully, but he continued to fix up Mulhall's accounts as well.

Rumors of a revolution had reached the ears of the port dwellers from time to time. It chanced that the very relative of Ortiz who had been a member of the president's cabinet had his eye on the presidency itself. Furthermore, Secretary Ortiz was foolish enough to state that "El Presidente" had occupied the place long enough; that he was a pig in the way of office-holding. Indiscretion appeared to run in the Ortiz family.

Of course the chief executive heard of his minister's unguarded statement. Secretary Ortiz was but one day's mule journey over the mountains ahead of the government guard set out for his capture when he passed over the frontier. To those familiar with Central American politics, a revolution was the logical sequence.

Somehow it did not come off at the appointed time. The barefooted Mozos drafted from the Sierra fincas were allowed to return to their coffee-picking. The president bade fair to die in office without others disputing his right.

Owing to its nearness to the frontier, its vulnerable position, and the fact that it was a considerable port of entry, with rich pickings to invaders, Ocos had been a favorite scene for the curtain rise of one of the opera bouffe wars in the past. All expected the blow to fall there. Such a thing as fortifying a place merely to prevent its being occupied by opposing forces is not considered the correct thing in Central America.

With the rainy season past and Ocos still peaceful, Fledderman and Mulhall breathed more freely. They had lived through several revolutions, and knew of the discomfort, as well as danger, attached to one. Especially Fledderman was uneasy when the rumors were the thickest. He remembered Ortiz.

December at last arrived, but not the revolution. Planters who had been fearful of leaving the country in view of the possible uprising took steamers which would land them in San Francisco in ample time for the Christmas celebrations. Some waited until the last ship, and then left to sail clear through the Straits of Magellan for the far-off fatherland.

Fledderman had intended that his wife and the children should sail for Germany, to spend Christmas there. He himself could not go. But at the last moment, Mrs. Fledderman, good wife and mother that she was, could

not reconcile herself to leaving her husband, and refused to go. So certain had she been that she and the children would spend Christmas in Hamburg, she had dinned in the ears of the little ones the beauties of the Christmas tree that they would see at their grandparents' home. The two youngest, natives of the tropics, never had seen such a wonderful thing as a Christmas tree.

Frau Fledderman confided to Vaughan with tears in her eyes that she was not sorry she had backed out, only for one reason.

"I haf told de leetle ones so much about Kris Kringle, an' now I haf noding for dem. Not only will dey haf no tree, but noding!"

Vaughan sympathized with her deeply. Later, when the children were away, he confided something to Mrs. Fledderman which caused her to brighten visibly. The children saw Mrs. Fledderman make frequent trips to the hotel, and caught their mother and Vaughan in frequent whispered confabs. Mulhall was let into the secret, and grinned joyously.

"I guess if I keep on I'll be runnin' a Sunday-school, an' keepin' order with a six-shooter, Dick," he declared. Hank Mulhall liked children, too.

Four days before Christmas, when the spirit of the season already had seized hold of the foreigners, in spite of the blazing hot sun and the thermometer reading ninety at night, a body of horsemen rode into Ocos. Others followed, with *"Vivas!"* and cries of *"La Libertad."* The riders, who composed as villainous a looking set of cutthroats as ever were seen, of all nationalities, even rascally Europeans, tethered their horses in most unsoldiery fashion, and proceeded to loot the one store.

"Well, we are in for it now. To think that Ortiz was foxy enough to wait until everybody was forgetting, and then start in!" ejaculated Mulhall.

"What shall you do?" asked Vaughan.

"Not much," responded the consular agent grimly. "Not much, but I am going to lock up my hotel, and the first one gets a bite to eat or drink from my establishment has to step over my carcass to get it."

Ortiz, the great man himself, did not appear, and his absence was understood later on. He was reported as having "established his base" at the terminus of the railroad from Ocos.

Toward evening, Pancho Ortiz, the nephew, rode into town, and announced that he was the representative of General Ortiz, "the liberator."

"Well, we're in for it now," muttered Mulhall, as the smirking Ortiz passed by the consular agent, strutting and jingling his spurs in swashbuckler fashion. Ortiz quickened his pace when Mulhall nervously fingered his "badge of office," as he termed it—an army Colt. The nephew of the great liberator shot a wicked glance at Vaughan.

"Hotel closed, nothing doing," was the tenor of Mulhall's remarks, when Ortiz sent an emissary to inquire if he could not make his headquarters at the Mulhall caravansary.

Ortiz retaliated by taking possession of the Fledderman dwelling. But Mulhall's house was not so tightly closed that he could not find refuge there for the German and his family.

Fledderman swore at Ortiz under his breath with fierce, guttural oaths.

"Oh," Mulhall remarked, grinning, "that yellow-hided little varmint won't end with that!"

Presently, as both anticipated, some fierce-whiskered gentlemen waited upon Señors Mulhall and Fledderman. With exaggerated politeness, they explained the benefits that would result from the success of the cause of which General Ortiz was the prime spirit, not only to his fellow countrymen, but to foreigners especially. It was only suggested, of course, that each should contribute to the "glorious cause."

"Not one peso," Mulhall stated emphatically, in as good Spanish as he could muster.

Fledderman allowed him to do the talking.

Suggestions changed to demands,

coupled with threats. Mulhall grew impatient. Vaughan could only guess what was being said.

Suddenly the consular agent whipped out his revolver. The emissaries started back in terror. The American did not shoot, however. Pointing with the muzzle of the heavy Colt to the eagle above the consular office—in reality the *cantina*—he told the waiting men:

"There's the emblem of the greatest country on earth, which in my humble capacity I have the honor to represent. When the eagle pays tribute to the zopilote, señors, I'll be willing to forget my birthplace. I guess that's all." His teeth closed with a snap.

As the Central American zopilote is a bird of carrion resembling the buzzard, the insult struck deeply. A hurried whispered consultation ensued between the official blackmailers. Mulhall still held his revolver carelessly in his hand.

The spokesman of the party snarled out something about a pleasant surprise being in store for the señors, saluted stiffly, and withdrew.

"If I had only half a dozen cowpunchers, I'd take this here opportunity to annex this God-forsaken country to Uncle Sam," declared Mulhall.

"You vere right, you vere right, Heinrich," concurred Fledderman, with sudden enthusiasm. "Ve must stand togedder, American, English, an' Cherman. If only de vife an' de leetle ones had not stait!"

Official notice was served that the port was closed, by order of General Ortiz. Ocos was put under so-called martial law; it was ordered that no one should be allowed out of doors after a certain hour at night.

The bloodthirsty character of the revolutionists was shown when Breitbarth—as inoffensive a little German as ever left Bremerhaven to make a fortune for the home folks—was shot and killed. The only excuse was that he had disobeyed orders which forbade any one going on the pier.

Breitbarth was a subordinate of Vaughan's. When the Englishman knew that the victim had been murdered simply because he had ventured to secure some papers from the pier, Mulhall was treated to a second outburst of fury. Swearing terrible oaths that he would find out the murderer, and make him pay the penalty, Vaughan started for the door. It was all Mulhall could do to restrain him.

"Don't go, Dick," he entreated, holding Vaughan back by main force. "It won't do any good. Ortiz is layin' for you, an' if you take my advice, you'll keep under cover. No use havin' that sneakin' hound gloatin' over your carcass."

Vaughan declared he would find Ortiz and shoot him.

"The chances are that a dozen of these bandits have been ordered to plug you, Dick," the other declared coolly. "They know I can shoot, an' that I'm a bad man generally. Though they are only bandits, havin' nothin' to lose, ever since Uncle Sam licked Spain with one hand tied behind him, they have greater regard for us gringoes. Keep under the eagle's wings, an' you'll be all right!"

Vaughan finally cooled down sufficiently to see some wisdom in his friend's remarks.

"There's no tellin' how the cards are goin' to fall in these Central American republics, Dick," Mulhall explained. "Ortiz may get to be president. He don't want to start in havin' a quarrel with Uncle Sam."

The pleasant surprise was forthcoming next day. Dynamite was placed under the pier, the Fledderman house, and other dwellings and places of business.

Ortiz sent for Fledderman, who found the grinning little rascal reposing, boots and all, on the snowy cover of the *hausfrau's* best bed. The German's fingers worked convulsively; and Ortiz, noticing, laughed gleefully.

"You must not rail at the fortunes of war, señor," he stated. "I have pleasant news for you. Christmas is four days away. We friends of the people have no desire to make the day unhappy for the dwellers in Ocos. We shall

evacuate the town, under one condition, promptly at noon Christmas day."

"And the ultimatum?" demanded Fledderman.

It was that a large amount of money be handed Ortiz in person Christmas morning.

"Otherwise, every soul in Ocos will be considered as unfriendly to the revolution," he added.

"If it is not possible to raise this sum —what then?" asked Fleddderman bluntly.

"We shall dynamite the houses and the pier, and burn the rest of the town," was the reply. "If my uncle was here, no doubt he would not permit it," he continued craftily.

Now Fledderman understood why the head of the uprising had absented himself. Of course he could disclaim responsibility.

All of the German's desire for mediation torn to tatters, he rose and shook his fist in the tormentor's face. With impressive vehemence he swore he would not turn his hand to collect a penny. Furthermore, he described the awful vengeance that the kaiser would visit upon the whole country, if a single piece of property or a single hair of the head of any foreign resident of Ocos was harmed. His Teutonic placidity shaken from its foundation, he was like a mad bull. Ortiz only puffed his cigarette and laughed contemptuously. Fledderman rushed raging back to tell Mulhall.

"Ortiz is anxious to destroy the town; and he banked on the fact that we wouldn't put up," was the latter's comment.

"The cowardly dogs have broken all telegraphic communications with the outside. Gentlemen, there's but one chance. It's a mighty slim one, but anything is better than letting these devils win out. One of us has to run desperate risk."

Vaughan and Fledderman listened to him eagerly as he outlined his plan.

"No, no, you can't go, Fledderman," spoke up Mulhall firmly, in answer to the German's offer; and Vaughan broke in quickly: "I'm the one to volunteer. Fledderman has the wife and children to look after. You, as the consular agent, Hank, must stay to protect lives and property as far as possible."

In vain Mulhall protested.

Finally Vaughan argued so well that Mulhall was forced to admit his right.

"But you can't go alone," pleaded the American, using his last defense. "One would lose where two might do the trick."

"I'll take Ernesto with me," Vaughan stated.

Mulhall snorted at the idea.

"You'll see how quick he'll forget his gratitude when he's told what'll be required of him," he scoffed. "I don't believe he should be let into the secret."

"I differ with you," was Vaughan's firm retort; "and I'm going to prove you're wrong."

Ernesto listened to the hazardous plain detailed to him, and when he understood fully, he drew himself up proudly.

"I go with the señor, to life or death," he declared, his eyes flashing. "If one has to die, it shall be me."

"Spoken like a white man," Mulhall fairly yelled with delight. "For once I was wrong. Let's make arrangements, boys. It's seven o'clock now, and the start will have to be about midnight."

Ocos was quiet on this night before Christmas eve except for sounds of merrymaking in the Fledderman residence, where lights gleamed. Ortiz and his fellows were imitating Nero's action prematurely.

At ten o'clock a fog, suffocating and thick almost as wool, drifted in from the Pacific, and the watchers' hearts were gladdened. Through the gloom came muffled cries of sentinels.

The consular agency was located not more than two hundred feet away from the little river which at Ocos emptied into the ocean. On the bank of this, straight away from Mulhall's, was the shed in which was kept the motor-boat used by a party of wealthy planters for hunting expeditions in the bayous and

lagoons some distance up the river. The launch was in Mulhall's charge, and he understood its mechanism fully.

Toward this boat-house four figures stole through the fog after eleven o'clock. One was in advance, and when the other three had traversed half the distance to the river, through the fog blanket, the leading figure stopped and raised a hand in warning. The trio halted, and presently they heard the challenge: *"Quien vive?"*

Indistinctly Mulhall, Vaughan, and Fledderman saw Ernesto leap at the sentry with the swiftness of a cat, the two fall together. When they had hurried to his aid, their ally had the life half-squeezed out of his captive.

A pistol in the hand of Mulhall covered the prisoner's head, and the sentry marched along with the understanding that he should give the watchword if challenged, or have the alternative of his brains being blown out by the American.

Fledderman and Ernesto stood outside the building, guarding the captive in case of emergency. Inside Mulhall and Vaughan made ready the boat.

Everything was arranged without disturbance. A whispered word outside brought Fledderman. Silently they slid the boat into the water. At the last moment Ernesto stepped in with Vaughan.

Mulhall slipped into Vaughan's hand a paper bearing the seal of the agency.

"Lay low passing the pier," he advised.

Fledderman muttered the German equivalent of "God speed."

"Adios, you two!" said Vaughan heartily. "I'm going to try to bring Christmas to the children, and to Ocos."

The boat was shoved off into the stream. Something flashed out, the screw began to revolve, and the launch slipped away into the darkness.

Vaughan sat at the wheel, his eyes peering through the gloom at the dark shape of the pier, near which they must pass.

Two hundred yards more, and they would be out of danger. Ernesto, crouching by the Englishman's side, held his breath.

Half the distance had been covered when a shrill hail came from the pier. One sentinel at least had caught the pulsations of the motor. A headlight flashed over the water, and presently it rested full on the launch and its occupants. Men were shouting orders in Spanish, asking excitedly as to the identity of the boat and its passengers.

Vaughan whispered to the native to throw himself flat on the bottom, he himself crouching as close to the sides as it was possible to do and yet grasp the wheel.

As the launch reached midway the length of the pier, the hails grew more insistent; were emphasized by the crack of a musket. Still they kept on their way. Four or five rods more of headway and the flash of guns blazed out from the darkness of the pier. Vaughan felt a sharp pain shoot through the left shoulder, which was exposed above the bulwarks.

"Is it well with you, Ernesto?" he asked in Spanish. For answer the native leaped to his feet in the launch, standing boldly erect, and shouting taunts and words of defiance at the guard on the pier. One more shot was fired, but the bullet whistled harmlessly overhead.

The Englishman knew by the roll of the boat in the heavy ground-swell of the Pacific that they were safe from one peril. The nose of the launch was pointed down the coast. He ordered his companion to light their one lantern. By it he saw that a bullet had gone through the fleshy part of the shoulder.

To Ernesto's startled exclamation he said that it was nothing.

"That won't keep us from getting to San José as quickly as possible," he declared, as, holding the wheel tight with one free hand, he allowed Ernesto to bind up the wound.

In the harbor of San José, their destination, Vaughan expected to find a foreign cruiser which would deliver Ocos from the hands of a relentless enemy.

Through the remainder of the cloudy, moist night the motor-launch plodded, avoiding sand-bars and other possible agents of destruction seemingly as if by miracle. Out of the East the sun popped suddenly, a big red globe. Soon it beat upon them fiercely, and they were many miles from San José. Through the heat, which seemed to scorch their very bones, the drawn-faced white man and the silent native watched the shore-line slip by with painful monotony.

The *Sea Bird* was a well-made, stanch little craft, that did not fail them.

Scarcely had the United States gunboat *Richmond*—having sailed from Panama in view of possible uprising in this republic—sunk her "mud hooks" outside of San José, than the lookout reported a motor-launch approaching.

Soon it panted up alongside. Officers and crew looking over the side saw a tall man standing feebly, asking to be taken aboard.

"I have news of greatest importance for the commanding officer," he said.

It happened that Captain Vilas, of the *Richmond,* at that particular moment was chatting with Montufar, *comandante* of the port, who had just come aboard.

"Send him in," was the curt order, and Vaughan tottered into the cabin.

"Ocos is in the hands of rebels who threaten to destroy the town to-morrow, Christmas day, sir," said Vaughan, without preamble.

Vilas looked keenly at him, and turned to the *comandante.*

"Why, how is this, Montufar?" he demanded. "You tell me everything is quiet, and Ocos is now in the hands of the revolutionists."

"Impossible! We have had no advices to that effect. It's true telegraphic communication has been interrupted for several days," he added doubtfully.

"I have here a paper from the consular agent," said Vaughan, and handed it over. The naval officer scanned it.

"That settles it," he declared. "It is signed by 'Mulhall, United States Consular Agent.' How did you get here, my man?"

Vaughan gave him the story. The captain's exclamation was a forceful one, but it expressed admiration. He glanced with added interest at the Englishman.

"You're a plucky fellow," he said finally. "May I inquire your name?"

Vaughan told him, and for a moment the naval man looked puzzled.

"Vaughan?" he repeated questioningly. "Richard Vaughan?"

The Englishman nodded.

"Mr. Vaughan, I happen to know that the British consul at Panama is hunting for you. He is acting in the interest of a Miss Westlake and her brother. By a strange coincidence they are sailing on the Pacific mail steamer *Acapulco,* due here, I believe, this afternoon. *Señor Comandante,* we shall start for Ocos in order to reach there early to-morrow morning. Mr. Vaughan, have a chair, and I shall send for refreshments. Then no doubt you can tell me——"

A sudden exclamation from the *comandante* caused Captain Vilas to look up. He was in time to catch Vaughan as he tumbled headlong in a dead faint. Both men helped him to a couch.

"Poor fellow! The man's wounded. Why didn't he tell me?" exclaimed the warm-hearted officer. "Here, orderly, tell the surgeon to report in my cabin immediately to dress a gunshot wound. Also see that the native in the launch has food and drink."

Vaughan was too "gritty" to allow himself to linger long in the "sick bay," and when he knew that the girl of whom he had dreamed, and for whose sake he had taken the burden of guilt which should have been borne by her dishonest father was coming he could not remain quiet. Even the surgeon deemed it best not to restrain him.

The *Acapulco* arrived on time. Kind-hearted officers of both ships, who had put parts of their story together, arranged it so that Vaughan and Miss Westlake were alone at their meeting on the *Acapulco.*

It was "Richard!" and "Amy!" and nothing else at first. Then he allowed her to do the talking. Little by little she told him how the father, manager of the big English estate, of which Vaughan was assistant manager, had confessed on his death-bed that he, not the exile, was guilty of the misappropriation of thousands of pounds.

"And it was for my sake alone you took the burden!" she exclaimed, with glowing eyes. "I knew you were not guilty, and that somehow all would come right," she said. "We traced you to Panama, and there lost the trail."

Vaughan told her of Ocos. He did not tell her the strange circumstances of his advent there; that at Panama he had signed on a sailing ship bound north; that growing weary of life, unable to stand it longer, he had thrown himself overboard off Champerico one night. Sudden desire to live had caused him to swim ashore. Once safely landed, he had wandered into Ocos.

It was the wish of Captain Vilas for further information which separated the two after their first meeting.

"I suppose you would not care to go back with me to-night, under the circumstances?" inquired the bluff old commander.

"If you would give me passage, I should be glad to go back. There is a Christmas tree for some children I should like to have a hand in to-morrow, sir," he said.

Miss Westlake remained on the *Acapulco*. It was arranged that she should go to Ocos on that ship a day or so later, and be married to Vaughan by the *Richmond's* chaplain.

Mulhall, consular agent, having passed a sleepless night with Fledderman, in the early morning light saw a smudge of smoke to the south. It grew into a war-ship flying the stars and stripes. With a yell, the American, flinging prudence to the wind, rushed out to the pier, waving frantic welcome as the *Richmond* steamed outside and anchored broadside to the town.

So busy were they, and so anxious to escape with whole skins, not one of the army of "brave revolutionists" paid him the slightest attention. No sooner had Ortiz and the rest ascertained the truth, than there was a wild scamper from the town.

Bluejackets were landed. Mulhall was there to welcome them; and at the sight of a husky "jackie" he gave vent to a cry, and stood as if transfixed. The officers in charge gazed at him curiously.

"Hardrick! I thought I had killed you!" gasped Mulhall. "I thought I had plugged you for keeps!"

"It took more than that to kill me, Hank," responded the "jackie," grinning. "I don't bear you no ill will."

That was how Christmas came to Henry Mulhall, who had fled from his home thinking he had murdered his friend in a jealous quarrel over a girl.

"She was still single when I heard last, an' they do say she's true to you, Hank," was Hardrick's declaration. The two men had a Christmas celebration of their own.

The Fledderman children had their share of enjoyment in the "property" Christmas tree, with its adornments, secured by Vaughan from a German ship weeks before. It did not matter that the temperature in the consular agent's dining-room was about a hundred degrees Fahrenheit from the tapers.

After it was all over, Mulhall and Vaughan strolled out on the pier, and stood gazing at the *Richmond* with its lights gleaming over the water.

"Amy will be here to-morrow or next day," Vaughan said, as if more to himself than his companion. "'Peace on earth, good-will to men.'"

"An' that goes, Dick," declared Mulhall huskily. "It goes even regardin' that varmint Ortiz and his gang. If they hadn't started the rumpus, you and I wouldn't have felt as much like celebratin' as we do now. I'm goin' home, too."

It was not much like Christmas night in Ocos, judged from the temperature and surroundings. But the Christmas spirit prevailed even there.

Strange Cases of a Medical Free-lance

By W. B. M. Ferguson

Author of "Garrison's Finish," "A Night With Lisping Jimmie," Etc.

A critic who read this series in MS. said: "It will make a sensation." We do not want to be charged with sensationalism, but we do want to interest the readers of "The Popular." In this respect this series will more than fulfil its mission. No man comes into closer touch with the life of the community than the family physician, and in consequence his diary is a thing of very great interest; but no physician's diary was ever so absorbing as that of Dr. Tiberius W. Tinkle, some of whose strange cases are graphically narrated by Mr. Ferguson.

I.—THE CASE OF THE ATAVISTIC PATIENT

(*A Complete Story*)

BEFORE I set out to narrate the following strange experiences, I think it is first in order to give a brief account of how I came to know the Medical Free-lance whose eccentric personality is the theme of these memoirs.

It all came about through the very prosaic method of advertising in a morning newspaper for a congenial professional gentleman to share the expenses of an extremely desirable suite of rooms in one of New York's bachelor hotel apartments. I desired congenial companionship more than any financial help, for at that time I was a newly fledged lawyer with more yellow than gray matter. My parents were dead; I had no friends that I really cared for in the city. I had an independent fortune, and no very insistent ambition. Not being in want or love, I could afford to wait for an exclusive clientele. But I required the presence of a pushing, optimistic young member of one of the professions to stimulate my flaccid ambition; one who by his example would raise me to that high pinnacle of worthy achievement I had only so far reached in my day-dreams. My profession was only the mask that hid the crime that I did no work, that I was a cumberer of the earth, and that there was really no valid reason why I should go on living. I benefited no one—except, perhaps, the voracious hall-boys and my landlord. As the first step to a cure is a knowledge of your ailment, so was my advertisement a mute appreciation of my mental and physical stagnation.

The Medical Free-lance, as I afterward came to call him, arrived with my first batch of replies. It was characteristic that he answered in person. His name was Tiberius W. Tinkle, and his card bore a complete selection of the alphabet that, to read, sounded like the keyboard of a typewriter pronounced all together. He was M. A. and B. E. and M. D.—everything. But his appearance even surpassed his card in individuality. He was over six feet, and his presence of length and absence of width were startling.

Subsequently I was more startled to discover that he only looked thin, and

that his strength was great; of that wiry, untiring variety which is most difficult to successfully cope with. His face was wonderfully long and melancholy, and he was dressed in a frock coat, white gloves, and the usual conventional four o'clock garb. In fact, Tiberius W. Tinkle forcibly reminded me of a pall-bearer climbing out of a long, black chimney. But that was before I knew him. Ten minutes' conversation sufficed to convince me that I had discovered one of the most eccentric, brilliant, and lovable men on earth.

I am somewhat chary in friendships, but it was not very long before I had given all my esteem, which in time almost amounted to worship, to the eccentric doctor with the melancholy face. For he was a man that grew on one: guiltless of self-consciousness, of any attitude or pose; modest, cool, self-reliant, steadied by that fine faith in himself which to lack is a weakness. His greeting was as unconventional as his appearance.

"Man," he said curtly, solemnly shaking me by the hand. "Man, I'll give you just one year to live. Just one year."

"What!" I cried, aghast.

"Just one year," he repeated. "Unless you give up this life. You're corroded with laziness and selfishness. Your eye says that. The eye never lies as regards health. Of course you've a great appetite? I thought so. Incipient Bright's disease. Too much albumen. You want to hit the fresh air. Toil, labor in the vineyard. Interest yourself in something outside yourself. You'll be all right, for your constitution is first class."

I was somewhat taken aback at this gratuitous diagnosis, but it was impossible to be offended at my strange visitor. There was a great friendliness in his somber gray eyes, and, besides, I knew he had spoken the truth. Only that morning my physician, in more discreet words, had given me the same warning.

"Nice place," continued the doctor before I could reply. He was critically scanning the room. "Do you know, Mr. Boyd," he added frankly, "I like you? I think we'll get on capitally together. I have many foibles and eccentricities, but you look as if your fund of good nature could stand the strain. I hope you'll like me. Perhaps you may have recognized already that I am a very lonely individual, as in fact I am. I have never found the congenial companionship I have always longed for. No doubt I am difficult to get along with."

"I am sure we'll be the best of friends," I said. The mournful look in his somber eyes had touched me.

"Indeed, I echo your wish," he said, brightening up. "I'll send over my truck right away. I know you'll like Mary Jane. Excellent creature, and most beautiful."

"Eh?" I exclaimed, aghast. "Why—er—surely you are not married——"

"Merely my companion," said Tinkle.

"But——" I began, in dismay.

"Parrot, you know," he explained, watching me anxiously. "You'll like her, Mr. Boyd. Most accomplished linguist, I assure you. Swears in seven different languages. She's known me since I was a baby, and I cannot part with her."

"I like parrots," I said, and my fiction was at once rewarded by the look of relief on Tinkle's face.

"Some people don't like Mary Jane," he said reflectively. "I don't know why. But I am so glad you do. That is the main point. Oh, by the way," he added suddenly, fishing in his coat-tails—"have an apple? Do. I always carry two or three. Most beneficial, I assure you. Cure for every ill."

Not wishing to offend, I accepted, and my strange potential companion and I were soon discussing two huge greenings and our future relationship. To me it was time most profitably spent. The minutes sped uncounted, for I had never listened to a more brilliant conversationalist than Tiberius W. Tinkle.

It seemed that he was independently wealthy, like myself, but where I had been a mere spectator of life's play, he had filled every human rôle on the stage. He was subject to nervous, rest-

less fits of energy. He seldom made use of his vast bank-account, but preferred to earn his daily bread and by the most inconceivable means. He had no regular practise, though a prize student of the foremost medical colleges and a member of many medical and medico-legal societies.

He had dug for diamonds in Africa, herded sheep in Australia, punched cows in Texas, headed an expedition to the elusive north pole, "barked" at countless fairs, washed dishes, laid bricks, had been author, actor—everything. Into his thirty-five years he had crowded every experience known to man. And he even knew the underworld and the level of the sodden as I knew the palm of my hand. And, withal, he was an optimist; one who believed in the Golden Rule; one who was twin brother to every human, however low.

Such was my future companion. What I have set down I only came to know by degrees, for modesty was the least of Tinkle's many attributes. Before leaving to send over his "truck," he displayed one more characteristic.

"Are you a lover of music?" he whispered anxiously.

"Yes," I replied. "I am passionately fond of it."

"Then I will give you a great treat," said my new-found friend solemnly. He reached into an inside pocket and brought forth a small flute. He regarded it affectionately. "I always carry it with me. Music is the soul of life. I seldom play for other than myself, but when I meet a true lover of music my heart goes out in sympathy and I cannot deny my genius. The dulcet tones of the flute are peculiarly appealing. I will play, with your permission, my favorite piece—Raff's 'Cavatina.'"

I waited expectantly while he placed the flute lovingly to his lips and closed his great, melancholy eyes. And then ensued the most villainous noises I ever heard. Weird, unearthly shrieks and discordant, slushed gutturals all hopelessly off the key. I had never heard the "Cavatina" so completely butchered. But I listened in silence, for the sublime look of rapture on Tinkle's face was heavenly.

That evening saw my new friend, the doctor, Mary Jane, the linguistic parrot, and a colossal assortment of "truck" and eccentricities under my roof. It was not very long before I was carried completely out of my narrow rut of indolence and egoism. And now I come to the first of our strange experiences which I have named "The Case of the Atavistic Patient."

Doctor Tinkle had been absent for a few days when one night he walked in, and, after a preliminary villainous travesty on the inseparable flute, drew a chair to the table where I was reading and commenced munching apples in silence. By this time I had grown accustomed to my peculiar friend's absences, and had ceased to wonder what new experience he was indulging in, knowing that sooner or later he would relate it to me.

"The life of a butler is most exhilarating," he announced, at length. "Gives a remarkable insight into human nature and the charmed, domestic circle. Ever been a butler, Boyd? What a treat you have missed! This is my first night off, and instead of walking out with the up-stairs maid, as I solemnly promised, I ran over here to see how you and Mary Jane were bearing up under my absence."

I had learned that Tiberius was incorrigible, so I manifested no surprise at his sudden menial fancy.

"Why a butler?" I asked idly. "Why not a coachman or gardener?"

"Well," said Tinkle reflectively, "you see I've been both coachman and gardener. Butlering is a new experience. I really had a most passionate desire to ascertain how Jeams conducted himself on the wrong side of the curtain. Of course, there were other inducements, but that was the primary one."

"And the 'other inducements'?" I persisted.

"I saw this advertisement among others in the paper," explained my friend. "I went to this house first. As I was nearing it, a carriage drove up,

and a fat man and a young thin man ascended the steps. The young man had his arm in a sling, and he seemed very weak and in a dazed condition. I had a good look at him, and—I am interested in that young man."

"I see," I said. "Professional interest, eh?"

"Exactly," said Tinkle, with a smile. "That young man was a patient out for the air, and the fat man is his doctor. Most remarkable couple," he added reflectively, putting his feet comfortably on the mantelpiece. "I am glad I applied at that house first. I think there will be some remarkable developments. My master, the young man, is a peculiar specimen. His name is Trefusis, and he lives on Madison Avenue."

"Why, I knew a Trefusis—Richard K.—at Harvard!" I exclaimed. "The name is uncommon. I wonder can he be the same."

"Just the same," said Tinkle, "Richard K., from Harvard. He is very wealthy, and somewhat peculiar in the upper floor."

"Exactly," I agreed. "We called him 'Dippy Dick.' As I remember, he was always a martyr to gloomy spells. What's wrong with him now?"

Tinkle scratched his large nose with an eloquent forefinger.

"Doctor Chadband, his family physician, says he is suffering from militant decomposition of *e pluribus unum*," said Tinkle solemnly.

"Be serious! I'm listening," I said. I saw that my friend had something to tell.

"Well, it's like this," he began, throwing the core of his apple at Mary Jane, who dodged with practised dexterity, and then swore in liquid French. "This Trefusis is the last of his line. He is a peculiar character. I call him the 'atavistic patient.' It seems that his grandfather, who founded the family wealth in the Alaskan gold-fields, paid for his fortune with his life. When he struck pay-dirt it was in some God-forsaken hole a million miles from nowhere, and he got frozen in, his provisions gave out, and, when his party subsequently found him, he had starved to death. And the ghastly part was that his mad hunger and privation had driven him insane, and he had reverted to cannibalistic first principles. They found that he had eaten away his own right arm."

I made an exclamation of disbelief. "But how does this affect his grandson?"

"You know what atavism is?" asked Tinkle slowly. "You know that it is the manifestation of some hereditary trait or characteristic. It may skip one generation and appear in the next. It may skip many generations—but it ultimately appears."

"And do you mean to sit there and tell me that Trefusis——"

Tinkle nodded, as I hesitated to put thoughts in words. "His grandfather's remarkable trait preyed upon his mind," he said. "It grew to be a mania with him. He thought he would be the atavistic victim, for it had skipped his father. You see, his grandfather had married——"

"Of course *before* his experience," I said triumphantly. "How, then, could it affect his offspring?"

"Doctor Chadband says he brought it on by concentrating upon it," said Tinkle calmly. "Such things are common. At any rate young Trefusis has a festering wound on his right arm the size of a dollar. His attempts at self-mastication come in spasms. He is more than partly insane, and is rapidly growing worse."

"That is horrible!" I exclaimed. "And one's own classmate, too! Can nothing be done?"

"Doctor Chadband is greatly exercised," said my friend. "He sleeps in the house. He is with Trefusis constantly. When he thinks the cannibalistic mania is about due he straps his patient to the bed. The spasms always occur at night. But they are very difficult to time correctly, and since I have been there, Trefusis has succeeded in enlarging the wound on his arm."

"Why don't they cover his arm in some way?"

"What would be the use?" said Tinkle. "Doctor Chadband can't keep him

entirely armored. If it wasn't his arm it would be his hands or feet. Besides, the damage has been done already. When Trefusis came to, after his initial spasm, and saw the wound on his arm, he almost went violently insane. He has since calmed down somewhat, but another one will finish him. His heart's affected."

"And what do you think of the case?" I asked slowly.

"I'm only a butler," said Tinkle solemnly. "But I have found occasion to examine the wound. It is undoubtedly caused by teeth. No one occupies the room but Trefusis, for Doctor Chadband says he resents any one's continued presence."

"There's something you're hiding," I said at length, watching my friend's face.

Tiberius arose and commenced to exchange bad words with Mary Jane. "No, I'm a pure and innocent little child of nature," he answered finally. "But the rôle of butler is very interesting. O learned one, suppose you resuscitate the alma-mater friendship with Trefusis? I serve excellent four o'clock tea—and dénouements."

"I'll come to-morrow," I cried impulsively.

"My precious boy," said Tinkle approvingly, reaching for his coat, "I know you'll enjoy yourself. I must hie me to the back stairs and the fair kitchen wenches. By the way, don't forget that my name's Billings—Flavius Petronius Billings. Fare thee, fare thee."

The following afternoon Tinkle, in regular butler costume and mien, ushered me into the reception-room of my former classmate's house.

Doctor Chadband, the family physician, received me. "I don't know whether my patient will recognize you, Mr. Boyd, though he is very normal to-day," he said, as I explained my visit. "A very sad case indeed; very sad." And the doctor struck an attitude and scratched his bald head. He was large and oppressive-looking, with a profound mien and very fat cheeks. We talked at some length, and I learned that he had known Trefusis intimately for many years. Finally the doctor arose and led the way to his patient's room on the second floor.

"I can only promise you a very brief interview," was his parting caution.

He followed me into the room. Dick Trefusis lay in an invalid's chair by the window, his arm in a sling. He had not altered materially since I had last seen him on Soldier's Field playing end on the scrub-team. But the expression in his eyes haunted me. Wild, unnamed fear glared from them, and would not be denied. His face was drawn and haggard. I must have happened in at an extremely lucid interval, for he recognized me without much apparent effort.

"Jack—old man," he said feebly, stretching up a hand that was feverishly hot and trembling.

"Mr. Trefusis must not excite himself," warned Doctor Chadband sternly. "By the way," he added, glancing at me, "how did you happen to know your former classmate lived so near you?"

"Merely by accident," I replied evasively.

"Better late than never," said Trefusis, with a sickly laugh. "I'm glad to see you. Sit down and let us talk over old times, if only for a moment." I noticed that his haunted eyes kept following the doctor as the latter fussed about the room.

I talked to Trefusis easily and lightly, as if we were back in the old alma-mater days, concealing from him my knowledge of his pitiful condition. He responded in a listless and indifferent way that grew more pronounced every minute. Finally he turned to Doctor Chadband.

"Doctor, will you get me that book you were reading to me last night? You took it to your room."

The doctor hesitated for a moment. "Very well," he said at length. "Yes, you have talked enough. Excitement is very injurious. I am sure Mr. Boyd will understand that."

As he left the room, I prepared to follow suit at his palpable hint. And then, in a flash, Trefusis' indifference

and lassitude fell from him, and he seized me convulsively by the wrist.

"Save me! Save me!" he cried hoarsely, glancing fearfully at the door. "I'm going mad—mad—mad! Save me, Jack—old man! For old time's sake!" He panted in his terror. "Heaven above! Cannibalism! And those horrible eyes! The eyes, Jack, the eyes! Take them away! Oh, God, pity me! The eyes, the eyes!"

He buried his face in his hands, and then, as the doctor's majestic tread was heard in the corridor, with a great effort he straightened up in the chair and assumed his former languid indifference. But that horrible glare of supreme fear was still smoldering in his eyes.

I was trembling at this sudden and dramatic episode. At first I thought one of the fearsome spasms had come on, and that Trefusis' exclamations were the ravings of a disordered brain. But why should he have acted as he had? Why assume the pose he had? For it *was* a pose. Plainly, he had not desired the book, for now he did not even glance at it.

A vague, nameless thrill crept over me, and I recollected Tinkle's mysterious attitude of the previous evening. And Tinkle was a man whose cleverness I had come to worship.

A sudden resolution came to me. I would not leave this house until I had solved the mystery—if mystery there were. Trefusis' wild, piteous cry for help had roused every fighting drop of blood I possessed. Despite all accounts, I could not believe him as insane as had been affirmed.

"I am afraid Mr. Trefusis has been unduly excited," said Doctor Chadband, glancing at me. "You know, Mr. Boyd, I have heretofore excluded all visitors, but gave in this time to your pressing demands in the name of friendship. You will understand that I must exclude all interviews of a similar nature in the future."

"Mr. Trefusis has just extended to me an invitation to stay with him for a few days," I said calmly. "I have accepted."

I felt, rather than saw, the gleam of hope that came to my former classmate's eyes at this unvarnished lie.

"Yes, Mr. Boyd has very kindly accepted," corroborated Trefusis languidly.

"Indeed?" said Doctor Chadband suavely. "Just as you wish. Mr. Boyd, however, will understand that he can only see you at stated intervals and but for a brief period. I have charge of this case, and those are my imperative commands. Otherwise, I will not stand responsible for the consequences."

Trefusis waved his hand wearily.

"I think the preparing of Mr. Boyd's room would be more to the point. This discussion is quite unnecessary. No one desires to run counter to your wishes, doctor." Whether it was due to my presence or not, I cannot say, but Trefusis seemed to be slowly regaining his self-assertion.

"Billings will see to that," said the fat doctor blandly. "Ah! here he is, now."

My friend the butler had appeared at the door with a small jug of milk and a glass. "Tea is served in the library, sir," he announced solemnly, handing the milk to the doctor.

The tea was evidently intended for me, and I went down-stairs to the library on Doctor Chadband saying that the hour had come when his patient usually slept. I saw the doctor enter his own room, which was on the same floor as Trefusis.

Tiberius W. Tinkle, with practised ease, waited upon me in the great, old-fashioned library.

"Sugar, sir?" he asked, with true butlerlike frigidity.

"If you please—the dénouements, as you promised," I replied.

"What do you think of our atavistic patient?" he asked.

"That he's not so hopelessly insane as they say," I returned. "He seemed quite rational, and was rapidly growing more so."

"Naturally," said Tinkle dryly. "The effects are wearing off."

"What do you mean?"

"Did you notice anything peculiar

about your friend's wrists?" he parried. "Are you a close observer?"

"Nothing, except their extreme emaciation," I replied slowly.

"Too bad," murmured Tiberius depreciatingly. "When will people learn to use their eyes? Didn't you notice the minute little punctures—the bite of the hypodermic needle?"

"You mean that Trefusis is a morphin fiend?" I asked, in amazement.

Tinkle, with most unbutlerlike procedure, hoisted himself into the middle of the fine damask linen table-cloth, and nursed a long leg. "Little one, I mean a whole lot," he said, eying me solemnly. He chose his words carefully. "I mean that Chadband desires some one to kick him—and I'll oblige him. The doctor, my friend, is a very fat villain. He has remarkable influence over Trefusis; an influence which he exerts and holds by drugs. Trefusis is doped. I knew that the minute I saw him. It's the doctor who has carefully instilled this horror of the atavistic reversion to type. He has fostered it; inoculating Trefusis with the ghastly idea until it has become a mania with him. He is gradually but surely making Trefusis drive himself to the madhouse and thence to the grave. Perhaps the first will *come* first, for, as I say, Trefusis' heart is affected. It is a safe way to evade the law. We arrived just in time."

"But why this—this horrible murder?" I asked disbelievingly. "Are you sure you're not making some horrible mistake?"

"And you a lawyer!" said Tinkle, eying me gloomily. "I hadn't been here five minutes before I learned that our fat friend will come into Trefusis' entire property. What have we our five senses for if not to discover things? And the kitchen is the cabinet room of every house. Yes, I learned many things. Doctor Chadband is an old friend of Trefusis, and had his entire confidence. I use the past tense because Trefusis is becoming slowly aware that things are not quite straight. The secretly administered drugs keep him in subjection, however. And then there's that horrible atavistic trait. He is a mental and physical wreck. Years ago, before there was any doubt of Trefusis' mental normality, and when Doctor Chadband was his mentor, Trefusis, having no relatives, made the doctor his beneficiary in his will. A great mistake, little one. Trefusis' case is simply an example of temptation given in to. The doctor is trying to short-circuit time, and with as little danger to self as possible. He has very nearly succeeded."

"But the means?" I cried. "Atavism or not, concentration or not, drugs or not, I cannot believe that a man eats himself——"

"Wouldst controvert our learned friend's opinion?" said Tinkle. "And have we not the evidence before our eyes?"

"And still I doubt it," I returned stubbornly.

Doctor Tinkle laughed. "Doctor Chadband has a jug of milk brought up to him every day. No, it's not for Trefusis. The doctor is very fond of milk. Does that fact serve to confirm your doubts? No? Well, does this?" He produced a small vial and handed it to me. It was filled with a colorless liquid, which had a peculiar haunting odor. "The doctor left that in Trefusis' room one day, and I annexed it," said Tinkle. "I can't get into Chadband's room. The door is always locked, and he never leaves the house."

I handed back the vial, shaking my head.

"It's valerian," said Tinkle. "I have detected a slight odor of it on Trefusis' person. Don't you know its properties?"

"Yes, I know it is much used as an antispasmodic. It allays spasms or convulsions. There is no harm in that."

"It has other properties," said Tinkle mysteriously. "I won't tell you yet. The dénouement comes to-night. I think Trefusis' third cannibalistic spasm is about due—the one that will finish him. Our fat friend cannot afford to wait longer. Your presence in the house has made him uncomfortable. I think it will come off to-night when we

are asleep. I was too late for the last one, and, anyway, I hadn't confirmed my suspicions. The finding of the valerian did that. I will put a discreet amount of chloral in our friend's wine to-night; that will enable us to secrete ourselves in Trefusis' room unnoticed. Then we can view the full working of the charm."

"Of course I don't know what you're driving at," I said, "but I'll do as you say. I'm willing to go on in the dark, if there's light ahead. By the way, have you heard Trefusis' weird ramblings about 'the eyes, the eyes'? What does it mean?"

"Perhaps you'll see to-night," said Tinkle, jumping from the table as Doctor Chadband's heavy tread was heard in the upper corridor.

I did not see Trefusis again that evening. Doctor Chadband said that his patient was sleeping.

That night, or, rather, early the following morning, Tinkle tapped at my door and bade me follow him. In silence we crept down-stairs and into Trefusis' dimly lit room. Somewhere in the house a clock chimed the hour of one. On entering my former classmate's room, the door of which was half-open, I could not repress a startled exclamation of dismay. Trefusis was strapped to the bed, his emaciated right arm bare to the shoulder, devoid of all iodoform, gauze, or bandages of any kind. In the half-lights the wound on the soft inner flesh of his forearm showed up a dull, angry red. There was an odor in the room that haunted me. At first I could not name it. Then I remembered. It was that of the valerian Tinkle had shown me the previous evening. Trefusis feverishly tossed his head at intervals, muttering incoherently. The straps would not permit him to move hand or foot.

"What does it mean?" I whispered breathlessly as Tinkle motioned me behind a large screen that stood near the head of the bed.

"Simply that Doctor Chadband has made the usual preparations to safeguard his patient from the impending spasm."

"But the wound—his uncovered arm?" I whispered tensely.

For reply, Tinkle drew a small-caliber revolver from his pocket.

"Surely you know," he said, at length, sarcastically. "We don't have very long to wait. I expect the doctor has about surmounted the chloral by now." Nor would he say anything further.

We crouched in silence behind the screen in the dimly lit room, and the minutes seemed to drag along. All was silence save for an occasional feverish incoherent murmur from Trefusis. I was strung to a highly nervous tension, expecting I did not know what, nerved against the greatest contingency. On the other hand, Tinkle was as gloomily composed as ever.

Perhaps half an hour, though it seemed immeasurably longer, passed, and then my nerves were brought to the jangling-point by hearing a door at the end of the corridor open softly. Then came silence. Tinkle had gathered himself together. His eyes were riveted on the half-open door, and my own followed his in unconscious fascination. I expected to see Doctor Chadband enter. Finally there came the faintest of noises from the corridor—a soft *pad, pad.* I braced myself. And then what happened next came so unexpectedly, so swiftly, so gruesomely, that I caught a startled scream on my lips.

My eyes were on the door when, in a flash, something shot into the room and with one bound was on the bed and mouthing in a frenzy at Trefusis' arm. It was a huge yellow cat—a venomous creature with bristling fur and wicked green eyes. I saw Trefusis turn his head impotently, raving incoherently the while. His eyes were open, unheeding, staring straight into the huge cat's face. On the whole, it was a picture I never wish to see again.

I stood transfixed with horror. Then the light flashed down Tinkle's revolver. There came a sharp crack; and the huge cat, with a venomous spit, sprang high, its legs splayed at right angles, stiff and unnatural; then down it thudded, a dead weight, on the bed,

with a bullet drilled through the left ear.

Just then, Doctor Chadband, fully dressed, a huge canvas bag in his hand, stood transfixed on the threshold. The next second and Tiberius W. Tinkle had lit upon him like a whirlwind.

I could not follow the ensuing fight, or, rather, massacre. It was nothing but one continuous thud, thud, thud, as my friend unmercifully walloped the fat doctor up and down the corridor, and finally kicked him down the full length of stairs, where he lay almost beaten to a pulp. It was the kind of summary justice that just suited the fiendish nature of the crime.

"Nothing like a little brisk manhandling for brutes of that stamp," said Tinkle with satisfaction, flinging the dead cat into the bag the doctor had held. "It appeals peculiarly to every human. How is Trefusis? Glad he is not fully conscious. He'll come round all right. You see how the game was worked? The doctor had that beast locked up in his room. The milk was for it; and I dare say he fed it raw meat at intervals without our knowledge. As you may know, valerian has a peculiar and powerful influence on cats. The smell of it puts them in a frenzy. They will follow its scent, no matter how long or difficult the trail may be. Our fat friend, as you can see, first thoroughly doped Trefusis, then exposed his arm, rubbed it with valerian, and carried the trail over the bed, down the corridor, and so to his door. When he thought pussy had mauled Trefusis enough, he would slip in and shove the bag over her. Then he would rouse Trefusis with a restorative, say that he had had another spasm, and that he had caught him at his ghastly trick, exposing the inflamed wound as proof. Trefusis vaguely understood that the eyes of the cat were but a part of his general insanity. You notice that though Trefusis' arms and legs were fastened to the bed, it did not prevent him from raising his body and getting at his arm if he so desired. The doctor was clever enough to lend a semblance of reality to the whole diabolical scheme. His only mistake was in not being aware that Billings the butler knows a few medical things himself."

"But—but I don't quite understand," I managed to gasp out. The intensely dramatic foregoing events had shaken me more than I cared to confess. "I don't quite understand. It's all so horrible. Surely Trefusis"—and I motioned to the half-unconscious figure of my former classmate—"was not subject to that ghastly atavistic trait. Surely he did not really at any time enlarge that wound——" I stopped. Tiberius W. Tinkle was regarding me with sincere pity.

"Little one," he said, shaking his head, "there's certainly something the matter with your liver. You didn't for a moment believe in Doctor Chadband's far-fetched theory? Cannibalism? Bosh! Don't you think I knew all the time that Trefusis no more made that wound on his arm than you or I made it? When he stepped out of the carriage the day I applied for the position of butler, I knew in a moment things weren't all right by a wide margin. The boy was drugged, and Doctor Chadband's influence over him was plainly apparent. The butler episode gave me the opportunity of getting the inside track as nothing else could have done."

"I always thought Trefusis never made that wound," I said sheepishly.

Such was the first of our strange adventures. Under Tinkle's masterly supervision, Trefusis recovered his normal condition in time. Doctor Chadband, after a prolonged stay in the hospital, left the States. Trefusis held that he had been sufficiently punished, and, from the appearance of the fat doctor, I am inclined to agree with that opinion. When Trefusis subsequently learned of his former butler's identity, he was most pressing in his desire to bestow some token of his gratitude upon him, but Tinkle, with a pride as courteous as it was firm, positively declined.

A Son of the Plains

By Arthur Paterson

Author of "A Man of His Word," "The King's Agent," Etc.

There is no one more qualified to picture the romantic West than Mr. Paterson, whom we are glad to welcome to the pages of "The Popular." He was a sheep-rancher in New Mexico for several years, and later he did some extensive farming in Kansas. It is of the West of thirty years ago that Mr. Paterson writes—the still untamed West, when hold-ups and assassinations were matters of every-day occurrence, and other emergencies to try the mettle of men were not lacking. It is a great story, and we predict that it will be received with unanimous acclaim.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE TRAIL.

A BROWN line of sandy track six hundred miles long, and fifteen to fifty yards broad, beaten out of the prairie by the hoofs of countless oxen, sheep, and horses, and the feet of men—such is that great emigrants' thoroughfare from east to west known as the Santa Fé trail.

The source of the trail is at Van Buren City, Arkansas; it ends at Santa Fé, the capital of New Mexico, and so vast has been the traffic over it that even the tough prairie-grass has yielded up its life, and not a blade is left upon the track for fully four hundred miles.

A grim record has the Santa Fé trail. All kinds of men pass over it, but it knows the emigrant best—and many, very many, have never gone farther. Thirst killed them, one by one, as they wearily tramped on and on, expecting the summer rains, which were late that year; or they died, a score at a time, round their blazing wagons, massacred in a night by the Arapahoe Indians.

Nowadays the journey is comparatively safe; but the observant traveler finds many a memento of the good old times, and when turning over the bones of cattle, horses, and sheep by the wayside, will stumble not unfrequently upon the skull of a man.

Twenty years ago, before the trail's deadliest foe, the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fé Railway, began to cut it to pieces and extinguish part of it altogether, a man who embarked on a journey across the plains carried his life in his hands. Yet there were men who did it constantly. Stockmen these, bred in the country beyond the trail, whose business it was to bring their produce to the Eastern markets, and who counted such risks as it had to offer them the merest child's play.

Every summer, in the months of June and July, when rain may be expected—though it does not always come—men with wild-eyed sheep, gaunt, long-horned cattle, or wiry bronco ponies, wended their way by easy stages from the mountains and the plains of New Mexico and Colorado to the towns of Kansas, sometimes as far as Kansas City itself, marking by day the water-holes and creeks, at night watching by their lonely camp-fires for the prowling Indians. The Indians, to do them justice, seldom interfered wantonly with such travelers, finding them more

trouble than their possessions were worth.

In the summer of 1873 a camp of two thousand sheep, four horses, a dog, and a wagon, all in the charge of two men, leisurely wended its way in an easterly direction, bound for Seckersburg, a town in Eastern Kansas. The sheep were "Mexican," but well graded with Merino blood, and while retaining the physical strength and hardiness of their original ancestry, had gained a crop of thick, long-stapled, silky wool, which would give them a good market value anywhere. Moreover, they were in excellent condition, in which respect they were in striking contrast to the rest of the live stock, including their owner and his man.

Food on a sheep-ranch is of the simplest description. In winter every one eats mutton. Bread is used sparingly and as a luxury; molasses is occasionally indulged in. For drink, there is coffee, innocent of milk or sugar. In summer, owing to the absence of refrigerators, fresh meat is impossible, and the sheepman retires upon dried or salted bacon. To this beans are added, and the two together form the whole of the diet available on a sheep-ranch while the warm weather lasts. In summer, therefore, sheepmen are the thinnest of any known race on earth.

The men in charge of these sheep on the trail were in their usual summer condition. Their dog, whose share of the food was the bread-crusts and bacon-rinds, was thinner still; while the horses, though independent of meat, were worked so hard, by reason of the sandy nature of the track, that to an inexperienced eye they would have appeared mere living skeletons. Those who knew the Western pony, however, would have pronounced them to be in good working trim.

The camp, when we became acquainted with it, was beginning its first preparations for settling down for the night, on the Two Butte Creek, a small watercourse twenty miles west of the Kansas frontier.

It was a good camping-ground. The creek, with the aid of a shower the day before, had deserved its name by providing at this point three large holes of water, or, to speak more correctly, liquid of the color and consistency of thick pea soup, which when boiled in the coffee-pot, produced a certain quantity of water. A strip of fresh, succulent grass bordered the creek for nearly half a mile, the trail crossing a hundred yards below and bearing away slantwise to the northeast, ascending a "roll" or undulation of prairie, on the side of which the camp was pitched.

In a few minutes the fire was lighted, the horses picketed out for the night, and cooking-utensils—two tin plates and cups, a frying-pan, battered coffee-pot and mill, and pan of black Mexican beans—were produced from the wagon, and in less time than any civilized person would consider possible, the camp-master stood up and whistled a signal to his companion that supper was ready.

This man meanwhile, the herder, had gently set the two thousand faces of his sheep campward, and, leaving them to their own devices, made a wide détour to the left, and approached his supper—that best and most grateful of meals—with long, eager strides.

It was a peaceful scene, growing more so as the night gathered fast from the east and the evening stillness crept over all living things. There was no wind, and the sky was free of cloud. To the west the lurid light in the wake of the sun made the brown prairie, stretching like the sea, without a bush to relieve its monotony, browner still, and cast a faint reflection of orange on the white backs of the sheep, as they greedily cropped the fresh grass and approached by slow degrees their bedding place on the hill. The most restful moment this in all the herder's day.

Sheep, properly handled, have an unfailing instinct of what to do with themselves when night is near. The light of the fire they know means protection, and as long as it is on the slope of a hill—for sheep hate flat ground to sleep on—they draw toward it of their own accord, and as the last gleams of daylight die away, settle contentedly down

in one great mass of baaing drowsiness.

Very soon there was no sound in camp but the occasional stamp of the tired horses and their busy munching of the meadow-grass. The sheep were asleep, the dog was dozing, and the men, their supper done, smoked in silence before the dying embers of the fire.

They had not spoken a word since the meal began, and but for a few curt remarks about the route to-morrow they would not address one another, probably, for twenty-four hours more. Yet they were not stupid, nor sulky, nor sad, nor oppressed with uneasy consciences. They were simply men who had been bred in the great silent land of the far West, where speech becomes a very minor quantity in life.

How can we bring home such a condition to those who dwell in cities and towns, whose fathers have dwelt in cities and towns, and to whose experience the customs, thoughts, and actions of such men as we have before us to-night are stranger and more puzzling than those of the wildest beasts of forest or field?

Sheep-rearing had been the business of these men for years; and sheep-camp in the summer, where a man lives for months together miles from the settlement in a hut of his own making; and sheep-ranch in winter, where he is by himself every day for twelve hours out of the twenty-four, is the loneliest life in the world. And when this goes on from year's end to year's end—one unchanging round of monotonous work, no society to enliven it, no holiday to break it—what happens?

In the examples we have here, two things have happened. We will take the herder first. He is a tall, powerfully built man of fifty-five, who, in spite of his elastic step and a wiry frame, looks ten years more than that. Drink has laid a heavy hand upon him. Just now he is free from his enemy, for he has not seen a saloon for two months; but in the trembling hands, bleary eyes, and bloated features, the demon has left indelible claw-marks, and when the long tramp is over will claim Sebastian Bean body and soul while he has a cent in his pocket.

Five years ago Bean was as sober a man as need be, but he lost his wife that year, and before twelve months were gone every stick he possessed had been sold over his head, and he was a wanderer without a friend.

The other man, camp-master and owner of the two thousand sheep, is a very different person. At first sight he looks little more than a boy, for he is of slender build, and has not a hair on his face. Take a second glance into that face, and you feel he may be any age up to forty. As a matter of fact, he is just twenty-two, but so hardly have the circumstances of his life dealt with him, that no Eastern man would believe he was less than five-and-thirty.

There is no sign of drink, however, here. His features are regular and sharply cut, his complexion a clear brown, albeit so burned and deeply tanned by exposure that one would be half-inclined to wonder whether he were of white blood but for his light-blue eyes.

He is the picture of health, and, gaunt though he be, unlike most sheepmen, he holds himself well, carrying his head with a certain dignity which makes him appear taller than he is. Yet he looks haggard and worn. His cheeks are as hollow as though he were recovering from illness; his lips, untouched as yet by the merest suggestion of a mustache, are thin and tightly drawn. Western life has left its mark on him. There has been no pleasure in his life since he can remember. He has worked hard and successfully, for these sheep are all his own, but there has been some shadow across his path which has robbed him of his youth.

If we look closely into his face, we see something more than weariness caused by a monotonous life. In his eyes there is that listening, watchful expression to be found in the eyes of savages or of men who have had to live for years in the midst of constant danger; yet the cast of his features is curiously immobile, and seldom ex-

presses the least emotion or interest in anything living or dead.

Nat Worsley began life on his own account at eleven years old. His mother died when he was six, and for five years afterward he was the companion of his father—a sheepman of some wealth. This was in the old frontier days before the Civil War, about which life people nowadays know little. Frontiersmen are always silent and uncommunicative folk; and so hard was the life and rough the fare then, that travelers in search of information went elsewhere to find it. In Nat's eleventh year the Comanches came down, and far and wide rose the smoke of burning homesteads and the shrieks of tortured men. One day Worsley's ranch was attacked, and, after a sharp struggle—the boy behaving under fire like a veteran of ten campaigns—the place was taken, and within twenty-four hours Nat became the adopted son of the chief by whose hand his father died.

Five years passed. The boy lived, even thrived, under the training of his foster-father, who loved him and taught him everything he knew. All this time Nat never saw a white face nor heard a word of English spoken. But he never forgot the night his father died; and as he grew older the determination to make his escape grew also.

At sixteen he contrived to realize his ambition; and, falling into the hands of Texan horse-breeders, he worked his way back to the place of his birth in Southern New Mexico, picking up his own language, which he had forgotten, on the way. Here he took service as herder with one John Denayer, who had known his father. He worked so well that in five years more his master took him into partnership. A year later Denayer died, leaving Nat part of his property.

All this time the boy had been gradually emerging from the half-savage condition to which his training in the Indian camp had reduced him. John Denayer taught him to read and write, and Mrs. Denayer, a native of St. Louis, told him a great deal about town life and the world in the East beyond the plains, and lent him books, which he had eagerly devoured. The outcome of all this was that when Mrs. Denayer, after her husband's death, returned to her relations in the East, Nat decided to follow her; see something of the world that men had made, and complete his education. So, in the good old-fashioned way, he had packed his worldly possessions into a wagon, and, hiring one man to help him, set his face eastward, and started upon the long journey over the Santa Fé trail.

His plans were to sell his stock when he could find a good market for them, and then hasten on by train to visit Mrs. Denayer in St. Louis.

He was now more than half-way across. Another month, and Seckersburg, where he hoped to sell the sheep, would be reached. Most young men under such circumstances would have been eager and hopeful. Not so Nat. So deeply had the weariness of his many hardships and long years of toil entered into his being, that he had no mental buoyancy left to hope for anything. He dreaded, with the shrinking of a wild creature, the plunge into a new world, and only took this plunge because he felt instinctively that without a break in this unnatural life of loneliness and monotony he would go mad, or, like the man beside him, take to drink.

The fire burned lower and lower; the pipes were done; it was time to turn in. The campers rose together without speaking, and laid their blankets on the grass. They did not go to sleep at once. Bean had a blistered foot to attend to. Nat, with the mechanical action of one who is performing a daily task, knocked out, examined, and reinserted the cartridges of a revolver and repeating rifle, which were never out of his reach day or night. He had just completed this when he heard a strange sound, and, without moving a muscle of face or body, sat listening. Bean dropped the foot he was examining, and looked up.

After a minute Nat took his rifle and pistol and laid them across the blankets at his feet.

"I wonder," he said musingly, as if speaking to himself, "who this will be?"

"What?"

"The horseman on the trail from the East. There's only one. I guess his horse is tired, by the steady way his foot-taps strike. Can't you hear it now?"

Bean shrugged his shoulders. His worst enemy could not accuse him of dulness of hearing, but this was beyond his power. He drew on his boots again, however, and stood up.

"Ah! now I dew catch it. He ain't goin' so fast, neither. Yet he's lopin'. Tell us what it means."

"A man who has ridden far. We must stop him. Come with me, and keep to the right of the track. Lie down when you get there. We will bead him together, but don't let go unless my shot fails. Keep your aim well on the horse. A man doesn't lope over the trail alone at night for nothing."

This was the last word spoken. With quick steps the men vanished out of range of the firelight, and not a sound betrayed their whereabouts until on the brow of the hill, faintly outlined against the starlit sky, there came the figure of a man on horse, riding hard.

"Pull in! Halt!"

The words rang out like a pistol-shot, and made the horses near the wagon jump, while the dog, left to guard the camp, gave a deep growl of sympathy. As for the person to whom they were addressed, he was so much astonished that he nearly fell off his horse in reining him in.

"Get down!"

The traveler hesitated, and settled himself in the saddle.

"Who are ye?"

"Get *down!*"

An emphasis was placed on the last word which served its purpose well. The horseman instinctively ducked his head, as if to avoid a threatened bullet, and slid from his saddle.

"Well—here I am," he drawled; "and there's nothing to me, or on me, or in me, for I'm hungrier than three bears."

"Come to our camp, then, and we'll fill you up with a square meal."

The man gave a prodigious sigh of relief.

"That's good news. My head's nigh turned silly with hunger, and I'm choked with thirst. Let me eat a sup, and then you shall hear all I know. And I *have* news, yes—my Lord!"

He said the last words to himself in a lower tone, and, the camp being reached, he slipped the saddle off his horse, begged some corn, and then threw himself by the fire as if tired out.

In a few minutes he was devouring beans and bacon in a way that did credit to his teeth and appetite. Nat and Bean watched him and speculated.

He was a cowboy—that was quite evident. His broad felt hat with its whipcord band; a shirt gaudily embroidered with beads; leather riding-overalls; high-heeled boots, in which no one could walk a mile without danger of being lamed for life; and spurs with rowels three inches in diameter proved that. But his carriage and bearing were far from expressing the easy assurance generally characteristic of men of his profession. His hands, they noticed, were shaking as if he were recovering from a debauch; his face was a dull yellow, and he shuddered at intervals as if he were suffering from ague. But according to Western etiquette, no questions might be asked until he had eaten and drunk his fill. When he had emptied his fourth cup of coffee, Nat handed him a corn-cob pipe and a light.

"If you're through—we're ready."

The man nodded, and eagerly seized the pipe, his fingers shaking so much that he dropped the burning wood upon his clothes, and nearly set himself on fire. He laughed at this; a feeble, forced sort of chuckle.

"I'll be doggoned, friends, if ever I were like this before! I'm just scared right through; 'tain't to be denied. My nerve—why, I have no nerve now. No more'n a tenderfoot bucked on his head for the first time. I'm clean turned, as you may say. But then I've seen—— How can I tell ye? See here, now. One hour before sundown, twenty-six boys, myself among 'em, camped in a

creek fifteen miles east of here, and 'bout half a mile off the trail. We was traveling partly to convoy some fine stock, and part to escort two gells—daughters of old man Shelford, sheepman; Alberquerque way—to New Mexico. This was an hour before sundown, three, or maybe four, hours ago. Now——" he paused, and then went on in a hoarse whisper:

"It was a pretty camp. Good water, and cottonwood—quite a lot of timber. The gells was that pleased they began walkin' down the creek, tired of ridin' so long. We boys went to the tail wagon, where there were a whisky-bar'l kept, to take a nip 'fore settlin' in for the night. We were all dry, for the day had been dusty and hot, and so, somehow, we took *two* nips—or some of us did—and we were all hangin' around anyhow, when on a sudden there came a woman's shriek; another, louder, and two more smothered like, and then the boss, who was on the other side of the wagon, and could see farther than any, yelled out:

" 'It's a raid—Arapahoes! Fight, ye devils, fight! If those gells are lost, and one of you lives, I'll plug him myself!'

"It was his last word—poor old Jeph! A bullet whizzed from the timber, and he fell all of a heap. Then we started, every boy of us, madder than hares. But not one had any sense after the whisky, and we went for 'em bald-headed in the open. And the Arapahoes, who'd planted themselves in that timber, cunning as death, had the easiest time you can think of. We fought—aye—and all lie there dead, scalped. All but me and the gells. I happened on my pony, and when I saw it were no good, I lit out, and here I am, and—that's the end, captain."

The man stopped abruptly and covered his face with his hands, twitching all over.

No one spoke for nearly a minute. Seb Bean's teeth were clenched, and he was breathing heavily. Nat, without any change of countenance, was looking at the cowboy.

"You did not bring the women along?" he said at last.

The man started as if he had been bitten.

"Women? The devils attacked us for them and our horses. The gells, I told ye, were snapped up first pop. I were only *one*."

There was another silence, broken at length by Seb Bean, who was unable to contain his feelings any longer, and let fly a volley of hard oaths, whether at the Indians or at the cowboy for his desertion, or at both, was not quite clear.

The stranger turned pale. "You can call me what you like, boss. But 'tain't fair. What could you, or any one, ha' done?"

He made the appeal to Nat. But Nat seemed to hear nothing. He was staring into the fire.

"They weren't Comanches?" he said at last.

"No—no; Arapahoes."

"What sized crowd?"

"A hundred—mebbe less; but enough on the surprise."

Nat nodded, and fell into his reverie until a hand grasped his knee.

"Nat, boy," growled Bean's voice, trembling and husky, "you've been with Injuns, and you *know*. Can't you see any way we might pick them girls out? I'd go anywhere and chance all for the littlest bit of a show at it if you could tell me how to start."

Nat laid his hand on the old man's, and held it fast.

"Wait, I'm thinking."

Another silence—a long one this time. Then Nat raised his eyes slowly and looked at the cowboy again.

"I lived five years in Comanche camp, friend, and I have an idea. It is not for you, Seb"—pressing his hand; "I must work it out, and this man must show me the way."

"What!" shrieked the cowboy, springing up; "go back to them demons, whose yells are ringing in my ears this minute? No! I say *no*. You ain't seen what I have. That old man, he knows nothing. If those gells were my own sisters, I would not stir a step. Hello! what—hold up—I can't breathe."

He had been caught by the throat and

thrown down, his neck gripped so tightly that he dared not struggle for fear of being choked outright.

"Save your breath and listen to me," said Nat, in a tone that trembled a little now. "I have not hurt you, and don't wish to. But be careful, for the life of a coward is worth nothing in this country. I don't know the location of those Arapahoes, and you *do*. I want nothing more from you. Will you refuse? You won't if you have the heart of a cat. Get up and tell us, but no more raving foolishness; I can't stand that."

The cowboy's throat was freed, and he rose to his feet as he was bid, slowly. He still felt the grip of Nat's fingers, and before he spoke rubbed his neck vigorously and groaned. Then he looked long and earnestly at the men. There was no resentment in his face.

"Are you reelly going?" he said at last.

"Yes."

"Ah, we-el—I—I'll be with ye. Now, that's truth."

He laughed the careless cowboy's laugh, and held out his hand. Nat took it, and looked at the man keenly.

"What does this mean—are you fooling?"

"Foolin'!" He laughed again. "Look here, boss, I ain't so terrible wise, but I know enough to play a straight game with *you*, and I stand to my word, if I can't always stand fire. I mean business. I'm glad to go there. After all, you're 'bout right. A coward is worse trash than skunks. See, now, I'll swear," he said, becoming enthusiastic, "to hold to ye in this, and you may plug me through if I fail."

Nat set his teeth.

"Swear, then—with me—repeat every word; and Seb, you be witness to his oath."

They were all on their feet now, and the fire, revived by a kick from the old herder, blazed up for a moment, shining brightly on the earnest faces.

"I swear," said Nat, "that I will go back upon this trail to save these women, so help me God!"

The cowboy repeated the words in a loud voice. He was a different person now. His eyes were steady; he stood firmly on his feet, the shivering had gone.

There was a moment of deep silence after the oath had been taken, and then Seb Bean, placing a hand on the shoulder of each of the men, added an oath of his own.

"And I swear to you, Nat Worsley, that if this man breaks faith, and deserts you in your time of need, though he go to the end of the world, I will find him out and kill him, *so help me God!*"

CHAPTER II.

ARAPAHOE CAMP.

A council of Indian warriors twenty years ago was often an impressive sight. In peace time, when the chiefs assembled in their robes of state—albeit only blankets and feathers and furs—and the ceremony was conducted according to rules of the strictest etiquette and decorum, these councils of savages might be set as examples which the parliaments and congresses of civilization would do well to study with diligence and respect.

In war time, before battle, the sight was grander still, in spite of the grotesqueness of the war-paint. But after battle—and especially after a victory—everything was changed, and in the place of judicial deliberations of grave men, there was a jabbering crowd of wildly exulting bravos, each man so busy boasting of his own deeds and prowess that the few chiefs anxious to get business done had a hard and thankless task.

The Arapahoes, this night, were no exception to the rule. Twenty-five white men had they killed; and for booty they could count forty good horses, an extensive camp outfit of provisions and whisky, and, best of all, two white women.

So the gallant redskins made merry. They ate the meat, the bacon, and the bread, and every scrap of food cooked and raw that they could find; then they drank the whisky; they set the wagons

on fire and danced until they were nearly mad; and lastly they thronged to the council-fire and squatted there to decide in full conclave assembled upon the fate of the captive women.

A tall chief, gray-haired, and yet still upright and full of vigor, rose first to address them. This was Long-tailed Dog, principal war-chief of the nation. He made a long speech, which was listened to in respectful silence—a strong proof of his influence, and of the self-control possessed by Indians even when they are drunk, for Long-tailed Dog was not a man of few words.

The last sentences of his harangue were as follows:

"I have now spoken all my words. Shall the women be made squaws of the nation? Shall they be kept until good money is paid for them by the whites, or will the young men draw lots to-night——"

He got no further. Such a fierce and unanimous hum of assent to the last proposition rose on every side, that Long-tailed Dog, with the wisdom drawn from experience, sat down there and then without finishing his sentence.

Up leaped one of the younger chiefs, and with a few impassioned words carried his audience away. Fierce yells came from every side. The men started to their feet, and so great became the clamor that even Long-tailed Dog tried in vain to make himself heard.

The braves were beyond all authority now. Two threw down their arms to drag the captives to the front. A regiment of troops could not have saved them. But at this moment, above the shrieks and yells, there came a long-drawn and peculiar cry, and every Indian started as if he had been shot. None were so drunk as not to be able to recognize that sound. Not one was so brave as not to feel a cold chill of dread and foreboding.

Again came the cry, this time close at hand, and a stranger, thrusting unceremoniously aside some braves who were in his way, strode into the center of the council, and stood there looking about him with the haughty bearing of a master.

The clamor had ceased. For a moment the captives were forgotten, and a profound silence fell upon the furious crowd.

There was nothing miraculous in this. For the cry had been the war-whoop of the Comanches — more dreaded by the Arapahoes than armies of white men—and the man who stood in their midst wore the dress of a Comanche chief.

"Peace, Arapahoes," said the stranger, speaking with an intonation which proclaimed his race more certainly to the quick ears about him than his long head-dress of eagle's feathers had done to their eyes. "I am alone."

A change passed over the faces of his listeners. There was a reaction in their feelings, and some even cocked their rifles insolently and presented them with a coarse threat at the Comanche's head.

At this he became a different being. With marvelous quickness he seized the weapon of the nearest man, wrested it from his grasp, and bringing down the rifle-butt with great force upon his head, felled him to the ground. Then he threw the rifle away, and, folding his arms, looked scornfully at the faces which now crowded threateningly around him.

"Arapahoe dogs! Is this your greeting to a friend? Beware, pigs! Though Young Wolf is alone, yet if his head is but singed by the heat of your fires, every hair that he loses will be paid for by an Arapahoe life. Take care!"

He laughed as he spoke, and the faces of the younger braves about him became contorted with fury. But the chiefs were of a very different way of thinking. Led by Long-tailed Dog, they surrounded the stranger, courteously gave him welcome to the camp, and inquired affectionately after the health of his friends.

Young Wolf dropped his sneering tone at once.

"Long-tailed Dog speaks as a father. I have come in peace. Listen, my Arapahoe brothers, for I have a message from Spotted Snake, the great father of my nation, who with five hundred

braves"—these words he spoke with great distinctness and deliberation—"lies twenty miles to the north, on the Small Fork River. He sends me to you with great news."

Young Wolf paused here; and every Indian in the council became as still as a mouse.

"But," he continued, "before I speak you the words I have brought with me, I would tell the joy I feel at your great deeds to-night. You have many white scalps and horses, besides other things. This is good news for me to bear to my nation. I will now give the words of Spotted Snake."

He paused again. No one spoke or stirred, but the speaker's practised eye could read uneasiness in every face as he recounted their spoils.

"The white men have come to offer us promises of land, and many good things, if we will give them peace on this trail. We think this is good, but we give no answer to the whites until the Arapahoe nation has spoken. Those are the words of Spotted Snake. And this morning as the sun rose, your White Bear and Little Owl rode into our camp, and wait now for Long-tailed Dog to join them. That is my news. But, Arapahoes, I have yet words to speak of my own. Listen!"

His tone had changed. He spoke again as one of a dominant race.

"You have taken from the whites two of their women. Do no harm to them. My nation wish for peace with white men. If these women are hurt, not a chief of your nation will live five days."

He looked round him defiantly, expecting a yell of dissent. But there was no sound. The young men kept a sullen silence, and the chiefs looked askance at one another. At length Long-tailed Dog stepped forward and advised compliance with the request of "our good brother."

No one responded, but no one disputed his words, and when he made a sign that the council was broken up, the men separated into small groups and slowly moved off to their respective camp-fires.

Long-tailed Dog now entered into a long conversation with the Comanche. By the time it was over it was nearly midnight, and the old chief proposed that they should go to rest. The wily Long-tailed Dog had placed his blankets near the women in case of accidents, but wily as he was, he was not aware how careful Young Wolf had been to ascertain this fact before he consented to sleep with him.

The place where the Arapahoes had camped was two miles south of the trail, on the banks of a river, where a struggling plantation of dwarf cottonwood and locust-trees gave them shelter and cover. On a broad meadow to the eastward the horses were feeding, while beyond them, forming a cordon round the whole camp, was a line of scouts to prevent any danger of surprise.

Long-tailed Dog led the way at a brisk pace, the Comanche keeping a yard or two behind, apparently out of respect, in reality to examine unobserved the main features of the camp. When the old chief turned to speak, however, his companion was looking stolidly before him.

"See, friend, here are the paleface girls. You will not wonder, now, that my young men were warm in their words. These white women are as fair as the morning sun."

The old man looked very keenly under his brows at the Comanche, as if half-suspecting that he had private ambitions of his own in this direction.

He was reassured, however, by the absolute indifference of manner with which the stranger looked upon the prisoners. After one careless glance, Young Wolf yawned and turned his back upon the women, and asked where he might rest.

Meanwhile the movements of the chiefs were watched with painful eagerness by the captives. No harm had come to the girls as yet, and they were too ignorant of Indian ways to feel more than a vague, formless dread of what might happen in course of time. But when the two Indians came so near, and, after a rude stare, rolled themselves in blankets a few yards away, it was a different thing altogether. For

a time the men conversed in whispers, then one — the fiercer-looking and younger of the two—drew a flask or bottle of some kind from his pocket, from which flask the other took a long and eager pull. Immediately afterward both men lay down and seemed to sleep soundly.

The girls were far too apprehensive to follow their example. Now and then they talked in whispers of the future, and how, if the Indians demanded a ransom, they could communicate with their father. But whether they talked to one another, or sat in silence—the camp-fires growing dimmer as the minutes passed and the sounds of excited braves dying away into heavy slumber after their debauch—they never took their eyes off the Indians sleeping at their feet.

Two hours passed, and the camp was still. Even the girls began to get drowsy, and in a few minutes might have slept; when all at once one of the figures by the fire moved, and the girls clung to one another in speechless terror. The younger of the two Indians had risen from his bed and was crawling toward them, now on his hands and knees, now close to the ground like a snake. He came foot by foot, so slowly that the suspense was maddening. But the girls sat still, white and breathless, too terrified to scream. One had hidden her face on the breast of her sister, unable to bear the sight; the other, with lips firmly set, never removed her eyes from the creeping form of the man.

He was close to them now, and, raising himself until he rested on one knee, he looked round the camp. All was dark, except for the faint glow here and there of a dying fire. Slowly he turned to the girls again, until his face was but a few inches from the one who still kept her presence of mind.

"I am a white man," he whispered. "Hush! keep still. This dress is a disguise. Follow me, and I will get you away. Will you? Speak softly."

He saw her eyes brighten and her lips quiver. She drew a long, trembling breath, and whispered back:

"Who are you?" She was evidently incredulous about his white blood.

"Nat Worsley, sheepman, New Mexico. A cowboy brought news of you. He is waiting with horses."

A change came into her face. "We will come gladly. But my sister has fainted."

This was awkward.

"Bring her to while I see if the way is clear. Tell her—tell her that if she had nerves like yours there would be no danger at all."

He crept away into the darkness and vanished.

The recovery of the insensible girl was soon accomplished, and at the word "rescue" she became all animation.

But when many minutes passed—to the girls it seemed like hours—and he did not come again, the one who had fainted lost faith.

"Maizie, you must have been dreaming. I don't believe I really fainted at all."

"Hush, dear; we must not talk. I hope no harm has happened to him. Oh, look! there he is!"

With slow, measured movements a figure closely wrapped in a blanket glided up to the nearest camp-fire and warmed its hands. It stood there motionless nearly a minute, and the girls saw that by a movement of its feet, it was scattering the embers of the fire and covering them over with earth. In a very short time the spot was in complete darkness, and Maizie felt his breath in her face.

"Are you ready? Don't speak; just stand up and hold out your hands."

The girls obeyed, and as they felt the clasp of strong fingers, a feeling of confidence and hope warmed their hearts. Nat, however, gave them little time for reflection. He thrust the end of a rolled blanket into Maizie's hand and whispered: "Pass this to your sister. She must hold it tightly while you take the middle and I lead. If you are scared or wish to stop, give the blanket a jerk, and I shall know what it means. But don't speak or cry out—not the faintest whisper. Now!"

He began to walk on very slowly, the girls following and holding the blanket as drowning men clutch at a rope. As they proceeded, the pace grew brisker. Sometimes they wound in and out of trees which their clothes brushed against; at others they passed over thick grass, by camp-fires, near which lay dark figures buried in sleep. But they never paused an instant until the breeze which blows at night over the open prairie cooled their heated faces.

Here Nat stopped, and touched their hands reassuringly.

"Our first danger is over. We are out of the camp. But the scouts have to be passed. Rest here while I prospect again. I will spread the blanket for you—so; now, lie down and pull it over your faces. Don't move until you hear my voice again. If a scout sees you, he will take you to be two warriors sleeping out."

His voice ceased, and the girls were alone once more.

CHAPTER III.

RESCUED.

The girls lay still as they were bidden for fifteen minutes, wrapped up in the blanket. But human endurance has limits, and on this hot night it was so much like premature burial that at the end of the quarter of an hour, Bel, the younger of the sisters, despite a remonstrance from her companion, extricated her head for a moment and took a long breath of fresh air. To her horror, she saw a pair of shining eyes within a few inches of her face, and something cold and clammy touched her forehead. This was more than the excitable girl could bear, and she threw aside the blanket with a suppressed scream. Whereupon a furry body fawned upon her with reassuring whines. It was a dog. At the same moment Nat came up at a run. The dog sprang to meet him with a whine of joy.

"Down, Shep!" the girls heard him say, in a deep whisper which made the animal cower at his feet; "you have done for us, boy." Then to the girls as calmly as though nothing had happened:

"Get up, please, and give me the blanket. They will have heard you, and we must run as long as you have any breath. The horses are near. Shep, follow and guard."

The girls obeyed with feverish haste, and set off at their utmost speed, holding Nat's hands so as not to be separated in the darkness, the dog trotting behind, snuffing the air uneasily as he ran. This violent exertion, however, soon began to tell upon the girls, tired and overwrought as they were, and before long, Maizie, the weaker of the two, stumbled, caught her foot in a prairie-dog hole, and fell on her face. Nat said nothing, but picked her up, and, carrying her in his arms as if she were a baby, ran on, faster than before. A few minutes later and Bel's breath failed her.

"I cannot run any more," she panted out, with a sob. "Oh, what shall I do?"

Nat pulled up.

"Stay here, and I will come back for you. Shep—lie down!"

He was gone, and Bel was left with the dog. For a moment she felt the relief of the rest, but the next, horrible fears seized her of being pounced upon by the Indians and carried away alone to unknown tortures, and she had to press her teeth together and clench her hands with all her might to keep back an almost irresistible inclination to cry out.

Her only comfort was Shep. She made a movement to caress him—then shrank back in dismay. The animal was quivering all over, and even in the darkness she could see his teeth gleam white. As she touched him, he dashed forward with a low growl, and she heard the grunt of an Indian, the fall of a heavy body, and the worrying snarl of a dog when he bites to the bone.

The girl, nearly beside herself, sprang to her feet and was about to run wildly away, when a figure glided up, a familiar voice said, "Keep still!"

and she knew that her protector had returned.

She dropped on her knees and listened. Again came the soft thud of something heavy falling on the grass, followed this time by a ghastly rattling sound, and then a silence that was worst of all. The outline of an Indian's headdress now towered above her, a hand was laid on her shoulder, and she shrieked aloud.

"It is me," said the voice again, and Bel felt herself lifted from the ground, and knew that her rescuer was running at headlong speed down-hill. A few more breathless minutes, and she heard Maizie's voice, and knew that she was safe. But, now, only a few hundred yards away, there came a loud, shrill cry—the call of the Arapahoe scout, followed almost instantaneously by a chorus of yells, as the whole encampment awoke to a man.

Nat spoke to Maizie. "Can you both ride?"

"Oh, yes—anything!"

No more words were needed. In a twinkling the girls were lifted upon the ponies, which the cowboy had been holding, and the next minute all were speeding away for the east at a swift gallop, Nat leading the way. This wild race lasted an hour, and then Nat pulled in, and all stood still, panting, while he listened.

"It is all right," he said quietly, swinging himself again into the saddle; "we may now go easily."

Two hours afterward they reached the camp, and were received by Seb Bean with a shout of welcome.

The dawn was breaking, and for the first time they could see one another distinctly. A sudden shyness fell upon them all. Nat, without speaking, placed his guests by the fire, and set the cowboy to preparing breakfast, then bolted into the wagon to strip off his disguise. Little had he dreamed, when he picked it up six months before, to take as a curiosity to St. Louis, what purpose it would serve so soon.

When he reappeared, he had donned a suit of gray buckskin—the best clothes he had—a cotton shirt instead of a gray flannel one, and a new hat with a stiff brim.

No one was more astonished at such a change than the old herder. The girls, who had made friends with Seb at once, and were helping, in spite of all he could do or say, to cook the breakfast, were so much amused at the blank expression of his face, that they surprised Nat by their brightness. He had expected to find them cowering disconsolately over the fire, and had perplexed himself greatly as he dressed to think of some way in which he could lessen their anxiety and awaken enough confidence in himself to make a scheme he had thought of acceptable to them.

And now—lo! they greeted him with smiles, and so far from cowering over the fire, had aided Seb so well that breakfast was ready and waiting. But Nat's surprise at the cheerfulness of his guests was nothing to Seb's astonishment at Nat. If he were puzzled at the change Nat had made in his outward appearance, he was absolutely "dumfoundered" at what happened afterward.

It had always been a grief to him, when he began to grow fond of Nat, to notice the taciturnity of the lad and the almost Indian immobility of his face and manner. He had remarked that strangers who met him were unfavorably impressed, and had wondered what would become of him in the East, where such ways were more foreign and unacceptable than in the silent West.

After to-day he troubled himself on that score no more.

For Nat *talked*. All through breakfast, which lasted three times as long as such a meal had ever lasted before, he never stopped talking except to listen to the observations of his visitors. He apologized for the rough fare he had to offer them, and for the lack of spoons and forks. He talked about New Mexico, and found that he had tramped through the county where their father lived, and had heard his name. He did not touch once upon past dangers or future contingencies. His object was to make them feel at ease; for

after the first greeting he detected a strained, anxious expression on the face of the elder girl, and noticed that the laughter of the younger was on the verge of becoming hysterical.

It is an instinct with some men to know what to do under such circumstances. If Nat had been asked afterward to repeat what he had said, he could not have done it to save his life. But he accomplished his purpose, and by the time that Seb, with an awkward duck of his head, and mumbled excuse, strode off at a seven-leagued-boot pace to bring his sheep up to the trail, the girls, though still pale and tired, were much more tranquil, and they talked to Nat as freely as if they had known him all their lives.

Nat had given whispered instructions to Seb in a pause of the conversation, and it only remained now to sound his guests. He did this in a few blunt words, his fluency of speech suddenly deserting him. But he had won their confidence, and might use what words he pleased. In the space of ten minutes everything was arranged. The cowboy was to start immediately for the west, bearing letters from the girls to their father, telling him of what had happened, and that they would travel to Seckersburg under Nat's escort, making their journey back to New Mexico by coach. It was a choice of evils.

The Arapahoes, searching far and wide for their lost captives, might very probably keep a watch upon the trail and stop the wagon that day. At the same time, the girls were not strong enough to endure hard riding westward, nor were they at all willing to undertake it under the cowboy's protection, while even if it had been possible for Nat to turn back with his sheep, so slowly does a flock travel, and so fast do Indians ride, that there would be even less safety in that course than to push eastward.

By the time the sun had risen an hour, the cowboy had departed west with outward regret and inward joy; the sheep, under Seb's care, were half a mile on the trail traveling briskly, while Nat, having made his ladies as comfortable as he could in the wagon among the stores, had broken up his camp and was also well upon the way.

All conversation had died a natural death. The younger Miss Shelford almost immediately fell asleep, while the elder, seating herself, for reasons of her own, so that she could watch the driver's face, was pondering upon the adventures of the preceding twenty-four hours, and possible dangers in the future.

Maizie Shelford was a reserved and thoughtful girl. Careless observers, impressed with Bel's soft brown eyes, tall, well-developed figure, and constant animation of spirits, scarcely saw her quiet sister, and would hardly believe that the latter was the elder by two years. Those accustomed to look below the surface, however, remarked that while Maizie's stature was insignificant compared to Bel's, her face less expressive, as a rule, and her manner undemonstrative, yet her large eyes looked with a keen directness into all things; though she seldom spoke, the words she said were always to the point; and when she smiled, her face held a beauty of its own in spite of irregularity of feature.

But there were not many people who saw these things; for the sisters were seldom apart, and in Bel's presence it was Maizie's custom to say as little as possible, from a feeling keen even to morbidness that she was dull and uninteresting and must be second, always, to her brilliant young sister.

It must be added, in justice to Bel, that she never intended this to be so. There was perfect love and understanding between them, and to make any slighting allusion to Maizie in Bel's hearing would be a blunder that no man or woman would ever commit twice. But people formed their opinions, nevertheless, and the feeling of the girls' friends when they decided to leave St. Louis, where they had been brought up since childhood, to take care of their father in New Mexico, was nearly unanimous. Maizie ought to go—it was her duty, for poor Mr. Shelford was alone—but for Bel to throw herself away in that horrid wild country

was something almost sinful. It was a social catastrophe.

In the stress of that terrible night in the Arapahoe camp the position of the sisters had been reversed, and Nat would have laughed if any one had suggested that Bel was the elder sister. The circumstances of his life had made him more observant than most young men of the little things that make up character, and he smiled, as he urged on his horses, to see this pale little woman keenly watching him, while her sister slept like a tired child.

Nat was right. Maizie, though very grateful for his services, and confident that the only course was to place herself and Bel under his protection, was yet very much alive to the fact that his character and future intentions were entirely unknown to her; and Maizie was one of those people who do not easily trust a stranger.

Therefore she refused to allow herself to go to sleep, though she sorely wanted to do so; and sitting stiffly on a sack of green coffee-berries, her back supported by a large keg in which Nat kept a store of drinking-water in case of need, she took mental note of the face before her.

It was hard, almost forbidding, now that it was in repose. The lips were habitually pressed together, and the corners of the mouth drawn down, giving a certain sardonic expression, as if in his opinion the world were a poor sort of place and the people in it mostly fools.

The day wore on. It was nearly noon, and very hot. Bel still slept, and even Maizie found herself beginning to nod drowsily. Nat alone was wide-awake. His hard training and present anxiety were sure safeguards against sleepiness, and not a prairie-dog scuttling to and fro on business, nor an inch of the horizon line to the north and west, escaped his eyes.

The time came at length when Nat, seeing what he had been expecting to see, laid his hands on the reins and pulled up. Maizie roused herself with a start, and saw him standing on the foot-board, shading his eyes with his hands. Nat's face was as quiet as usual when he turned toward her, but she noticed that the lines about his mouth had hardened and deepened. He looked as if he had suddenly grown older.

"Is it—Indians?" she whispered, speaking under her breath so as not to awaken Bel.

"A scout is lying on the hill."

"What can we do?"

In spite of her courage and confidence, Maizie was as white as a sheet. Nat's voice became as tender as a woman's.

"There is no danger yet. Hide yourself and your sister under these felts and blankets, so that they'll find nothing but stores if they peep in. Remember, the risk is not so great as in their camp. Cheer up! we shall pull through."

"But they will take everything, as they did yesterday."

"I think not. My outfit is not worth enough to tempt them, as long as they do not see you. Quick, here they come! Ah, they have split up into searching-parties, for there are only twenty here. That is right—the sack of flour at her feet looks well; and the water-barrel hides her head. Leave it to me, now, and lie down. I'll lay the sheepskins across you. That makes it natural. Hand me my shotgun—take care of the triggers; she's loaded, both barrels. Will your sister wake? That is the point. If there's a chance of it you had better rouse her first. I leave it to your judgment."

While he was speaking, Nat deftly turned and twisted the coverings in the wagon, until every trace of the girls' presence was concealed. He was about to return to his place, when Maizie raised her head and whispered:

"You must give me a knife; they shall never take us alive again."

Nat took from his pocket a tiny five-chambered pistol.

"Use this, if I drop, but not while I'm alive. I will not leave the wagon, and if there's no hope, you will hear me say 'Fire.' Then—let go, just below the heart. It is double-action—take care."

Maizie took the pistol, and their hands met. A deep flush mounted to Nat's forehead, and for a moment he looked at her with moist eyes. Maizie looked back at him trustingly, like a child. "I will be very careful," she said softly, and smiled. That smile will abide with Nat and haunt his dreams to his dying day.

All was over in an instant; and Nat swung back to his seat, and Maizie disappeared under her blanket. The Indians were there.

To Maizie, though she had many things to suffer in after days, nothing, in point of sheer horror and sickening suspense, was ever worse than the time that followed. She was able to hear distinctly all that went on, and, buried under ill-smelling sheepskins and heavy blankets, suffered agonies of acute helpless suspense.

First came the soft tread of the galloping unshod Indian ponies; the jar of the wagon as Nat, who had resumed his journey, pulled up his excited, snorting team. Then they were surrounded, and the crisis had come. There was a deep silence, and Maizie's heart beat so heavily that she was afraid it would wake Bel. It was a relief when she heard one of the Indians address Nat in Spanish. Maizie's childhood had been passed among Mexicans, and she remembered enough Spanish to understand what followed.

"Are you sheepman?" she heard the Indian say.

"Yes, and alone."

"Your wagon very big for one."

"I come a long way, and carry much food."

"Open wagon, and let me see your food."

Maizie's heart nearly stopped beating altogether.

"What is that for?"

"We have lost something, and look in all wagons on the road to-day. Open, quick!"

"Very well," rejoined Nat, in a very slow, deliberate tone. "You may look, and welcome. But, see here, amigo," his voice deepened now, and Maizie distinctly heard the click of the dog-heads as he cocked his shotgun, "I have no stolen goods in my outfit, and I am not going to have my things thrown about, not for all the Arapahoes alive. So, look in as much as you like—but keep your hands to yourselves."

The only reply the Indian made was a grunt, and then the wagon creaked and shook beneath his weight. At this precise moment Bel began to breathe less regularly, as if she were on the point of awakening. Maizie's suffering now cannot be described. She knew that the Indian's sharp eyes were searching every nook and cranny, and that the slightest movement would be utter ruin. She kept trying to remember where she had put her hat. The sight of that would be enough to betray everything, for she had worn it when taken prisoner the day before. The air grew hotter, the sheepskins more stifling, and Maizie felt as if her brain were turning. A fear oppressed her now that she would move herself—Bel was sleeping still. Suddenly everything grew dark. She heard afar off the sound of voices, there was a rushing in her ears, and then—a blank. Human nature could bear no more, and Maizie had fainted.

But the danger was over. The Indian who looked in was satisfied with his inspection, and the rest, impressed by Nat's stoical calmness of manner, and well aware of the qualities of a shotgun at close quarters, after a few words together departed in a northwesterly direction and disappeared behind a roll of prairie.

The removal of the skins and blankets, and a few drops of water sprinkled on her forehead, soon brought Maizie round, and the wagon resumed its journey at a brisk pace. That evening a pleasant camping-ground was taken up on the shores of a tributary of the Arkansas River, and after an undisturbed night the travelers started on their way the next morning refreshed and in cheerful spirits.

TO BE CONTINUED.

Napoleon and the Trust

By Jackson B. Corbet, Jr.

For ways that are dark and tricks that are mean we nowadays go to the much maligned "trusts." In Mr. Corbet's dramatic narrative he tells of a unique "trust" operated by one cold-blooded trader, whose victims were Alaskan miners. The lynching that would have followed in the ordinary course of affairs is delayed by the prompt action of a man with a sense of humor, and the miners are formed into a company of "trust bu'sters." The process of "freezing out" the "trust" is very cleverly described.

(A Complete Novel)

"NAPOLEON" BANNETT, so nicknamed because he was something of a strategist and of medium stature, accentuated by broad shoulders, possessed the calm philosophy of many Alaskan miners after they have roughed it for years, that he would win out in the end. Therefore, the decisive manner in which Marion Fisher, recently from the Pacific Coast, and the only marriageable woman, old or young, on Lost Hope Creek, had refused him did not cause him to lose either appetite or sleep; nor was he disturbed by the knowledge that of the dozen or so proposals which she had received since her arrival, his was the only one which she had declined point-blank, the rest having been taken gravely under advisement by Marion, who vaguely suspected that she was the victim of a practical joke, and intended, if it were so, to keep her tormentors in a state of suspense as long as possible.

Ignorant of her motive, Napoleon was content to be an exception to the general rule, attributing her rejection of his first offer to the fact that he had made it rather early in their acquaintanceship.

His second offer, made after a month of the most persistent wooing, had just been declined even more decisively, however; and now as he untangled the traces of his dog team, he watched the girl, standing in front of the log cabin which she and "Pop" Fisher called home, in a manner that showed some perplexity. He recognized in her the best type of western womanhood; straightforward, generous, and splendidly self-reliant—qualities which, combined with many physical charms and graces and a subtle femininity, would have made her sought after anywhere. Like himself, she was health incarnate; her eye, clear as a mountain spring, sparkled with the zest of youth.

In spite of Napoleon's love-making, they were in a fair way to become friends; and she met his gaze with a glance devoid of embarrassment, wondering if his offer were not part of a crude northern joke. She searched his face for some sign of amusement, but failed to find any; instead, she was startled by the intense admiration and devotion with which he regarded her. It came suddenly to her that he was in earnest.

"I am sorry," she said impulsively.

"So am I," frankly answered Napoleon, "but it will pan out all right in the end."

"Yes, that is the way to look at it.

You will find some other woman who will make you much happier than——"

Napoleon stopped her with a gesture.

"I didn't mean that."

"Oh!"

"But I must be off now," he went on composedly; "I am going out after a caribou. When I come back, I'll be around to see if you won't take back the Arctic mitt."

Marion laughed softly. It was music in the man's ears, and his face brightened in ready response.

"You would be so amusing," she said, with sudden demureness, "if——"

"If——"

"You weren't so like your namesake."

Napoleon jerked his fur cap down over his ears, smothered a profane exclamation, shouted instead the command which his malamutes impatiently awaited, and then over his shoulder as he left swiftly:

"Perhaps; but this isn't my Waterloo."

The next instant he disappeared around a bend in the snow trail, and Marion, reentering the cabin, endeavored to resume her perusal of a book on placer mining which she had been reading when interrupted by his visit. Its contents, however, had lost their hold on her attention; the problem of how to break the news to a dozen men, some of them old enough to be her grandfather, that she was not able to be their partners on the trail of life, in conjunction with her seeming inability to prevent Napoleon from living on a false hope, was a more absorbing study than questions of pay-streaks, sluice-boxes, shafts, drifts, and geological formations.

In the meantime, Napoleon, drawing in deep breaths of the brisk, exhilarating atmosphere, "mushed" his dog team down the creek trail in a headlong gallop. The morning was ideal for his purpose; the temperature warm for the northern winter, and the trail smooth and hard, and consequently easy of travel. Life with him was running at high tide, and, glorying in his strength, he raced by the gee-pole urging his dogs to greater speed, while the red blood leaped tingling through his veins at the prospect of the hunt on which he was setting out.

He halted his dogs at the quarters of Barr, the only trader in the isolated sub-Arctic community; and, having tied the leader to a handy stake, entered the post to secure a supply of tobacco for the trip.

Napoleon himself had formerly owned the post, but, finding the life too monotonous, had sold out to Barr, who had arrived in the country a few months before with the close of navigation. The new trader had not adapted himself to conditions in the north as readily as most others do, and the fellowship between him and the miners was still in its incipient state—a condition, however, which had not hurt his status in the community, since the miners, while willing to admit him to closer relations, recognized his right to live as he chose.

"As long as he dips from his own sour-dough bucket, the 'cheechaco' has the right to freeze up alone with his conscience, if he has one. It is a free country," had been "Idaho" Smith's verdict when the matter had been under discussion by Pop Fisher, Napoleon, and himself—and Idaho, because of his fairness, was a sort of ultimate court in the camp, which was far beyond the last stronghold of the law.

The post consisted of a large log cabin, in which the trader's supplies were stored, and a few feet from it a small, one-roomed structure, in which, hermit-like, he dwelt alone and free from interruption. He carried a heavy stock. Lost Hope had been peopled by an organized, but none the less sudden, stampede early the preceding summer. When Pop Fisher, the discoverer, who was then prospecting alone on the creek, had struck pay-dirt that ran seventeen cents to the pan, he was near the end of his provisions, and, after staking what he considered the best claim on the stream, had traveled back to the camp which he was using as a basis of operations. There dwelt all the friends whom he had in the north;

and he had made no secret of his discovery. Practically the whole community had returned with him to the scene of the new strike, not waiting for the river steamer which was coming with the professional traders' supplies for the coming winter.

Napoleon, realizing that only the worst provisions would be sent over the trail to the more remote camp by the regular dealers, had turned trader himself, and, as a result of a hasty journey three hundred miles down the Yukon in a canoe, and a generous use of the wireless telegraph system which the Federal government had established in Alaska, had an abundance of provisions, fresh from the marts of civilization, at the post on Lost Hope by the time the summer was at an end. Knowing that they would not be able to compete with him, the professional traders had left him in full possession of the field. Soon after the beginning of winter, Barr had arrived, and, tired of the life, Napoleon had sold out.

He had another object besides tobacco in stopping at the post. The new trader had never roughed it before. Cooking his own meals and looking out for himself generally were strange experiences to him. His aloofness had held him from hints that would have made his path much easier. But while he might ruin his digestion by his bad cooking, Napoleon reflected, there was no reason why he should be allowed to run the risk daily of burning himself to death. Barr, he had heard, failed to take any care of his stovepipes, which meant that sooner or later they would become corroded by creosote from the wood used as fuel in the north, a problem by no means unimportant in Alaska, where the Yukon stove burns at full blast all winter, and new pipes are hard to secure. It is solved by burning salt in the stove at certain intervals, information which Napoleon intended to impart to the trader.

But as he watched Barr, with whom he had credit, set down the purchase in his day-book, the matter was driven from his mind by the amount charged against him.

"When did you double the price of tobacco?" he asked in amazement.

Barr glanced at him speculatively. "To-day."

"By the ice-worm's skeleton!" cried Napoleon, "what a howl will go up! Mark my words, they'll damn you for a soulless trust."

Barr's eyes snapped.

"Let them," he answered defiantly; but the other, turning to leave, his attention distracted by a series of howls that denoted a fight in his dog team, missed the hostility in the trader's reply, and answered lightly as he hastened to his malamutes:

"Well, I guess you are not up here for your health any more than the rest of us."

A week later, when Napoleon, who had been accompanied on the hunt by several Indians, mushed his dogs back to Lost Hope, he entered the narrow, snow-covered valley at the nearest point possible to the Fisher cabin, the sled groaning and creaking beneath its weight of caribou. As he approached the cabin, with a heart beating high with expectancy, the door flew open, and Marion appeared in the opening with a look of gladness and relief that sent the warm blood in a rush to his face.

"I've been praying for your return," she exclaimed. "You have come just in time."

"Something gone wrong?"

"Yes." She motioned him into the cabin. There was an anxiety in her voice that filled him with alarm. "I want you to promise you will help me."

Napoleon, thrilled by her appeal, faced her. "I will help you," he promised unhesitatingly, and dropped into a chair with an appreciative glance around the room, which had gradually undergone a magic transformation since Marion's arrival on the creek.

Back of the couch, which served as her father's sleeping-place at night, a red Paisley shawl gave a touch of warmth and color to the apartment which otherwise would have been almost somber with the soft, green burlap which hid the barrenness of the

walls; and the gray wolf-skin robes which carpeted the floor of rough lumber. The couch itself was a bower of luxurious sofa-pillows, which Marion, whose fresh young face now showed pale and disturbed against the rich background of the shawl, had worked in the long evenings of the Alaskan winter.

"But, first, do you consider lynching wrong?"

Napoleon stirred uneasily in his seat. The greater part of his life had been spent on the frontier.

"Sometimes," he said guardedly; "especially if it is an American who is lynched."

"Some of the miners, and they appear to be in control, want Barr, the trader, lynched. A miners' meeting will be held to-night."

"Barr? What has he done?"

"He has doubled the price of everything."

"I thought it was only tobacco."

"No, everything; and he refuses all credit."

"The fool! he'll ruin the camp," cried Napoleon, aghast at this information. "Not a fifth of the boys are fixed so they can stand it. They have talked with him, of course."

"Yes. He says that he came up here to make money; that he asks no favors, and will give none."

"He's getting things down to bedrock with a vengeance. What does your father say?"

"That is what troubles me," returned Marion, with a shudder. "He seems determined that Barr shall be lynched, which would be nothing more or less than cold-blooded murder."

"No, not that exactly," explained Napoleon gently. "Here we are without courts and laws. We have only our own code, which is enforced through miners' meetings. Injustice is rare. Barr has the camp at his mercy. Its prospects are good, but it is still in the experimental stage, and he can ruin the majority of us, including, I am afraid, both your father and myself. Nearly all the boys have families outside who are dependent on them. Is it any wonder that they should feel called upon to use desperate measures? Unless Barr returns to the old scale, which, I know, gave him an enormous profit, he will cause terrible suffering."

"Can't we freight in more provisions?"

"It's not absolutely impossible, but the cost would bankrupt us. It's four hundred odd miles to the nearest camp where we could get supplies, and there is no trail. We would have to break one." Napoleon shook his head. "It's out of the question."

"Nevertheless, my father must not be a party to this murder. You can never convince me that it is anything else. I am unable to influence him, so I have come to you."

Napoleon buried his face in his hands, in deep thought.

"He will never be lynched," he said, looking up, a peculiar grimness in his manner. "I give you my promise. But tell me one thing: Why did you come to me?"

"Because you are the only close friend I have here."

Napoleon did not show his disappointment at her answer. He preferred the truth always.

"While I think Barr deserves the knotted end of a rope," he said, "I'm glad you look at the matter in that light. If you women didn't soften our ideas of justice, life up here would be a pretty harsh proposition. I'll save him in some way."

"I trust to you."

Napoleon's heart beat fast because of her words. She should not trust in vain, he resolved; he must divert attention from the trader and check any movement against his life. It would be the toughest job he had ever tackled; far more difficult than Marion ever dreamed, for he would be dealing with men as fixed in their opinions as himself; and from what he knew of Barr he feared that, instead of any backdown on his part, there would be only words and deeds that would make his task doubly hard. One thing would not be so difficult—he could delay the

approach of the crisis, and gain time in which to find some solution of the problem now facing the camp.

In answer to his queries, she told him how some of the individual miners stood in relation to the trader. As he had suspected, a number of them were unreservedly for Barr's death, while others were for confiscating his supplies at the old price-scale, and giving him a few hours in which to leave camp, which, with his ignorance of life on the snow barrens, meant almost certain death from exposure, a fact which was known to Marion.

"You'll prevent that also?" she asked. "He might as well be lynched as cast adrift in this wilderness."

"I'll prevent it, or, if I can't, I'll see that he reaches the next camp in safety," promised Napoleon, rising to go. "In the meantime, don't be disappointed if I don't seem to succeed very well at first."

"I know," replied Marion, with a note of comradeship in her voice. "It's pretty near you and I against the whole camp, but we'll win."

"That's the right spirit," agreed Napoleon admiringly. "We'll win."

Leaving the cabin, he continued his journey down the creek, crossing the frozen stream an eighth of a mile below the Fisher claim to his own properties, which, with his two other men, he had left in charge of "Red Sim," the foreman, who awaited him with the news that they had failed to locate the pay-streak in his absence.

The miners' meeting proved an anxious problem for Napoleon, who, however, with the aid of Idaho Smith, the chairman, succeeded in carrying through his program, though at the cost of Pop Fisher's friendship. The latter, seeing the reward of years of privation and hardship slipping out of his grasp, had assumed the leadership of the extremists, and demanded that Barr either be lynched or run out of camp that night. Against this Napoleon spoke earnestly, advocating the appointment of a committee to hold an official conference with Barr, and present him with a set of drastic resolutions passed by the meeting. At the critical moment Idaho had announced that he favored Napoleon's plan; and the latter won out by a bare majority, Smith and himself being selected as the miners' representatives.

His clash with Marion's father annoyed Napoleon more than the smallness of the number of votes by which he had triumphed. Fisher in the heat of the discussion had forbidden him ever to set foot on his claim again, and had intimated that at bottom the younger man lacked courage—an insult that rankled deeply. Napoleon, out of respect for Marion, had to bear the abuse in silence, and manfully beat back the defiance that sprang to his lips. The quarrel meant that he could no longer visit Marion; that the little conclaves which, he had hoped, might result from their alliance, were impossible, and he had no desire to make matters worse by any act that would prejudice himself in her eyes.

As he left the bunk-house in which the meeting had been held, he found Idaho waiting for him at the door. There was a question in the chairman's eyes, but he did not speak until they were well out of ear-shot.

"Napoleon," he said finally, "you have a card up your sleeve. Is it an ace or a deuce?"

"Neither. I have nothing in reserve."

Idaho drew away from him in evident hostility.

"What's your game, then?" he demanded sternly.

"Nothing," calmly replied Napoleon, who had decided that it was best to confide in Smith. "Pop Fisher's daughter objects to him being a party to a hanging, and I've promised her that Barr's number twelves won't be elevated from Alaska. That's all there is to it. Now, help me."

"Old Fisher has a warm appreciation of your efforts in his behalf," observed Idaho dryly. "That slip of a girl has lowered you into the drift and cut the rope, Napoleon."

"I knew what I was going into," responded the other evenly.

"But what's the use of this conference?"

"I'm sparring for time. In this case nothing succeeds like delay. Besides, something may come of it."

"And if not?"

"Well," said Napoleon, with a sudden inspiration, "we'll boycott the trust."

"How?"

"By going on a fresh meat diet."

"All very well, but where will you get the meat?"

"Caribou! Listen, Idaho; thousands are migrating from the other side of the Rockies down into Central Alaska. We'll organize hunting expeditions. It is only a matter of a forty-mile trip."

"I think you are on the wrong trail," remarked the other. "But I can come pretty near guessing why you gave your promise to that little petticoat up there; and I suppose I might as well stand by you now. So get busy thinking up that caribou proposition, for the conference will be a failure as dismal as a sick army-mule's dream."

Idaho's prediction proved only too correct. At Napoleon's suggestion the conference was put off until the following afternoon. Barr, whom they found by the stove in the smaller cabin, reading the advertisements in a year-old magazine, contemptuously tossed the miners' resolutions into the fire, and refused to budge an inch, in spite of the conciliatory persuasiveness of Napoleon, who tried hard to keep the meeting on a friendly basis.

"You are only wasting your own and my time," declared the trader uncompromisingly, after a long argument. "My goods are here. If you like to pay, you can take them; if you don't, you can leave them. They are mine. I guess I can do what I like with my own property."

"You'll ruin dozens of the boys," objected Napoleon.

"That's their lookout."

"But in ruining them, you simply ruin your market for next year."

"When I dispose of this stock at my present scale—and you have to come to me or starve—I'll be well enough fixed to quit Alaska for good. One winter here is enough for me."

"Many of the boys have families outside," ventured Napoleon.

"And I also have a family," retorted Barr. "Every one must look out for himself. I'm not here for my health—they are your own words."

"What profit did you make at the old scale, Napoleon?" asked Idaho, who until now had remained silent.

"The regular profit up here—four hundred per cent."

Idaho turned on Barr with eyes that gleamed like cold steel. "And you—you want eight hundred!"

The trader winced perceptibly before the miner's honest scorn, but recovered himself quickly.

"You don't have to trade with me unless you want to," he taunted.

"No?" answered Idaho, preparing to leave. "Look here, Barr, you have been treated square in this camp, and in return you have given us a dirty deal. Our only object in coming here to-day was to save you from yourself. You're a cheechaco, and new to the ways of this country, and you are going to be taught a pretty bitter lesson before you get out of this mess. If it hadn't been for Napoleon and myself, you'd have been strung up to the nearest tree last night."

"Stop right there!" thundered Barr, half-crazed with rage. "You can't bluff me with your threats of lynching. You forget that we are on American soil; you forget that the law gives me the right to do as I like with my own property; you forget that there is an institution which out in civilization we call a criminal court to deal with such fellows as you. The goods are mine. Take them at my price or—starve."

Idaho stepped forward, an ugly expression on his face, but checked himself.

"I won't fight with a doomed man," he said very quietly. "You have my pity." And he passed through the doorway into the frosty air.

Napoleon, still believing that there was a possibility of winning over the

trader, remained seated, and returned to the attack with apparently unbroken patience. Barr, however, was in a sulky mood, and met his advances in a manner that made friendly conversation almost impossible, and aroused in the other an anger which was kept under control only by the memory of his pledge.

Napoleon had met with several rebuffs which verged closely on the insulting, and was at a loss what next to do, when he suddenly recalled that he had forgotten to warn the trader about his stovepipes. Rising, he walked over to the heater and inspected them. They were in bad condition already, and the winter was only half gone. The elbow near the roof had become so corroded that in one or two places the flame showed distinctly through holes about the size of a pea.

"Barr," he said, turning around, "you should——"

"Never mind what I should or shouldn't do," snarled the trader, who had been eying him suspiciously. "You may think you are pretty clever, Mr. Napoleon Bannett, with your smooth, slick, sneaking ways, but you don't deceive me. I've seen your kind before."

As he spoke he seized Napoleon by the shoulder and jostled him toward the door. "Now, get out of here!"

The younger man's patience flew to pieces. He shook himself loose.

"I guess you are tired of living," he sneered, and took his departure.

He found Idaho, who chuckled when he heard of Barr's characterization of Napoleon, awaiting him on the next claim up the silent, ice-locked creek along which the population of Lost Hope was scattered at irregular intervals.

"I'll call another meeting for tonight," remarked Smith. "We'll make our report, and then the boys can decide for themselves. I think I can see our friend the trader hitting it up over the last divide."

"There's no need of a meeting tonight. You've forgotten my boycott scheme."

"Too late to start that now."

"It's started already," grinned Napoleon. "That's where I benefited by delaying the conference to this afternoon. We've two-thirds of the boys with us, and the rest had to fall in line."

Idaho regarded him with a look of mingled amusement and admiration.

"You are wasted out here," he said. "You should go to Washington. They need you back there. How did you do it?"

"Well, after several months on bacon, a fresh meat diet looked pretty good to them, and then I appealed to their sense of humor."

"Humor!" cried Smith, with unutterable disgust. "In the name of all that's square and decent, where does the humor come in?"

"The Alaskan miner, my dear Idaho, has a keen sense of humor. Barr is to know nothing of our hunting expeditions, and the picture which I drew of him sitting in his store day after day and anxiously waiting for customers who never came, struck them as irresistibly funny. 'Bu'st or trust' is now our war-cry."

Napoleon had not exaggerated the success which had attended his project. The idea took like wild-fire. By the following afternoon several small parties had mushed quietly with their dogs out of the valley of Lost Hope, and the boycott was on in real earnest. At Idaho's suggestion an inventory had been made of the provisions in the different cabins, and they had been divided equally. There was enough, reenforced by the fresh meat, to last about a week. After that there would be nothing but caribou and a few crates of potatoes, which were to be held in reserve as a safeguard against scurvy — the black scourge of the north.

While the provisions lasted, the miners entered into the boycott with enthusiasm. At the end of the first week on a straight caribou diet they were in a state of resignation that could not last; and by the time the second week was drawing to a close, the terrible monotony of the food was beginning to produce a reaction which grew more pronounced as it became evident that

Barr had no thought of surrender. By the middle of the third week, Napoleon, who at the beginning of the boycott had been regarded as the leading spirit of Lost Hope, perceived that the situation was slipping beyond his grasp. The creek was again growing turbulent; threats began to be made openly against the trader; and while the boycott was still rigidly observed, any suggestion that it might succeed was now received with derision. Idaho's influence alone held the men in check. Napoleon had so fallen in prestige that his words no longer carried weight, but through his men he was able to watch the trend of events with a thoroughness that greatly helped Smith in his unequal struggle.

The men who composed the hunting expeditions were selected by lot, and, as luck would have it, Napoleon himself was chosen in this manner to head one of the parties at the beginning of the fourth week, when events were rapidly shaping themselves for another crisis. If it had been possible, he would have turned the leadership over to one of his companions on the trip, but such a course, he knew, would only invite immediate disaster. The boycott was his own plan; he had persuaded its adoption, and now it was necessary that he should bear his share in the labor which it entailed.

The expedition held no pleasure for him; anxiety for the boycott's success and a new fear that if it failed he would fall in Marion's estimation united to ruin his enjoyment of the sport. Marion he had been unable to see since the day on which he had given her his pledge to save the trader, for his hours had been too crowded to allow him to steal up to the Fisher claim on the few occasions her father had gone down the creek. He had another worry, too. His men already had sunk three times to bed-rock without striking the pay-streak, and were now digging the fourth shaft. His faith in his claim began to waver; logically, it should have been rich because of its location and the surface indications, but he knew from harsh experience that there is no more logic in placer mining than in the game of love.

"Gold is wherever you find it," he had told Red Sim when the third shaft had failed to strike pay-dirt. "There is no science in discovering it. The Klondike proved that."

"Yes," agreed Red Sim, with a string of profanity, "I was one of the wise suckers who stuck by the creek bed on Lower Bonanza and sent the greenhorns up on top of Cheechaco Hill, where they struck it rich."

Despite his efforts to hasten the trip to a conclusion, it was the evening of the fifth day after his departure from the creek before he again saw the smoke rising from the chimneys of the Lost Hope cabins. He perceived almost immediately that his cause was lost. The miners whom they met on the trail greeted him with an ill-disguised contempt and much cursing of caribou—the latter, as he realized, in reality directed against himself. He noticed, also, a sort of distrust in their attitude toward him for which he could not account. It made him uneasy, and, leaving the heavily loaded sled in charge of one of the other men, he stopped at Idaho's cabin to learn what had happened during his absence.

"The boycott will drop to pieces in a few days," Smith said gloomily, in answer to Napoleon's questions. "Which means, of course, that Barr will be dragged before a meeting for trial and punished. But there is something else that is much more important. Somehow the report has crept around that you are in league with Barr, and are to share in his profits; that the boycott is only a clever ruse. I know that it isn't true, but that doesn't help any. There was a lot of talk about you to-day, and some—threats."

"Lynching?" asked Napoleon.

Idaho nodded. "You want to be on your guard. You should go armed."

Napoleon shrugged his shoulders.

"Who started the report—old Fisher?"

"No. It's peculiar, but he laughs at it; says that while you may be crazy, you're not dishonest."

"He's all right at bottom," remarked Napoleon.

"He's been very active yesterday and to-day. Last night he brought a delegation here, demanding that I call a meeting without waiting for your return. I refused. He came again to-night, and I refused again. He has gone down the creek to see some of his supporters, and will be back in a couple of hours to see if I have changed my mind. He doesn't expect you back for a few days yet, and, I think, is trying to bring matters to a head before your return."

Napoleon rose. "I'm going," he said.

"Where?"

"To see if four weeks on caribou hasn't given Marion new light on the fate which the trader deserves, and also to find out what Pop is up to."

Although almost exhausted physically from his forced march back to Lost Hope with the caribou, Napoleon passed up the creek at a brisk gait, and before long saw the light in the window of the Fisher cabin gleaming like a beckoning star against the white expanse of hillside in whose shelter the structure stood.

He had little fear of any interruption. The night had become bitterly cold, and few would be abroad except for some specific purpose. The chance that Fisher might return unexpectedly only lent an element of romance to the venture that appealed to him irresistibly. He was trying to analyze the pleasure which this risk gave him, when he became aware of a figure, muffled in furs, approaching him from the forbidden cabin.

He rushed forward impetuously. It was Marion, dressed in a long coonskin coat, whose high collar framed a face now radiant with unrestrained welcome. Once or twice since he had seen her last, Napoleon, in a measure, had regretted his unqualified pledge to save the trader, but as he gazed hungrily into her eyes, and heard the warm words of praise with which she received him, all his doubts and fears seemed to shrink into nothing.

"It wasn't very hard," he said modestly. "Idaho is standing by me. But how did you know I would come to-night?"

"I didn't," confessed Marion, as they paced slowly up the trail. "I have been out here waiting for you every night that my father has gone down the creek. I was beginning to fear you never would come."

"I'm sorry," said Napoleon contritely. "I've been rather hard pressed keeping the boycott going, and——"

"I know," said Marion, drawing closer to him. "It was wrong for me to ask you to promise to help me; I asked too much."

"I'm glad to help," he replied, slightly embarrassed by the gratitude in her voice. "How are you standing the caribou?"

"I detest it," she replied, with considerable force; "but it is our best friend in this trouble, and, if necessary, I am prepared to live on it for the rest of the winter."

"If only the miners had half your grit, we'd smoke Barr out before another month is gone!" exclaimed Napoleon.

She gave him a swift, sidelong glance, meant to show her appreciation of his praise, but which had the effect of reducing the miner to a state of abject slavery which he would have pitied in another. That she was pleased by his words was evidenced by a pretty pride which they caused in her manner. He experienced a vast elation, but contented himself with walking silently by her side along the narrow path.

"Napoleon," said Marion suddenly, when they had gone some distance, unconsciously calling him by his nickname, "my father says the boycott will fail, though he admits that it was cleverly planned and carried out." She hesitated. "I'm afraid that he intends to see that it shall fail. That is one of the reasons why he went down the creek to-night. He is trying to organize a miners' meeting independent of you and Idaho Smith. I heard him say that it would be called for to-morrow night."

"In that case, I must leave you at

once and see Idaho. An independent meeting would be fatal to us."

"You will come again when you get the opportunity?"

"I'll make the opportunity," he replied boldly; "not to-morrow night, but the night after."

Hurriedly retracing their steps, they left the trail and struck out across the unbroken snow of the claim, while Napoleon told her of her father's visits to Smith, and explained the necessity for himself reaching that miner's cabin first.

In their haste they neglected to pick their steps over the irregular surface, but already had almost reached the cabin, when Marion, who was slightly in the lead, stepped into a deep hole, tripped, and would have fallen heavily on her face, but her companion, with the quickness of a panther, sprang to her side, and caught her tightly in his arms as she plunged forward. In a moment he had her on her feet, and for the fraction of a second his arms remained unrelaxed, her form crushed against his breast, while his whole being shook with suppressed love. A wisp of soft hair brushed his lips; he could feel the caressing warmth of her breath. It was maddening. Every drop of blood in his veins leaped fiercely; incoherent phrases of endearment raced to his lips, but did not pass them. His self-control was superb. He released her.

"Not until the trader is out of the woods," he told himself; and in a sort of daze he walked at her side back to the cabin. At the door they paused.

"Good night, Napoleon," said Marion, with a shade of self-consciousness in her tone. He seized her hand in a grip that hurt; was dimly aware that her eyes shone, and then, turning, rushed down the creek, not trusting himself to speak. Marion, closing the door behind her, went up to the solitary mirror which the cabin boasted, and glanced shyly at her own face. Her eyes were lustrously bright; two rosy spots showed vividly on her cheeks.

Napoleon, reaching Idaho's cabin on the run, burst in without ceremony.

"Has Fisher returned yet?" he demanded.

"Not yet," answered Idaho, who was laboriously trying to repair some of his wearing-apparel.

"He's turning the tables on us. He's going to call a miners' meeting on his own account for to-morrow night. When he comes, tell him that I want the three of us to hold a conference first, not to act until we have talked it all over."

"More delay," said Smith wearily. He glanced keenly at Napoleon, and suddenly fell to laughing.

"Well, what's wrong?"

"Nothing. Only when you come to the conference, don't bring the Fisher girl's mitten along."

"Good Lord!" ejaculated Napoleon, in some confusion. "I didn't know I had it. Laugh, damn you, laugh!"

And with that Napoleon disappeared as impetuously as he had come. He found Red Sim emerging from his own cabin.

"You're a nice specimen!" said the foreman. "I was going out to look for you. You might stay at home occasionally. I've some news for you."

"Where are the others?"

"I gave them the afternoon off. They're on some of the other claims."

They entered the cabin, a hastily built log structure. There was only one room, roughly furnished; with a tier of bunks on one side, in which Napoleon and his men slept; on the other side a table made of whipsawed lumber; and at the end opposite the door a Yukon stove vibrating with its intense heat. The floor was uncovered. Though it was a bare, uncomfortable-looking abode in the flickering candlelight, it had all the charm of home to Napoleon, who had long been without the luxuries of civilization. Throwing off his furs, he dropped, tired out, on an empty box. There were no chairs.

"Fire ahead," he said listlessly, expecting to hear of some new development in the movement against the boycott.

Red Sim wiped the perspiration from

his forehead. "We've struck the pay-streak," he blurted out suddenly.

Napoleon's face grew rigid.

"And it panned—what?" he whispered fiercely.

"I've done nothing but pan all afternoon. The lowest I got was fourteen and one-half cents; the highest, twenty-three cents." The foreman's great fist came down with a crash on the other's broad back. "Napoleon, you crooked old sour-dough! it's coarse gold. You've struck it rich."

Before Napoleon had recovered from his surprise, the foreman, who was a man of few words, had put him in possession of all the details of the discovery.

"Your luck is still with you," he concluded, with an outburst of profanity that stood for nothing but joy.

"The wheel has turned," responded the other soberly; "and it turned almost at the eleventh hour. A few more weeks and I would have been out rustling a job for wages."

"Well, you're fixed for life now. Not only that; we've located the old bed of the creek. We've all been working on the wrong basis. The formation here is peculiar."

"In that case, our discovery means nearly as much to the whole creek as to ourselves. It proves that Fisher's claim is not the only one. Have you given the news out?"

Red Sim's face reddened slightly.

"I'm not a public megaphone," he replied somewhat curtly. "Besides, even if I had felt like telling it, there is a claim below here that is still unstaked, and I want it. I may be able to work it next winter, if all goes well."

"You'll work it, anyway," declared Napoleon. "I'll see to that. I'm going to spring this news on the camp. When will you stake?"

"Now. No use in taking chances. So-long."

The more Napoleon studied the facts which the foreman had laid before him, the more clearly he saw that his fortune had completely changed. The width of the pay-streak, the coarseness of the gold, and many other details which he had learned indicated that he was the possessor of great wealth.

In the first rush of his joy, his thoughts had instinctively turned to Marion, and he had forgotten the boycott and its attendant troubles. When he remembered, doubt again knocked at his heart. The news of the strike would cause so much excitement, he knew, that the trader would be lost sight of for a few days, but as soon as the camp had returned to its normal condition, the problem of food would once more force itself to the front, and it would be a matter of only a short time until summary action was taken, unless in some manner the old scale of prices were restored. And he had given his word that no harm should befall the trader.

"There seems to be only one way out of it," he reflected, after he had brooded over the matter for some time. "If I can't win Fisher over at our meeting, I could buy out Barr at his new scale, and resell to the miners at the old scale."

This meant that he would have to give the trader a mortgage on his claim until the "big clean-up" in the summer; it meant also that Barr would exact a rate of interest on the mortgage that would be beyond all reason, even in Alaska. The pay-streak was rich, but it was impossible to secure more men before the arrival of summer; and, with the small force he now had, the amount of dead work still to be done, and the crude methods by which they would have to operate the claim, there was an uncomfortably big chance that he might be unable to meet the obligation, and that Barr would take possession of the property. Still, it was useless to try to readjust affairs on the creek by any other scheme unless he could win Fisher over to his way of thinking.

In the morning Idaho came to him with the information that Fisher had consented to a conference.

"It's our last stand," he told Napoleon. "The trader has only a few more days to live on this creek. The whole camp is at the breaking-point. Some of the boys are threatening that if a

meeting isn't called they will fix Barr themselves. Fisher promised to calm them. He consented to putting off our conference till to-morrow night."

"Good," remarked Napoleon. "I've some news myself." And he told him of his rich strike.

Idaho was overjoyed. "You should tell the whole camp," he asserted. "It will put new life into the boys. They need it badly."

"The job's yours. Go ahead and tell them."

The news, which spread with lightning rapidity, created a tremendous sensation. In an hour the gloom and uncertainty which for a month had depressed the entire community had disappeared, and the miners, rejuvenated by hope, were flocking to the claim to see for themselves. The small bottle of coarse gold was passed quickly from hand to hand, as the foreman described the discovery. Napoleon allowed several of his visitors to descend the shaft to secure some of the dirt for panning, and in each case Red Sim's statements were fully substantiated.

Men whose faces bore the unmistakable imprint of years of unrewarded labor in the sub-Arctic wilds began talking and laughing like schoolboys. The existence of the old creek bed heretofore had been unknown. They had all been following the wrong clue, and now that they knew upon what basis to work their enthusiasm and joy knew no bounds. The crowd soon broke into little knots of men, laughing and talking excitedly, and going into wild roars of laughter on the slightest provocation. The transformation was complete. Napoleon, standing with Smith on the outskirts of the throng, knew that for that day, at least, nothing would be talked of except the strike.

All the rest of that day and until well into the following morning he toiled with his men, getting out the pay-dirt from which in the summer they would extract the yellow dust which meant fortune and future ease; and then, like a bombshell, came the announcement that Barr, who in some way had learned of the strike, had posted in the night a notice of another rise in prices.

The increase was not very heavy, which indicated to Napoleon that the trader was beginning to lose confidence, but its rank injustice changed the miners in a moment from peaceful, hard-working citizens, into a wild mob howling for immediate vengeance.

With difficulty Idaho and old Fisher, who stood steadfast by his promise not to act until after the conference, held the angry miners in check, pledging themselves that the trader would be put on trial within twenty-four hours unless the former price scale were restored. The men yielded with a sullenness which showed Smith that the delay brought about by the boycott had made matters only worse; but when he spoke of this to Napoleon, the latter laughed grimly.

"Wait," he said, with a finality in his tone that impressed the other. "I have a card up my sleeve this time."

He made up his mind. He would mortgage his claim and buy back the trading-post.

When evening came, he hurried up the creek an hour before the time set for the conference, to keep his tryst with Marion, taking the risk of finding her father at home. Luck, however, was with him. Fisher had been summoned down the creek, and would not return until after the meeting at Idaho's cabin. Marion, who had just learned of the report that he was in league with Barr, amazed him by the intensity of her indignation and anxiety.

"If I had known that it was going to hurt your reputation," she declared almost passionately, "I would never have asked you to help me. Do you know that they were repeating this horrible story this afternoon and making threats against your life? At this very moment my father is endeavoring to quiet some of the miners who are shouting for action against you as well as Barr. He said before he left that it was hardly safe for you to be out to-night. Napoleon, forgive me. I have brought you nothing but trouble."

"It will all blow over," he rejoined cheerfully, secretly exulting in the indignation which she evinced toward his detractors.

But Marion refused to be reassured. "You shall take no more risks," she declared. "I release you from your promise. Stay here until I return."

"Where are you going?"

"To tell my father and Idaho Smith that it is I, not you, who caused all this trouble; to tell the miners that I alone am to blame, and that this story about you is a cruel falsehood."

Napoleon pressed her back into her seat.

"Listen to me," he said. "I have succeeded. To-morrow morning the old-price scale will be restored. If you do this which you intend, all my plans may be destroyed and Barr executed to-night. They will not believe you. They will think that you are trying to shield me because——"

"Yes?"

"We've been seen often together—because you love me." He moved toward the door, feeling that he had wandered out of his depth.

"I don't care what they think," cried Marion. "You are not going down to that cabin alone. They will not dare to attack you in my presence."

Napoleon turned quickly. She was struggling into her fur coat. It was no night for her to be abroad.

"It's impossible," he said, with a slight sternness in his tone as he faced her. Their eyes met. A splendid defiance flashed in the girl's glance, but the great, protecting tenderness in the gaze which she met slowly conquered her.

"As you will," she said, regarding him curiously; "but take this with you." She stepped to a cupboard and handed him a revolver. "It is loaded."

Napoleon laughed.

"You won, after all," he said; "I'm not going alone." And with the weapon ready for action in the side pocket of his fur coat, he passed quickly out of the cabin and started down the trail.

It was an exquisite sub-Arctic winter's night. A pale, white moon flooded the snow of the valley in a chaste light, showing each detail of the landscape, as far as the eye could reach, in soft, subdued outlines; against the clear, cold blue of the heavens the billowy shoulders of the round-topped hills rose dreamy and yet distinct. It was a night for poets and lovers, but Napoleon, immersed in his worries, saw nothing of its beauty as he strode swiftly along the trail.

"Not much chance to ambush me in this light," had been the only thought he had given to the possibilities of an attack; "but I must hurry." The temperature was falling, and before long the valley would be steeped in the frost mists.

As he passed some of the isolated cabins, the noise of angry discourse came to him plainly, and he judged that the passions of the camp were still at the boiling-point. The knowledge, however, did not cause him any trepidation; the prospect of losing his claim, the prize which he had won by privation and hardship, flung him into a state of dejection that left no room for any feeling of fear.

Considering everything in the most favorable aspect, he had hardly one chance in a thousand, he realized, of retaining the property with all its wealth of hidden gold. The slight increase which Barr had announced that morning had eliminated the narrow margin by which he had hoped to pull through, and the loss of the claim would mean that once again he would have to plunge into the terrible uncertainties of stampeding. In his heart he bitterly cursed the trader. At the same time he had no thought of not fulfilling his prediction to Marion that the old prices would be restored on the morrow.

"It's too late to retreat now," he told himself; "and besides, I'll strike it lucky again some time."

Deep in these thoughts, he reached the door of Idaho's cabin without meeting any one on the trail. The sound of voices in earnest conversation informed him that Fisher already awaited his arrival. Outside the door he paused

for a moment, his mind busy with the plan which he would follow at the conference. He intended to announce that he had found a way of bringing Barr to terms; to ask them to remain in the cabin while he went over to see the trader, who, he believed, would only be too glad by this time to exchange his post for a mortgage, bearing practically whatever interest he dictated, on a claim whose immense richness had been demonstrated. Then, after the papers had been drawn up, he would summon Idaho and Fisher to the post to witness the signatures without being aware of the document's contents. This last was necessary, as he knew that the miners never would allow him to make such a sacrifice, and that the knowledge of it, while it would make him the lion of the hour, would only increase the feeling against the trader to such an extent that nothing could save him.

As he was about to enter Smith's cabin, his own dislike for Barr turned suddenly into a mad hatred; and, turning with a curse, he glanced across the narrow valley to the trading-post. It was some distance off, but in the clear moonlight he saw distinctly. Smoke belching from the smaller cabin showed that Barr had heaped high the fuel in his stove when the temperature had begun falling, and that now it must be raging like a furnace.

"No hope of him freezing to death," thought Napoleon with a sneer, and then: "What's that?" He started forward, stopped and peered more intently at the distant building, shaking with the fear of what he had seen. "The cabin's on fire!" he shouted. "If it ever spreads to the storehouse we are lost!"

A thin flame had coiled around the base of the chimney, had seemed to waver for a moment, and then had leaped in demoniac fury into the air. A frenzied cry for help rose from the trading-post.

Idaho and Fisher, hearing Napoleon's shout, tumbled out of the cabin and ran to his side. A glance showed them the peril of the situation.

"We must save the storehouse," said Smith quietly. "Our own lives may depend upon it. There are worse things than going broke."

He bounded back into the cabin, and reappeared in a moment with his Winchester, which he discharged three times in succession, the signal which would call the whole camp to their aid. He repeated it twice. Almost immediately the deep silence of the creek was broken by the answering cries of the miners who lived on the adjacent claims, while from far up the frozen stream came the sharp report of a gun as the signal was passed along.

Napoleon, having the advantage of youth, reached the trading-post first. Barr, who was in a state of fear bordering on prostration, met him with a shriek for help. He had been severely burned; the edge of his coat was on fire, but in his terror he seemed unaware of his danger.

Napoleon beat out the flames with his mittened hands. "How did it happen?" he shouted.

"The elbow in the pipe—I never thought—collapsed."

The sound of many men running broke in on his words. It was a crowd of the miners led by Idaho Smith and old Fisher. As they came within the widening circle of light from the burning structure, Barr, leaving Napoleon, darted up to them.

"Put it out, boys!" he screamed. "It will spread to the storehouse. There! there! The sparks are beginning to fall on the roof. I'll be ruined. Everything I have is staked in this post. For God's sake, boys, help me!"

In the northern wilds differences disappear like magic before a common danger; so it was that the miners, forgetting the treatment given them by the trader, and seeing starvation for every one if the stores were destroyed, surged forward with axes and other implements to raze the doomed cabin to the ground before the flames should leap to the larger structure, which, as has been explained, stood only a few feet away.

All animosity had disappeared with one exception, and that exception was Napoleon, whose keen mind almost in-

stantly had grasped the possibilities of the situation. He ran in front of the miners, and blocked them with the revolver which Marion had given him. High above the roar of the flames his voice rose with piercing clearness:

"He grants no favors; he asks none," he cried. "We gave him a square deal; he gave us a dirty one. He said you could starve if you would not pay his prices. He threatened us with the criminal court. When I told him that many of you had families outside who were dependent on you, he sneered that he could do what he liked with his own property. Now let him save himself from ruin if he can."

"Napoleon's right," shouted Idaho, pressing back the crowd which in its magnanimity would still have responded to the trader's appeal.

"But it's all I've got," pleaded Barr, stupefied by the sudden attack. "I'll be ruined—ruined, do you hear? My God, boys, help me! I have a family—two children."

"That is your lookout." Napoleon repeated the man's own words.

Barr, struck with a sudden thought, turned on him like a demon.

"Why you—you double-faced scoundrel!" shaking his fist in the other's countenance, "you knew that the stovepipe would collapse. You knew that it was defective, and that it was only a question of time until the cabin would catch fire."

"Certainly I knew," laughed Napoleon.

At this, Pop Fisher, who now saw through the younger man's plan, took his place beside him.

"You crazy devil!" he chuckled.

Barr sank on the snow, weeping like a child. Several of the miners, moved to pity, broke from the throng, to be thrown back bodily by Napoleon and his two supporters. A growl of dissent came from the crowd. Barr, defiant, stirred their anger; but Barr, broken and sobbing, appealed to their generosity. Besides, the only provisions within hundreds of miles would soon be in flames. Red Sim and Napoleon's other workmen at this moment came with a rush down the trail and joined him.

"Lord! I thought at first that they were stringing you up," said the big foreman. "So we brought out gats. What's up?"

"I've got Barr where I want him. I am going to play my trump now. Watch me."

He glanced back at the buildings. The fire was burning furiously. The gable of the storehouse would soon be in flames. It was the moment for which he had waited. Barr would never be able to save the larger cabin now without the help of every man present. He motioned the trader, who had stumbled to his feet, to him, while Idaho circulated among the miners and acquainted them with the part which they were expected to play.

"The storehouse is about to catch fire," said Napoleon to the man who had caused him so much trouble. "If it is destroyed, you are absolutely ruined. You will be destitute, without a place to lay your head. You will not be able to secure work of any kind in this camp. You've queered yourself with every one. We can live on caribou, but you must starve. Isn't it so, boys?"

The answer came with a roar: "It is."

"There is one way, and only one way, by which you can save yourself."

"And that?" cried Barr.

"Restore the old prices, and we will save the post."

"I will. I promise."

"Raise your right hand, man, and swear to it here before all the boys. Quick, or you may be too late."

"I swear," shouted the trader, with feverish haste. "If you save the storehouse, I swear that I will restore the old prices on everything."

"Come on, boys, let yourselves out," yelled Napoleon, and with a cheer the miners hurled themselves on the burning cabin. The flames by this time were beating fiercely against the storehouse. A corner of the gable was already ablaze. Napoleon had calculated the progress of the conflagration to a

nicety. The miners would save the larger structure only after a good, stiff fight.

"If you had delayed a minute longer, it would have been caribou all winter," said Idaho, who, black with ashes and grime, staggered up to Napoleon after the flames had been subdued. "My boy, I congratulate you. You are the luckiest man that ever lived.

Napoleon shrugged one shoulder—a habit which he had when he was in fine spirits.

"Luck, nothing!" he replied. "I was Johnny-on-the-spot when the opportunity came. That was all. Here they're coming. I'm going."

But he was too late. The next moment he was the center of a wild, cheering, good-natured mob, and was being carried up the creek on the shoulders of men who a few hours before had been threatening his life.

Catching the excitement, he glanced around his hilarious escort with the air of a conqueror.

"You could never persuade them that I hadn't the whole thing planned out," he thought; "even down to the hour that the stovepipe would come to my aid."

"Speech! speech!" sounded a voice above the tumult. It was Pop Fisher. The crowd took up the cry, and his bearers halted.

"Boys," shouted Napoleon, "the trust is bu'sted flat. It broke our code—the code that demands that all shall hang together and be on the eternal square. If you had stopped to size matters up, you would have seen that sooner or later the trust would need the protection of that code, and that we would have it at our mercy. It was a law-breaker, and therefore had no right to the protection of the law. Now, pardners, let me go home, for I am tired as a Siwash, and hungry and—thirsty as hell."

It was long after midnight, however, before he was able to steal away from the excited populace of Lost Hope, which was then in the middle of a celebration that was to become one of the camp's most cherished chronicles.

In the morning he awoke with a tremendous feeling of relief. He was again one of the leaders of the camp; rich, free from care, full of hope, and with the warm blood of youth coursing through his veins. His thoughts flew to Marion. What would she think? By this time her father would have told her of his triumph, and Pop, who was always an extremist, would minimize not one iota of it. The odds were that he would embellish it lavishly.

Napoleon rolled out of his bunk with a bright smile on his face, and became aware that Red Sim, with a sputtering frying-pan in one hand and a fork in the other, was solemnly contemplating him.

"I thought I would give you a surprise," said the foreman. "I've a breakfast ready for you that's fit for a plutocrat—canned raspberries, mush with condensed cream, bacon crisped to a turn, fried potatoes, scrambled eggs, toast, and coffee—but no caribou!"

"Ye gods!" exclaimed Napoleon, scrambling into his clothes. "Rush it along! I'm famishing!"

"Old Fisher was down to see you," went on Red Sim, flapping the eggs over in the pan with a dexterous turn of his wrist.

"What did he want?"

"Don't know. Left that note for you. Woman's handwriting."

Napoleon seized the letter and tore it open. This is what he read:

> Napoleon, you've reversed history. I'm knitting a new pair of mittens, but in the meantime miss the one which you in your hurry carried off that night. If you should ever happen to be up our way, will you please bring it back? MARION.

Napoleon snatched up his fur cap.

"Which way did Fisher go?" he asked breathlessly.

"Down to the trader's. Here! what's wrong? Come back. Breakfast!"

But Napoleon was already on the creek trail.

O'Rourke, the Wanderer

By Louis Joseph Vance

Author of "Terence O'Rourke, Gentleman Adventurer," "The Private War," "Faraday Bobbs, Free Lance," Etc.

III.—THE GAUNT SERANG

(A Complete Novel)

THE *Panjnab* coaled at Port Said; she was coaling when O'Rourke came alongside in a harbor boat, with his luggage and his man servant Danny, to take passage.

It was mid-afternoon of a sultry June day, and the heat beyond belief. The *Panjnab* swung at anchor in the artificial roadstead, near the entrance to the canal. The coal-barges were lashed alongside, with their complement of impish black figures, incredibly active. One after another the huge, flat boats, piled high with their cargoes of glittering black splinters, were towed into position, to be invaded by a swarming, antlike army of men, women, and children, all with baskets, themselves as black, well-nigh as naked, as the stuff they handled. And then the baskets would begin to fly up the steamer's sides so fast that you couldn't count them, and the coal-heaps to melt away with almost magical swiftness.

The sky was an inverted bowl of brass; Port Said, the city, was like a cluster of gaily colored blocks, thrown heedlessly aside by a tired child; the water, blue and astonishingly still, rose and fell in long, all but imperceptible, undulations; no air moved.

Against this blaze of light and color the coal-barges and heavers were like so many blots of ink. A slight but distinctly perceptible haze of coal-dust enveloped the ship like a black mist. A low moaning filled the air like a dirge: the mournful work-song of the heavers, rising and falling in plaintive monotony, endlessly iterated.

O'Rourke had time to observe all this, for the harbor boat that bore him and his fortunes was delayed at the steamer's side; another had preceded them, and now occupied the gangway. Another intending passenger was shipping from Port Said. O'Rourke was interested to watch.

It was a woman—he was quite near enough to see all details; a slight, trim figure of a woman, becomingly attired in white, with a veil about her head. She went up the steep flights of steps with a cheerful and active air, a springy step, and a certain well-bred manner of calm self-possession. At the top she turned and looked down, watching the disembarkation of her maid—at least one presumed her a lady's maid, from certain indefinable indications — and their luggage.

So doing, the woman on deck drew back her veil to see the better. She seemed to promise uncommon beauty, if one might only get near enough to see distinctly—beauty of the English type, full colored and classical of feature. Her eyes wandered toward the Irishman, and he fancied—and told himself that of course it was only fancy —that she started slightly.

Sure, what interest would she be having in him? What was he to her, that she would be startled at the sight of him? Nothing at all; belike she had never seen nor heard of him before.

At all events, she was quick to drop

the veil and turn away, and, her maid joining her, vanished beneath the awnings of the deck. The boat that had brought her sheered off, and O'Rourke was permitted to board the *Panjnab*. Danny, fussing importantly over the luggage, followed him.

It was a glad day for the Wanderer, that gentleman told himself, that he trod those decks; for now he was definitely on his way to the East, the splendid, the barbaric, and alluring East, that called him ever insistently with a siren voice; the East where his fortune lay—at the rainbow's end.

II.

Twenty-four hours later the Wanderer roused up on his elbow and peered out of the port-hole of his stateroom on the *Panjnab*. An endless vista of flat yellow desert, flaming beneath the sun, met his gaze, unrelieved save by grayish patches of hardy desert shrub, and, far away, a tiny caravan of three camels plodding patiently toward the setting sun.

"Darn the desert!" said Colonel O'Rourke languidly. He sank back in his berth. "Will this old tub," he demanded of nobody in particular (though Danny was at hand to hear), "never slouch through the canal at all?"

Danny, recognizing that he was not expected to answer, and being a young man remarkably acute in the diagnosis of his master's moods, prudently refrained from comment. He sat hunched up on a cabin stool, his intensely red, bullet-shaped head bent low over something upon which he was stitching industriously. It appeared to be a bit of chamois skin, which he was sewing into a rough but strong bag. From time to time he laid this on his knees, while he waxed his thread or deftly found the eye of the needle with an end of it, as gracefully and airily as any seamstress alive.

O'Rourke lay back on his pillows, mopped the perspiration from beaded brows, and crossed his knees in the air. Attired quite simply and unaffectedly in pajamas of sheer Indian silk, he had got as near to comfort as any other passenger on the *Panjnab* in all likelihood; but you would never have believed it from his expression, which was a frank scowl of discontent.

There was excuse for that; the heat of the canal in June is most properly described as unbearable; in point of fact it is little better. The little stateroom was stuffy and close; no breath of air stirred in through the open port; and only a whining punka swaying tediously overhead served to make the prospect of continued existence tolerable.

Yet it was not altogether the heat that disturbed O'Rourke and rendered him moody and dissatisfied; he was a seasoned traveler; could stand much more in the way of high temperatures than the average tourist. It was the simple fact that he felt it unwise to go on deck ere the sun should set, or Aden be left behind, that irritated him. In other circumstances he had been quite content to abide where he was; but he resented the fact that anything should be denied him.

Hence O'Rourke fumed. He smoked, and found it overheating. He tried to pin his attention to a yellow-backed French novel, which at any other time he would have found amusing, and failed. He squirmed restlessly, but found no cool spot in his berth. The devil had it!

Since boarding the *Panjnab* he had been at pains rigorously to seclude himself in his cabin, lest he be recognized ere the boat left Suez and unpleasantnesses ensue. He had a very lively apprehension of trouble brewing, based upon past experiences. From the look of the stateroom, you would have fancied that he expected to be besieged even there, and put in peril of his life. For a revolver lay convenient to his hand, and its mate was as near Danny's, ready (one would presume) for instant use in a moment of need. And the door was securely locked and bolted, and its keyhole stuffed with a little wad of paper.

The cause of these extraordinary

precautions against surveillance or surprise presently transpired. For, even as the sun dipped beneath the rim of the desert, and a pleasant shadow invaded the cabin—until then lurid with its level rays—Danny sat up, dropping thimble and thread, and announced the completion of his needlework by a brief word: "There!"

O'Rourke glanced at the article dangling from the valet's fingers, and slammed the French novel against the partition at the foot of the berth.

"Finished, is it?" he exclaimed. "Faith, 'tis time, ye lazy good-for-naught!"

Danny smiled serenely. "An' a good job, too, sor," said he proudly. "M'anin' no onrespict to yer honor," he added hastily.

O'Rourke grunted acceptance of the implied apology, and sat up on the edge of the berth, stretching forth a hand. "Let me see it," he demanded. "Sure, if there's a weak stitch in it, Danny, I promise I'll boot ye over the side."

"Nivver fear, yer honor. 'Tis a foine, strong job."

O'Rourke took the subject of discussion in his fingers and turned it over, examining it searchingly. It discovered itself, in fact, a bag of chamois skin, neatly gathered at the neck with a leathern thong strong enough to bear a heavy weight, and unacountably long.

"'Twill do," announced the Wanderer. "'Twill serve its purpose, if no more. 'Tis a great comfort to me, Danny, to know that, if all else fails ye, ye can earn a comfortable living doing plain needlework. Lay out me evening clothes, now."

He stood up, stooping to peer through the port-hole. "Good enough," he commented on what he saw without; "'tis passing Suez we are this blessed minute. Praises be, we caught a boat that doesn't stop here!"

Danny scratched his head thoughtfully. "Yiss, yer honor," he assented dubiously. "But, fer all that, phwat's to hinder anny wan from boordin' us be boat, if they sh'u'd want to?"

O'Rourke turned and eyed the boy keenly. "'Tis a great head ye have on your shoulders, Danny," he said. "Sometimes ye exhibit almost human intilligince. I have hopes of ye. Now get ye on deck and watch who does come aboard, if any one, and report to me."

"Yiss, yer honor."

O'Rourke bolted the door after his valet, and sat down to ponder something which apparently troubled him deeply—something connected with the little chamois bag, to judge from the contemplative stare he bent upon it. Eventually he sighed heavily and shook his head.

"The divvle, the divvle!" he murmured pensively. "What will be the end of it all, I wonder? Sure, 'tis the heavy risk we run! Yet, faith, I dare believe now that we've outwitted them at last! I'll take me word no one followed us to Port Said; and if by the grace of God we leave Suez with no misadventure, I'l breathe freely for the first time in as much as three months!"

He arose and, in his bare feet, moved noiselessly to the door. A moment's investigation assured him that the keyhole was properly wadded, that no crack existed through which his movements might be observed from the gangway. Shrugging his broad shoulders, he returned to the seat vacated by his valet, and thrust his hand beneath the coat of his pajamas, withdrawing it a moment later, fingers tightly gripped about a rather bulky object.

This, when it lay uncovered in his palm, proved to be nothing less than the counterpart of the result of Danny's needlework; a small, leathern bag, which he had worn slung about his neck by a stout lanyard of the same material. It was, however, in striking contrast to Danny's production, indubitably aged, worn thin in places, smooth in others, badly stained—altogether in a state of disrepair affording sufficient reason for the manufacture of another bag to replace it.

Obtaining a penknife from the pocket of trousers that swung from a hook behind the door, the Wanderer slit the old, thin thong, and, opening

the mouth of the bag, permitted that which it held to roll forth into the hollow of his hand.

"The Pool of Flame" it was named, aptly enough; it lay glittering and stabbing the Irishman's eyes with blood-red shafts of light, an immense ruby, of price incalculable, of quality inestimable; a jewel to grace the diadem of an empress, the regalia of a king.

Into its pellucid, fiery depths O'Rourke gazed long and earnestly, fallen into the profoundest of meditations. For minutes he did not move, save to shift the gigantic stone from side to side, watching it catch and glorify the fading light of day. The most somber of thoughts seemed to fill his mind as he looked; his straightforward and dauntless eye went clouded, his unlined brow was shadowed as with apprehensions. Surely a strange sensation to this man, to whom fear was a stranger, misgivings a bare acquaintance. His very voice had an ominous ring in its timbre when he spoke at length.

"Blood," he said slowly; "blood—I misdoubt that rivers of blood have flowed for the sake of ye. Belike ye were fashioned of blood in the beginning, for 'tis that's your color; and the story of ye, as I've heard it, is all told when I've said that one word—'blood'!

"And 'tis meself that's to take ye to far Burma, is it? 'Tis meself that's to make an everlasting fortune out of the return of ye to the man that once owned ye, eh? I don't know why—'tis not like the O'Rourke to be timorous—but I begin to believe that, fair as the future seems, I'll never do it. The odds are too great, I'm thinking, even for the O'Rourke. Were ye not a sacred trust in me hands, 'tis timpted I'd be to fling ye overboard and spare the world the thousand murders more that will be charged to your account ere the last thief writes 'Finis' to your story.

"But"—and here he slipped the ruby into the new receptacle and drew tight the lanyard, knotting it about the puckered throat—"for the sake of the O'Mahoney I'd dare great odds—rest his soul! Let me but carry this through and get the reward, and 'tis never a cent of it I'll touch, for all I was to have half—barring me traveling expenses, which I'll take for Danny's sake. No; every last farthing shall go to Norah O'Mahoney, and may she prosper with it, bless her innocent little heart!"

He stood up and threw the loop of the lanyard over his head, permitting the bag with its precious contents to fall beneath the folds of his jacket, and, shaking off the sober mood inspired in him by the study of the stone, turned and rang for the stateroom steward. To whom, when he responded, O'Rourke gave a summons to be delivered to Danny—"if so be it we are clear of Suez."

In the course of five minutes or so Danny himself tapped on the door, and presented to his master a beaming face.

"Divvle a sowl, rayspects to ye!" he announced triumphantly. "Sure, 'tis ourselves that have given thim the slip entirely!"

He pulled a brand-new kit-box from beneath the berth, and, opening it, began to lay out O'Rourke's evening clothes.

The Wanderer drew a long breath of relief. "Then no boat put off to us at all?" he questioned indifferently.

"Only wan," replied the servant, "an' thot wid no wan in ut but a naygur."

"A negro?" demanded O'Rourke, facing about. "What do you mean? Did he come aboard?"

"Sure an' he did thot, yer honor. Faith an' he caught us be no moor thin the skin av his tathe and——"

O'Rourke bent over the boy, and, seizing him by the shoulders, swung him around so that his eyes met his master's. "What the divvle," demanded the adventurer, "did ye mean by telling me nobody boarded us, then? What——"

"Sure, yer honor! Aw, yer honor, an' 'tis mesilf meant no harrm at all, at all!" protested Danny. "Didn't I say thot divvle a sowl came aboord? Sure, thin, has a naygur a sowl?"

With an impatient, exasperated gesture, O'Rourke released the boy. "'Tis too much for me ye are," he said helplessly. "Now and again I believe ye have the makings of a man in ye, and then ye go off and play the fool like this! If I didn't believe ye were sincere, Danny, a pure simpleton with not an ounce of mischief in your body, I'd take that out of your worthless hide. Get on with ye! Tell me about this 'naygur.' What sort of a black man is he?"

"Sure, sor," whimpered Danny, "'tis meself that w'u'd die rather thin have ye talk to me thot way, yer honor. Upon me sowl, I niver thought ye'd worry about a poor divvle av a naygur, come aboard wid nothin' but a saychist and the clothes he walks in, beggin' for a chanst to worrk his passage to Bombay, sor!"

"And did they let him sign on, then?" inquired O'Rourke, slightly mollified by his servant's humility, as well as by the apparent inconspicuousness of the new passenger.

"Divvle a bit, rayspicts to ye"—more cheerfully. Danny struggled with the studs in the master's shirt. "Th' purser was all for kickin' him back to his boat, sor, whin he offered to pay his passage in the steerage. So they let him stay, sor."

"Seem to have plenty of money?"

"Aw, no, yer honor. 'Twas barely able he was to scrape it all together."

"Lascar?"

"I belave so, yer honor. 'Tis harrd for me to say. Wan av thim naygurs is as much like another as two pays, sor; 'tis all tarred wid the same brush they are."

"Ah, well!" The adventurer girded on his harness for the evening, his satisfaction increasing and his temper bettering as he regarded himself in the stateroom mirror, and saw that his coat fitted him to perfection, that his trousers were impeccable in cut and material, that his shirt was spotless, his tie knotted with just the right effect of negligence—not too pronounced; that, altogether, he looked the gentleman he was by right of birth.

"Ah, well," he resumed more pacifically, "belike he's what he seems to be, Danny, and has no concern with us at all. Whether or no, care killed the cat. D'ye mind, Danny," he swung off at one of his characteristically wide tangents, "the little woman with the red hair? Though 'tis meself should beg the lady's pardon for mentioning the color of her hair in the same room with that outrageous headlight of yours, Danny. D'ye mind her I mean?"

"The wan ye observed at Poort Said, sor? The wan ye told me to discover the name av?"

"'Tis a brave detective ye would make, Danny. Ye have me meaning entirely."

"Aw, yiss." Danny's lips tightened as he laced O'Rourke's patent-leather shoes. He cast up at his master's face an oblique glance of disapproval. "I mind the wan ye mane," he admitted.

He arose, and as he did so O'Rourke gently but firmly twisted the boy around by the ear, and as deliberately and thoughtfully kicked him.

"What the divvle is the matter with ye, Danny?" he inquired, in pained remonstrance. "Is it mad ye are, or have ye no judgment at all, ye scut, that ye dare speak to me in that tone?"

Solicitously Danny rubbed the chastened portion of his person, grumbling but unrepentant. "'Tis the wimmin," he complained; "'tis always the wimmin, beggin' yer honor's pardon. Sure an' yer honor knows they do be forever gettin' us into trouble. 'Tis no more thin wance we get comfortable an' aisyloike in our minds, whin wan av thim pops up and drags ye off into some shindy or other——"

O'Rourke grinned tolerantly, retaining his hold upon the servitor's ear. "Her name?"

"Ow, yer honor, leggo! Missus Mervyn, sor!"

The Wanderer gave the ear another tweak, by way of enforcing the lesson. "Mrs. Mervyn, is it? And how did you learn that, Danny?"

"'Twas her maid told me, sor. Leggo, yer honor, plaze——"

"And how did her maid come to tell

ye, ye great, ugly, long-legged omadhaun?"

"Sure—ow!—'twas a bit av a kiss I was by way av givin' her, sor——"

"That'll do, Danny," O'Rourke chuckled.

The trumpet-peal announcing dinner interrupted a contemplated lecture on the ethics of investigation and the perils of flirtation as between maid and man servant. He turned away, still smiling his amusement. Danny delayed him an instant, flicking the last, least speck of dust from the lapel of his master's dress-coat, then permitted the immaculate man to depart.

"'Tis the bowld, dashing man he is," meditated Danny, without malice, when the door had closed behind O'Rourke. "Pwhat woman in all the worrld would be holdin' out agin' the loikes av him, now? Sure, befure the avenin's done 'tis himself will be sittin' wid his arm crooked about the lady's waist, showin' her the moonlight on the wather!"

III.

If Danny's notions of love-making, as practised by those in stations of life above his own, were slightly colored by his own honest methods, his understanding of the cause of O'Rourke's interest in Mrs. Mervyn was more at fault.

The Wanderer had come upon that lady but once since he had boarded the *Panjnab*. That morning, himself early astir because of his vague misgivings, he had discovered her on the hurricane-deck of the liner; an inconspicuous, slight figure in the shadow of a life-boat, leaning upon the rail and gazing with (he fancied) troubled eyes out and across the desert waste below Ismailia. Seeing her at such close quarters, and in the clear light of the new day, he had been struck afresh with that impression her personality had conveyed to him, the evening before, of beauty and breeding beyond the ordinary.

Though she must have been conscious of the approaching footsteps, she had not stirred from her contemplative pose; and he had passed on, gaining but a fugitive glimpse of a profile sweetly serious—indefinably saddened. When he had made the round of the deck and returned to the spot, Mrs. Mervyn had vanished; nor had she appeared at breakfast or luncheon in the dining-saloon—a circumstance which led O'Rourke to surmise that she did not court observation; which was passing strange, in one so fair.

The memory of her, however, had remained with him throughout the long, hot hours of the day; and, dwelling upon it, he had—imaginative Celt that he was—invested her with an illusion of mystery, wholly of his own construction. He told himself that she had worn an air of watchfulness, a vague and indefinable expectancy, as though she, too, feared some untoward mishap; that she had the manner of one definitely fearful, constantly on her guard against some foreseen peril.

Now, he asked himself, what could it be? What threatened her? And why?

Sure (and you can see the man straighten his shoulders and look about himself, as though challenging the world), there was no good reason for any woman—more especially so attractive a woman—to fear aught when the O'Rourke was at hand to shield her—for the asking. And he dimly promised himself the pleasure of her acquaintance (relying on the rapid intimacy that springs up between strangers on a long voyage), with a more indefinite intention of putting himself at her service in whatever cause she might name.

At least, he would be entirely at her command, if that did not interfere with his plans for reaching Rangoon and ridding himself of that perilous treasure, the Pool of Flame. The trust of the dead O'Mahoney must be discharged ere he could lend his heart and sword to another.

This very evening he was hoping to discover the lady at dinner; but, though the ship's company was small, he failed to find her in the saloon, at either the

captain's or the chief officer's tables. Nor, so far as he could determine, was she taking the air on deck.

Was it possible, then, that he had been right, that she had a reason equally as compelling as his own for secluding herself? Or, was it simply—and infinitely more probably—that Mrs. Mervyn was indisposed, enervated by the excessive heat?

As a matter of fact, this latter conjecture proved the right one. Mrs. Mervyn failing to appear at meals or on deck during the two following days, while the *Panjnab* rocked down the channel of the Red Sea, O'Rourke grew interested enough—he had little else to occupy his mind, for a duller voyage he had never known—to give Danny permission to pursue his inquiries (with an injunction, however, against too lavish a squandering of the man servant's wealth of affection). Whereupon Danny returned with the information that the mistress of Cécile (this time the boy succeeded in learning the maid's name, also) was suffering from exhaustion induced by the heat.

This was entirely reasonable. O'Rourke accepted the demolition of his airy castles of romance, and tried to laugh himself out of what had threatened to pass into infatuation. And in part he was successful in putting the woman from his mind; doubtless, in due course of time, he would have done so altogether, had not the lady in question chosen to take the air on the promenade-deck the night that the *Panjnab* negotiated the Straits of Bab-el-Mandeb.

For it was so ordered that O'Rourke, himself wakeful, had been minded to sit up and watch the lights of Perim Island heave into view, if the *Panjnab* delayed not too long in the passage.

Circumstances were entirely favorable, for the night had fallen passably cool and surpassably beautiful, a strange, still night of stars, with a moon that rose before eleven, and, waxing in strength, showered the world with its weird glamour. O'Rourke, in a deck-chair on the starboard side, well cloaked in the shadow of the deck above, watched the other passengers, one by one, quiet their vapid chatter, yawn and stretch, and go below to stuffy staterooms. Save for the pulsing of the screws the liner was silent by eight bells; even the quaintly mournful *"All's well!"* of the watch was distinctly audible in the great stillness. O'Rourke, at that hour, found himself in solitary possession of the deck; and was not ill pleased.

He let a dreamy eye rove where it would, drinking in the superb illusion of the night. Abeam, and far across the moon-smitten waters, the precipitous coast of Arabia Deserta marched slowly across the horizon, a low, black line gradually rising as the straits narrowed. The sea, where the moon's trail did not rest quivering, lay black as ink, as smooth and highly polished as a mahogany surface and apparently as motionless.

Awed by this unearthly splendor, O'Rourke was reluctant to stir; it were a profanation to smoke, even as the shudder and surge of the driven ship was a profanation; unconscious of the passage of time, and oblivious to it, the Irishman fell into deep reverie, steeping his soul in vague Celtic melancholy, pondering those futile days of adventure that lay behind him, seeking carelessly to solve the problem of his future.

Four bells—two o'clock—chimed upon his consciousness like a physical shock. He verified the hour by his watch, and, reluctantly enough, agreed that it was time he got to bed. He half-rose from his chair, then sank back with an inaudible catch at his breath.

Without warning, the apparition of a white-clad woman had invaded the deck. For an instant he hardly credited the evidence of his eyes, then, with a little nod of recognition, identified the personality of Mrs. Mervyn.

Beyond doubt unconscious of his presence in the shadowed chair, she fell to pacing the promenade-deck, forward and aft and back again, walking swiftly and without sound in her deck-

shoes. Now and again she stopped, and with her chin cradled in her hands, elbows on the rail, watched the approaching cliffs of Arabia. Then, with perhaps a sigh, she would return to her untimely constitutional.

Partly because he had no wish to startle her, partly because he was glad to watch her unobserved—he had a rare eye for beauty, the O'Rourke—the Wanderer sat on without moving, if a prey to active curiosity.

The oddity of her appearance upon the deck at such an hour fascinated his imagination no less than her person held his eye. He gave himself over to a vain and profitless speculation as to what it all meant. Why, he wondered, should she have kept to her cabin the greater part of the evening, only to take the air when none might be expected to observe her?

Why, if not to escape such observation? Then, he told himself, he must be right in his supposition that she had something to fear, or some one to avoid. What, or whom? What meant it all? What the mystery that, as he watched her, seemed to grow, to cling about her like some formless, impalpable garment?

Events conspired to weave the man into the warp and woof of her affairs, to give him, within the next ten minutes, an inkling of her purpose.

More quickly than he could grasp the reason for his sudden action, the Wanderer found himself afoot and dashing aft at the top of his speed. But an instant gone Mrs. Mervyn had passed him, unmolested and wrapped in her splendid isolation of thought. But now, from the farther end of the promenade-deck, he heard a slight and guarded cry of distress, and a small, scuffling sound.

In two breaths he was by her side, to find her struggling desperately in the arms of a lascar—one of the deck-hands of the steamer, by the look of him.

At first the strangeness of the business so amazed O'Rourke that he paused and held his hand, stood fairly rooted in inaction for a brief space. For, although it was apparent that she had been caught off her guard, wholly unprepared against such an unprecedented assault, and while she struggled fiercely to break the lascar's hold, still she uttered no sound. A single scream would have brought the ship's complement to her aid; yet she held her tongue.

The two—the woman's figure, slight and white-robed, and the lascar's, gaunt and sinewy—strained, fought, and swayed silently in the shadows, tensely, with the effect of a fragment of some disordered nightmare. Quick-witted as he was, the Wanderer was for a time at a loss.

And then, as the lascar seemed about to overpower his victim, she was swung about, struggling, so that she faced O'Rourke. Their eyes met, and in hers he read a mute and desperate appeal that electrified him. In a thought he had thrown himself upon the lascar's back.

With one strong arm deftly he embraced the fellow, the elbow beneath his chin forcing his head up and back. With the other hand O'Rourke tore away an arm that encircled the woman, and that, be sure, none too gently. An instant later, wrenching him aside, he sent a knee crashing into the small of the lascar's back, all but breaking him in two, and so flung him sprawling into the scuppers.

Without a murmur, the man slid backward, on his shoulders, a full half-dozen feet, while O'Rourke got a momentary glimpse of his face in the moonlight—dark-skinned and sinister of expression, with white and glaring eyeballs. Then, in one bound, he was on his feet again, and springing lithely back to the attack; and as he came a jagged gleam of moonlight ran like lightning down the sinuous and formidable length of a creese—that most deadly of knives.

O'Rourke fell back a pace or two, casting about him for a weapon. His own hands were empty, and the revolver that he seldom went without was in his stateroom; he had nothing, beyond his naked fists and high courage,

wherewith to defend himself against the lascar and his creese.

Nevertheless, keenly alert, the Irishman threw himself into a defensive position. He was yet to give up a fight because the odds were long against him. He speculated briefly on the possibility of running in under the lascar's guard and grappling with him, thereby escaping with (perhaps) a slight cut.

But he was not to encounter that appalling danger, it seemed. The snarling lascar was brought to terms in quite a different fashion. O'Rourke had, for the nonce, forgotten the woman; it was enough that he had made possible her escape, and he had no thought other than she had fled to the security of the saloon-deck. It was, therefore, with as much surprise as relief that he caught the glimmer of her white figure as she thrust herself before him, and saw the lascar bring up in the middle of a leap, his nose not an inch from the muzzle of an army Webley of respect-compelling caliber.

Simultaneously he heard her voice, clear and incisive if low of tone: "Drop that knife!"

The creese rang on the deck.

"Faith!" murmured the Irishman, "what manner of woman is this, now?"

She did, indeed, demand admiration. The weapon in her hand was firm and steady; and she held herself as she did it—with superb assurance.

As for the lascar, he was as rigid as though carven in stone—long, gaunt limbs shining softly brown beneath the dazzling white of his cummerbund, the upper half of his body lost in shadow; a blur of white standing for his turban.

O'Rourke stepped forward, with a quick stoop possessing himself of the creese, and stretched forth a hand to seize the fellow, when the woman interrupted decisively.

"If you please—no," she said.

Bewildered, the Wanderer turned. "I beg your pardon——" he said in confusion.

She did not reply directly; her attention was all for the lascar, whom her revolver still covered. To him: "Go!" she cried sharply, with a significant motion of the weapon.

The lascar stepped back, with a single wriggle losing himself in the dense shadows.

O'Rourke fairly gaped amazement at the woman, who, on her part, retreated slowly until her back touched the railing. She remained very quiet and thoroughly mistress of herself, exhibiting no trace of agitation beyond a slightly quickened respiration and a cold pallor of excitement. Her glances raked the deck on either hand; it was plain that she had no faith in the lascar, but apprehended, perhaps, his return; yet her splendid command of her nerves forced a gasp of admiration from the Irishman.

"Faith!" he cried, breaking a tense silence, "'tis yourself that shames me, madam, with the courage of ye!"

She flashed him a glance, as if startled from a deep reverie, and laughed slightly. "Thank you," she returned. "I'm sure I don't know where I should be now but for your gallant conduct, sir."

"'Twas nothing at all. But ye'll pardon me for suggesting that ye have made a mistake, madam?"

"A mistake?" she echoed; and then thoughtfully, "no, I should not call it that."

"Be letting him go, I mean. Neither of us, I believe, saw him well enough to be able to identify him. When ye report this outrage to the captain, whom will ye accuse?"

The woman stood away from the rail, replacing the revolver in a pocket apparently hidden in the folds of her skirt. She laughed again lightly—a deep-toned laugh that thrilled O'Rourke. She was indeed a woman among women, who could laugh after such an experience; a woman after his own heart.

"I shall accuse no one," she said quietly, "for I shall not report the affair."

"Ye will not——" he cried, astounded.

"Indeed I am sincere; I shall do nothing whatsoever about it. It is, moreover, a favor which I shall ask of

you, to say no word of the matter to any one."

O'Rourke hesitated, unwilling to believe that he had heard aright. Yet, "Believe me," she told him earnestly, "I have good reason for making this request so unaccountable to you."

"But—but—Mrs. Mervyn——!"

"Oh, you know me, then?" she interrupted sharply. And her look was curious and intent.

"I—'tis—faith!" O'Rourke stammered. He felt his face burning beneath her gaze. "Me valet told me," he confessed miserably. "'Tis a bit of a flirtation he's been having with your maid, Cécile, I believe, madam!"

"Ah, yes." She seemed unaccountably relieved by his explanation. "You, then, are Colonel O'Rourke?"

He bowed. "Terence O'Rourke, madam, and at your service, believe me."

"I am very glad," she said slowly, eying him deliberately, "that, since I had to be aided, it came through one of whom I have heard such high praise for gallantry."

"Faith, Mrs. Mervyn——!"

"And I thank you a second time, very heartily!" She offered him a small, white hand, smiling bewitchingly.

The tips of her slender fingers upon his own, he bent over them, and before he had time to contemplate the audacity of it, had brushed the back of that small, frail hand with his lips.

"'Tis embarrassing me ye are," he protested. "Faith, to be thanked twice for so slight a service! I can only wish that I might do more."

"It is possible," she said, apparently not in the least displeased by his presumption. "It is possible that I may take you at your word, Colonel O'Rourke."

In her eyes, intent upon him, he fancied that he recognized an amused flicker, with, perhaps, a trace of some deeper emotion—the kindling interest of a woman in a strong man—with whose signals he was not unfamiliar. Pride and his self-conceit stirred in his breast.

"'Twould be the delight of me life," he told her in an ecstasy.

"Do not be too sure; I warn you, colonel." Her air was arch, her smile entirely charming. "It might be no light service that I should ask of you."

"Ye cannot ask one too heavy. Is it tired ye are, Mrs. Mervyn?" he inquired solicitously.

"Very." And there was an infinite weariness in her voice. Her manner had changed. She moved away from him, her head drooping as if with lassitude and fatigue. Very fragile and pitiful she seemed to him, standing there in the moon glamour.

"I am but a woman, Colonel O'Rourke," she said faintly, with a little, tired gesture; "and my ways are hedged about with great perils——"

"'Tis the O'Rourke who would dare them all for ye," he said tenderly, advancing.

His hand closed upon hers that had sought the rail for support. "Madam——" he began, his voice all a-thrill.

She turned and lifted her gaze to his face. Beneath his ardent eyes she colored divinely. Her head was near his shoulder, and the faint, intangible, inexpressible perfume of her hair intoxicated him. Her scarlet lips parted.

It is at this point that your novelist of delicacy would hastily draw a veil of discretion, leaving his audience to wonder and to speculate how she won him. Not such must be the methods of the veracious biographer of the gallant Wanderer's career. You must steel yourself to hark to Tragedy's dull note in the fluting of this idyl.

You must have the picture of them in your mind; the two alone there on the promenade-deck, alone with the night, the silence, the sea, the moonshine, swaying inevitably into one another's arms; the Wanderer carried off his feet by this new-born infatuation; the woman—— But who shall say what is or was in a woman's mind?

And then you must figure to yourself the manner in which they started apart, each (I dare say) with a choking throat and a clutching heart. You must hear, as they heard, the harsh yet deadened

detonation of an explosion, followed by a grinding crash and the shriek of riven steel, somewhere deep in the hold of the vessel. You must hear, likewise, the subsequent and immediate clamor of human voices, the shouts, the cries, the roared commands, the screams of terror. And you must feel the great liner shiver and shudder beneath your feet, like a stricken thing, hesitate in its steady southward surge, then slowly limp to an impressive halt, to a full stop on the face of the waters.

IV.

There are few tales, however strange and terrible, that strike more chill to our hearts than those that tell of disaster at sea. It is the common heritage of all men, whatever their age, rank, color, caste, or creed—the fear of death by drowning.

Sharing this mutual fear as they did, stout as were their hearts—and it would he hard to say which wore an exterior of great composure, O'Rourke or the woman—an iceberg intervening could not have swept them apart more effectually than this sinister happening.

It was not that O'Rourke thought of himself alone, for in truth his first fears were for the woman, his first words a lie designed to reassure her.

"What—what does it mean?" she gasped faintly.

"Sure, I'm thinking 'tis nothing at all," he averred readily, with a smile, "nothing of any great consequence, that is to say. Permit me to escort ye to your cabin. But, one moment."

He bent over the rail, glancing down the side of the vessel and fore and aft. To his eye—and his sight was sharpened, you may be sure—the *Panjnab* rested on an even keel, nor seemed to have settled: a circumstance which tended to remove his instant fear that the vessel had struck upon one of those sharp-toothed coral-reefs with which the Red Sea is so thickly studded.

"There will be life-preservers in the lockers over there," said the Wanderer; "and if 'twill reassure you, I'll be happy to help you adjust one. But I don't think 'tis necessary. From the look of things, I should judge 'twas no more than an accident in the engine-room."

"I am not afraid," she interjected.

"Faith! I see that, madam. But your maid, now? Would it not be best to return to your stateroom and quiet her, while I ascertain the cause of this trouble? I promise to advise ye instantly, whether there be danger or not."

"You are very thoughtful," she returned. "Your advice is much the best. Thank you."

At her stateroom door he left the woman, remarking the location and renewing his pledge to return in ten minutes—more speedily, if possible. As, in fact, proved the case. He was back in five, with a long face.

Mrs. Mervyn answered instantly his double-knuckled summons on the panels, a prearranged signal, for the woman (he thought) feared a repetition of the lascar's attack, in the disorder, and would not open to any whom she did not know. In confirmation of this deduction, the adventurer noted a circumstance that impressed him forcibly.

Mrs. Mervyn opened the door, and, stepping out quickly, closed it tight. In the fraction of a second that it swung wide, however, the eyes of O'Rourke got a snap shot of one side of the stateroom, warm and bright with electric light. And on the edge of the berth sat Mrs. Mervyn's maid, completely dressed, wide-awake, and vigilant.

The girl was French, dark and sullenly handsome after her type; O'Rourke received an impression of a determined chin, with resolute eyes beneath level brows; and he did not in the least doubt that she was quite prepared to make good and effectual use of the revolver which she held pointed directly at the door.

Why?

From her mistress' pose, too—one arm stiffly at her side, the hand concealed in the folds of her gown—the Wanderer divined that she was on the

alert, armed and on her guard no less than the maid.

Here was something deeper than he had fancied. But he had no time to rack his brain over the mystery. Moreover, it was not his part to comment—at least until the woman herself reopened the subject of the lascar.

"Well?" she demanded breathlessly.

"'Tis as I thought, Mrs. Mervyn. A cylinder-head blew off the starboard engines, and a broken shaft, threshing about, has done no end of damage. We're badly crippled, if in no danger. The other screw will take us as far as Aden, where we'll have to wait for the next boat."

Mrs. Mervyn's brow clouded. "A delay!" she cried, in dismay. "For how long—a day or two?"

"Mayhap," he replied, in a tone no less disconsolate; "mayhap as much as a week. Faith! 'tis meself that would have it otherwise, but I fear there's no way out of it."

"Then you, too, travel in haste, colonel?"

"Indeed and I do so, madam. Me fortunes depend upon the swiftness of me voyage. If I get there"—he checked up in time, the word Rangoon upon his lips—"too late, 'twill be all up not only with me, but with others. I travel heavy with another's future, madam." And he smiled.

"I am also in desperate haste," she murmured abstractedly, looking past him into the vacancy of the gangway, and appearing to ponder ways of escape out of her dilemma. "What will you do?" she inquired at length.

"Faith!" he said, disturbed, "that's hard to say."

She flashed upon him an ironic, provoking look. "You mean that you are resigned to accept the inevitable, sir?"

"Be the powers!" he cried, in resentment, "I accept nothing that does not suit me! Is it that ye ask me to aid ye? Then 'tis to the right man ye have come, if I may make so bold as to blow me own horn, Mrs. Mervyn. Sure, if you ask it, neither the inevitable nor the impossible shall keep ye from arriving at Bombay, and on time."

Her spirit, through her eyes, answered his in a flash. Then, cooling, she looked him over, from crown to toe, weighing him deliberately in the balance of her knowledge of men. He bore the inspection with equanimity, quite as sure of himself as was proper in the O'Rourke. Thus dared, put on his mettle, and more, enthusiastic in the woman's cause, he felt himself invincible, and showed it in every line of his pose. She could not have wavered long; indeed, her decision was quickly manifest. Impulsively she caught his two hands in her own.

"Yes," she cried excitedly, "I do believe in you! I take you at your word—your generous word, Colonel O'Rourke! I shall trust implicitly in you. You are to get me to Bombay by the fifteenth."

"The fifteenth," he echoed thoughtfully; "and this the tenth."

"The *Panjnab* is scheduled to arrive on the fifteenth. All my plans depend upon my being no later than that day."

"Five days! 'Tis short, but it shall be done, Mrs. Mervyn."

"You promise largely, sir!" she smiled up at him.

"Never yet have I fallen short of me word, to man or woman. Bombay by the fifteenth it shall be, or the O'Rourke will have broken his heart!"

She fell thoughtful. "You are good—I have told you that. I believe that you will do as you say. Yet it seems hardly fair to you to saddle you with my cares, my perils, without informing you of their nature."

"Madam, 'tis not the O'Rourke who would ever be prying into your secrets. Let us not complicate this simple situation with explanations. 'Tis thus—ye have come to me and put yourself in me hands, saying——"

"Colonel, dear," she laughed, with a delicate imitation of his faint brogue, "will ye take me to Bombay by the fifteenth?"

"I will that," he asserted heartily; "I will, if I have to wade the Arabian Sea with ye in me arms!"

A faint jingling of bells in the bowels of the vessel came to their ears, and a

moment later the *Panjnab* began to move lamely onward. "Ye see," said O'Rourke, "the very stars work in their courses to aid us."

"I pin my faith to a less heavenly body—Colonel O'Rourke!"

"Ye may, Mrs. Mervyn," he returned simply. "And so 'tis good night to ye—or good morning! I'm off to scheme out a plan."

"But, colonel——"

"Ye are not imagining for one moment, madam, that I could be thinking coherently with your eyes dancing before me, as they are now? Faith!" he laughed.

"One moment. There is one thing more."

He paused.

"It is a question," she continued, "of chartering a ship at Aden, is it not?"

"I see no other way."

"Then—spare no expense, Colonel O'Rourke."

"Oh, the divvle!"

To save his face O'Rourke could not have helped that traitorous ejaculation, betraying, as it did, that he had not given that point much thought. Now that he was brought face to face with the question of ways and means, it gave him pause in his headlong career of reckless promises.

"Where, indeed, will the money for that be coming from?" he asked himself, in the utmost consternation. And the woman bit her lip to repress a smile, so evident was his confusion.

"Madam," he stammered, "I beg your pardon humbly. 'Twas but a slip of the tongue."

"As freely granted as offered, sir. But remember that I foot the bill."

"But—er——"

"Or, if you insist, sir, I pay nothing. Great Britain pays for both of us."

"Eh? Yes? I beg pardon?" he stammered, thoroughly taken aback.

"But, see, colonel."

He had before this noted indifferently that she wore a thin, fine chain of gold about her neck, its termination—presumably a locket of some sort—hidden in the folds of her corsage. Now she quietly pulled this forth, and pendant upon it O'Rourke saw a little trinket of gold, a coursing greyhound, exquisitely modeled.

Stunned by the revelation, he stared first at the toy, then at the woman. "Ye mean to say——" he whispered, doubting.

"On the king's service, Colonel O'Rourke!"

"*Ye*—are—a king's courier, madam? A woman!"

"And why not?" she demanded proudly. "The king's messengers dare many dangers, sir, it is true. But in some of them might not a woman serve better than a man?"

"True enough. Yet, 'tis unprecedented—at least, you'll admit, most unusual. I begin to understand. That lascar, for instance——"

"Believe me, Colonel O'Rourke, I can tell you nothing."

"Tell me this, at least: Would ye know him if ye saw him again?'

"Truthfully," she said, looking him in the eye, "I would not. I will say one word more—and no more; I anticipated his attack, though I had never seen him before."

"Faith, 'tis yourself that has your courage with you, Mrs. Mervyn! But I'll say no more. Good night. Madam, your servant!"

"Good night, colonel," she replied softly.

This time he was off.

As for the woman, she watched his broad shoulders swinging out of sight. And she laughed softly and strangely. Later, still standing without her stateroom door, she sighed. And an odd light glowed deep in the eyes that had captivated the susceptible Celt. Sighing again, and yet with another low laugh that might have been deemed a thought derisive, as though she were flouting the man whose service she accepted so gladly, she turned and vanished within her stateroom.

As she did so, the opposite door, which opened into an inside stateroom on the same gangway, opened cautiously. A turbaned head peered out, its eyes glancing swiftly up and down the

corridor. Long since, however, the excitement of the passengers had been calmed and they had returned to their berths; the coast was clear.

The lascar stepped noiselessly out, shut the door without a sound, and sped swiftly forward, a long, brown-skinned man, with an impassive countenance, eyes strangely alight, and high cheek-bones.

Swinging into the space at the foot of the saloon companionway, he collided violently with an undersized and excessively red-headed Irishman, nearly upsetting the latter, to say nothing of the glass of brandy-and-soda which he was conveying to a certain state-room.

"Phwat the divvle, ye dom' naygur! Pwhy d'ye not look pwhere ye're going?" demanded Danny, with some heat.

The East Indian disengaged himself, bowed profoundly, mumbling something inarticulate, and sprang up the stairs. Danny looked after him, for a moment hesitant, then put down the glass and pursued the lascar. He caught the flicker of a cummerbund as the latter escaped to the deck, and arrived at the foreward end of the promenade just in time to see a white shape disappear into the forecastle.

"I'd take me oat'," said Danny reflectively, "thot he were the naygur who came aboard at Suez. 'Tis mesilf thot wishes I'd had a betther look at the ugly mug av him. I'm thinkin' I'll tell the masther."

V.

Aden basked in the intolerable blaze of a mid-afternoon sun when the *Panjnab* lurched drunkenly into the harbor known locally as Aden Back Bay—the only fit anchorage for a vessel of her draft.

The dead calm of the elements still held; the harbor waters moved only in long and oily swells; the sun struck back a blinding glare from their unruffled surfaces. The assembled shipping, gathered transiently together from the four corners of the earth, jigged solemnly to the motion of the water.

Beyond the settlement, a cluster of dingy buildings, dwarfed by the three great hotels on the beach, loomed as unreal as a painted city on a stage backdrop swayed by a wandering draft; it quivered palpably, its outlines blurred in a dancing haze of heat. In the background the dead crater of Jebel Shan-shan reared its haggard crest into a sky of dense, hard blue, against which it seemed to tremble with all the instability of a mirage.

O'Rourke, standing on the accommodation ladder of the *Panjnab,* surveyed the anchored fleet in the harbor, pursed his lips, and shook his head despondently. Then, with the air of one acting under protest, he called a boat that hovered near, boarded it, and instructed the native oarsman, a black, shining Arab, to row him to Post-Office Pier.

The heart of the Wanderer was something more than heavy in his breast; he was on the point of abandoning hope, confessing that he had (I quote him) "bitten off more than meself can masticate." His eyes searched the shipping ceaselessly, but failed to light upon a vessel that promised anything like the necessary amount of speed.

"'Tis useless," he conceded bitterly, as the Arab boatman guided him between the heaving hulks. "And I'm thinking 'tis the O'Rourke who will have to slink back to the little woman and confess that he bragged beyond his abilities. The fool that ye are, O'Rourke, with your big words, and your fine promises empty as your purse. 'Tis no patience I have with ye at all."

He bowed his head to the fervor of the sun and pulled his helmet down over his eyes, sunk deep in misery; for sure it was a sad, bad thing that the O'Rourke should have to consider defeat at the very outset, and that to a woman; doubtless he made a striking picture of unhappiness.

So, at least, thought a man lounging in a deck-chair beneath a dirty awning in the stern of a distant tramp steamer; who, raking the shoreward-bound boats with a pair of rusty binoculars,

had chanced to focus them upon O'Rourke.

"Looks as if he hadn't a friend in the world," said the stout man audibly. "Looks as if a letter from home with a cash draft would about fill his little bill."

He grunted pleased appreciation of his own subtle wit: a short man, stout, very much at ease in grimy pajamas, with eyes small and blue, and informed with twinkling humor, set in a florid countenance that bristled with a three days' growth of grayish beard.

He turned the glasses again toward O'Rourke, and, "Hello!" he exclaimed, sitting up and regarding the unconscious Wanderer with more interest.

"Well, by jinks!" said the stout man. "Who'd a-thunk it?"

He got up with evident haste and waddled forward to the bridge, where he came upon what he had evidently needed in his business: a huge and battered megaphone. Applying this to his lips and filling his lungs he bellowed, with a right good will. And his hail, not unlike the roaring of an amiable bull, awoke Aden's echoes.

"O'Rourke!"

"*Good* morning," murmured the Irishman, lifting his head to stare about him with awakened interest.

The man in pajamas continuing to bellow his name at the top of his voice, the Wanderer, by dint of earnest staring, eventually located the source of the uproar. "Now, who the divvle might *you* be?" he wondered. "Ananias, me friend," to the boatman, "row to the steamer yonder where the madman is."

Whereupon the stout man, seeing that the boat had altered its course, put down the megaphone; and there was peace in Aden.

On nearer approach to the tramp (whose stern bore the word "Ranee") O'Rourke's smile broadened to a pleased grin, and airily he waved his hand to the man with the voice.

"Jimmy Quick!" he observed, with unfeigned delight. "Faith, I begin to believe that me luck holds, after all!"

From the lower grating of the accommodation ladder he tossed a coin to the boatman and mounted to the vessel's deck. The stout man fell heavily upon his neck, with manifestations of extreme joy. He proved himself of highly emotional disposition.

When a lull had succeeded his first transports, he wiped his eyes, beamed upon the Wanderer, and suggested insinuatingly: "Drink?"

"Brevity is the soul of your wit, captain," said O'Rourke. "I will." And followed the slippered heels of the captain down the saloon companionway.

Quick, still a-gurgle, wandered off, returned with a bottle, and set it on the table. He beamed upon his visitor, asked a question, and without waiting for the answer, waddled away again, to return with a brace of dripping soda-water bottles. "Schweppe's," he said, patting their rotund forms tenderly; "and in your honor, colonel."

"So?" commented O'Rourke to himself. "Hard up, is it? 'Tis not the O'Rourke who would be wishing ye ill, captain dear, but, faith! I'm not sorry to hear that word this day. I'm thinking that me luck is sound, after all."

Quick had again vanished. Presently O'Rourke heard his mighty voice booming down the engine-room hatchway. "Dravos! Dravos, you loafer! Come up and see a queer bird!"

He returned, still vibrant with an elephantine sort of joy. "O'Rourke," he panted, mopping a damp brow with the sleeve of his jacket, "you're a good sight for sore eyes. Never did I meet up with you yet but there came a run of luck."

"'Tis good hearing," began O'Rourke, smiling.

A slight little man, with a bald head relieved by ragged patches of gray hair about the temples, slipped apologetically into the cabin. He wore flapping Chinese slippers, a pair of trousers that seemed everlastingly on the point of slipping their moorings, and a thin cotton shirt—all saturated with oil and grease. His thin face, of a gentle, kindly cast, was streaked with grime, which, with praiseworthy intent, continually he swabbed with a fistful of

cotton-waste; accomplishing, however, nothing more than an artistic blending of smear with smudge, until his entire countenance was overcast with midnight gloom.

"The top of the day to ye, Dravos!" said O'Rourke loudly. "And how are the engines?"

For little Dravos, the engineer, was partially deaf. O'Rourke's tone had carried, however; the engineer carefully hitched up his trousers and regarded the Wanderer with a faded smile.

"Good afternoon, Colonel O'Rourke," he replied, clipping his words mincingly. "Very nicely, I thank you." He shook hands, sat down on the edge of a chair with the air of one who fears he intrudes, and glanced at Quick. "If you're going to serve the drinks, cap'n," he snapped acidly, *"hump yourself!"*

The final words came with surprising heat and vigor. Quick, startled, shut off the series of expansive smiles which had been enveloping O'Rourke, and jumped to obey. Dravos regarded the captain's huge bulk with something of acerbity; he was a man of few words, but now his manner spoke for him, saying distinctly: "I could do this thing better, more quickly, with less fuss."

He accepted his glass with a dispassionate air that said: "I will deliver judgment on this unholy mixture when it is down." But from his afterglow of benevolence, O'Rourke concluded that the verdict had been favorable.

"What brings you here?" asked Quick, in a subdued roar, after the customary interchange of courtesies.

"I've a job for ye, if so be it ye are not otherwise engaged—and if ye can do it."

Quick slapped his thigh delightedly. "I knew it! I could have sworn to it!"

"Can do anything," asserted Dravos briefly.

"'Tis merely a question of speed," explained the Irishman. "Can ye make Bombay in four days—be the fifteenth?"

"Dravos," roared Quick, turning to his engineer, "how much speed can you get out of those fool engines?"

"Twenty knots," snapped Dravos indignantly.

"Ye're joking?"

"Not in the least," returned the engineer, with even more heat.

Quick slouched in his chair, eying the ceiling reminiscently.

"We made a bit of a strike last year," he volunteered. "No matter how, nor why, nor where. Dravos, here, sunk two-thirds of the money in new engines. They're beauties, all right," he conceded, with a heavy sigh. "And we'll need them. We're going to take a little stroll down through the pearl fisheries pretty soon, and it takes good engines to beat the pearl patrol these days. The business ain't what it once was."

Dravos looked at him furiously, opened his mouth to speak, changed his mind, and shut his lips tightly. O'Rourke hastened to cover the indiscretion.

"When can ye sail?"

"To-night," said Dravos.

"If," stipulated Quick, "I can pick up a crew in Aden."

"'Tis settled, then."

"We'll need a trifle of money in advance."

"Ye shall have it—within reason."

Dravos rose and slipped toward the companionway, a far-away look in his pale eyes. "You strike the bargain, Quick," he said; "I'll have a look around the engine-room."

"Right-o, Bobby. Yourself alone, I suppose, O'Rourke?"

"And three others. Danny——"

"Yes?"

"And two ladies; an Englishwoman, with her maid."

There fell a dead silence in the cabin. Dravos had halted half-way up the steps. Quick's eyes were bulging from his head.

"A lady *and* her maid!" he gasped finally.

"Might 've knowed it," commented Dravos. "He's an Irishman." He

sniffed sourly and passed on, up and out of the saloon.

VI.

The day wore on in unruffled calm and with intolerable heat. Toward evening the sky went dull with clouds; night settled down, a pall of blackness penetrated only by the glow of lights ashore and the scattered, unsteady riding-lamps of the anchored vessels.

A dull depression seemed to weigh upon the world; Dravos, coming to the engine-room hatchway for a breathing-spell, sniffed the night air with a dubious wrinkled nose, wagged his bald head, and prophesied gloomily the advent of the southwest monsoon.

At nine o'clock the *Ranee* lay, steam up, ready to weigh anchor and start upon her voyage. Miracles had been brought about within a few hours aboard the disreputable tramp steamer. Her captain had been ashore, picked up a crew, and laid in a week's supply of provisions, to say nothing of interviewing harbor authorities about his clearing-papers, and attending to a thousand minor details; for all of which O'Rourke had advanced money from his own purse, resolutely suppressing the sigh that surged to his lips as he contemplated the scanty remains of his little fortune.

"'Tis not the first time that the O'Rourke has beggared himself for a woman's smile," he reflected philosophically; and thereafter, as the work progressed and it became evident that the *Ranee* would proceed as per schedule, grew steadily more cheerful.

It is no praise to Dravos to state that his engines were in first-class order. That was their invariable condition. As assistant engineer, he had impressed into service none other than Danny Mahone, to Danny's intense disgust. However, it was the O'Rourke's order, and whatsoever the O'Rourke desired, that Danny did with a show of cheerfulness, however distasteful the work might be to him.

O'Rourke took upon himself the duties of the first officer under Captain Quick. The Irishman cared little enough for the sea, knew less of a first officer's duties; but it was patent that Quick could not stand every watch, and O'Rourke was not to be daunted by any such slight matter as his nautical ignorance.

Quarters had been provided for Mrs. Mervyn and her maid, Quick not only surrendering his room, but also working with a will to clear and cleanse it, in a cheerful but dubious attempt to make it fit for a woman's occupancy.

At nine, then, all was ready; and at that hour, for the second time that day, O'Rourke was ascending the accommodation ladder of the *Panjnab*. At the lower grating there awaited him one of the *Ranee's* boats, manned by a brace of lascars drawn from Quick's makeshift crew; a sullen pair of scoundrels, both of whom had been warned not to hold converse with any of the *Panjnab's* crew, under penalty, if discovered, of the Wanderer's extreme displeasure. Which they had likewise been given to understand was no light matter.

For O'Rourke was anything but easy in his mind; at intervals all through the day there had been recurring to him a sincere regret that Mrs. Mervyn had interfered to prevent the summary punishment he would have dealt out to her assailant on the promenade-deck.

"'Twas a mistake, to me own way of thinking," pondered the Wanderer. "'Tis in that divvle her danger lies—whatever at all it may be, which it's meself can't guess. Sure, the man had some good reason for making that attack. 'Tisn't likely at all he will have forgotten it. I'm persuaded 'tis as well that he and we are to continue our journey be different routes."

He kept an eye sharp for sight of the lascar on the *Panjnab's* decks, but saw nothing of him. When he returned to the steamer the first time, after concluding his bargain with Quick and Dravos, Danny had had nothing to report concerning that mysterious person, who had kept pertinaciously out of sight ever since his encounter with Danny in the gangway—if Danny was

right in his contention on that point. If not right, the red-headed one remained obstinate and convinced. "'Twas himself an' none other," he maintained; "the naygur that came aboard at Suez. Sure, don't *I* know?"

Had the fellow been in sight, it had been an easy matter to espy him, for the crippled steamer was all but deserted, its quondam passengers having eagerly availed themselves of the opportunity for a run ashore and a sojourn in one of the beach hotels, at the steamship company's expense—a welcome break in the tedium of the sea voyage and the monotony of a refrigerated menu.

Meeting practically no one, and that to his relief, O'Rourke made his way to the saloon-deck and so to Mrs. Mervyn's stateroom. As on previous occasions, his guarded knock was quickly answered, and he remarked the same extreme of caution in the woman's alert manner, as well as in her maid's readiness with the revolver.

"'Tis deep," he told himself; "a rare deep mystery. But meself will never see the bottom of it. Mrs. Mervyn," aloud, "is it ready ye are?"

The Englishwoman, with an expressive smile, glanced down at her costume. O'Rourke, following her lead, was forced to acknowledge that his question had been superfluous. Mrs. Mervyn was ready for anything.

She had donned a serviceable khaki tourist suit, short-skirted and cut with a certain simplicity that would have evoked the comment "sensible" had it been worn by another of her countrywomen. She, to the contrary, adorned it with an indefinable grace that robbed its abrupt lines of severity. From helmet to linen puttees there was not a trace of the mannish; she showed herself entirely feminine, wholly charming, and—more important still—dressed precisely as she should be to brave the hardships of a voyage on a tramp of the Eastern seas.

For which, as well as for other things not unconnected with her personality, O'Rourke would gladly have gathered her into his arms—by way of some slight reward. A dangerously subtle light flickered in the back of his eyes as the thought flashed through his brain. Mrs. Mervyn had not been herself had she failed to observe it; she was at pains to turn the subject with no delay.

"Have you explained to Captain—Captain——"

"Quick?"

"——to Captain Quick that his bill is to be presented to the Indian Government, by which it will be promptly paid in cash?"

"I have that, madam; 'tis all settled. The captain understands that he sails on his majesty's service." He paused and threw back his head, smiling his triumph. "Did I not tell ye, madam? Tell me, did ye do well to trust in the O'Rourke?"

"You shall learn of my gratitude, colonel!"

"Gratitude! Faith, Mrs. Mervyn, I ask nothing more than a smile of your pretty eyes!"

"You shall be repaid more substantially."

There was a significance in her tone and manner which he failed to catch.

"Not a word of that, if ye please! The boat's in waiting for ye, madam, and the *Ranee* straining at her cable like your golden greyhound at his leash, impatient to be off."

Mrs. Mervyn turned. "Cécile, bring the suit-case. Now, colonel, dear, I'm at your orders."

Three minutes later the *Panjnab* was minus four passengers—Danny being already aboard the *Ranee,* at that moment, indeed, harkening sulkily enough to a lecture on the rules of engine-room etiquette as propounded by a bald-headed wisp of oil-soaked humanity "wid trousies" (avers Danny) "that forever made ye hopeful of being shocked."

The *Ranee* was already making the night hideous with clanking winches, weighing in the anchor; hardly had Mrs. Mervyn set foot upon the deck ere the ship began to move, and within the hour Dravos' engines had settled

into the stride, and the tramp was stretching down the Gulf of Aden, pointing her nose to the heart of the Arabian Sea.

From the knowledge that they were safely off at last the Wanderer drew a sense of poignant relief, as he stood on the bridge by Quick's side, with midnight imminent and the ship still and peaceful. He peered into the oppressive thickness of the night and saw nothing and was glad. Damp air puffed violently into his face, sharp with the tang of the open sea, sweet with its assurance of dangers passed. To that moment Mrs. Mervyn's secret had weighed upon his imagination; now it was a matter of no immediate consequence. For the succeeding days there would be naught to do save navigate the *Ranee* and—mayhap a bit of philandering, just by way of a relief from the ennui of doing nothing at all.

And the Wanderer heaved a deep sigh of heartfelt relief. "Faith!"—briefly.

"Come again?" suggested Quick, turning from the wheel.

"I was merely expressing me pleasure in being out of that mess, captain, dear," explained O'Rourke obscurely.

"What mess?"

O'Rourke glanced at the man at the wheel—a stalwart lascar, probably a Malay, erect, self-contained, impassive, eyes on the binnacle, arms gleaming like burnished bronze in the light of the binnacle-lamp, as point by point he shifted the spokes to maintain the *Ranee* on her course. He seemed utterly oblivious to all save his duty; nevertheless, a vague distrust of all men of his color stirred in O'Rourke.

"A fine night," he observed evasively, glancing at the sky; "be the smell of it, 'tis rain we'll be having the morning, Jimmy Quick."

The northern horizon glowed pale gold for a long minute; and then again the world was black. A salvo of shocks rattled through the night-wrapped void.

"Thunder-storms," commented Quick superfluously. "Showers before sun-up, then the monsoon. You didn't answer my question," he persisted querulously. "I said, What mess?"

O'Rourke moved abstractedly to the far end of the bridge, keeping the corner of his eye on the lascar at the wheel, who gave them no heed whatsoever.

"'Twas the divvle of a mess for the little woman," said O'Rourke. "I'll tell ye about it, me boy, but for the love of Hiven, captain, if ye have any comments to make, whisper 'em. Then not more than half the ship will hear."

He narrated briefly, in crisp phrases, Mrs. Mervyn's adventure on the *Panjnab*. When he finished, Quick whistled softly.

"She let him go?" he iterated, with an obvious effort to gentle his voice. "What'n creation did she do that for?"

"Mainly," O'Rourke speculated, "to avoid attracting attention to herself, I'm thinking. I've told ye what she is."

"Oh, well!" said the captain. "She's got no cause for worry now. We'll pull her through on time or bu'st a gallus."

He stepped to the rail, and, leaning over, bellowed at the top of his lungs: "Silence, there!" And for a time silence obtained among the group of lascars that had been squatting on the forward deck and squabbling vociferously, after the manner of their kind. Their quarrel, whatever its cause, subsided into sullen mutterings, oddly like the grumbling of the thunder below the northern horizon. Quick shrugged his heavy shoulders.

"Always scrapping, like a pack of crows!" he complained. "I'd give the mess of them for half a dozen white men—Dutchies, at that. What d'ye suppose that lascar was after?" he pursued curiously, lowering his tone.

"'Tis nothing at all to me," returned O'Rourke; "'tis the lady's secret, and be the same token none of mine." He yawned, stretching himself. "I'm thinking 'tis bedtime."

"Right-o!" assented Quick. The chorus of the lascars arose again in full, angry blast, and again the captain found need to caution them.

"I'll stand the night watches," the captain took up the thread of his thoughts. "By morning we'll be far enough out for you to take hold—there'll be no particular call for seamanship. Good night."

"Thank ye," said O'Rourke. Indeed, he became sensible he was getting very drowsy; the night wind in his face had something to do with that, very likely. "Good night," he returned, and went down the ladder to the deck.

At its foot he paused, turning curiously; it seemed that there must be some serious trouble among the crew. They were at it again, with an uglier note in their yelping. The Wanderer could see in the glimmer of the forecastle lantern a confused blur of naked, brown limbs, apparently inextricably interlocked. A scream rang shrill and there followed the sound of a heavy fall.

Overhead, on the bridge, Quick was roaring himself hoarse, to no effect. The sounds of shuffling, of blows, harsh breathing, and stifled cries continued. A knot of the contestants swept, whirling, down toward the superstructure. Something leaped, singing, through the air; the wind of it fanned O'Rourke's cheek.

With an unconscious, surprised oath he stepped aside, his hand going toward his revolver. The missile struck the side of the deck-house, glanced, and fell, shivering, into the scuppers.

The Wanderer's face darkened. Revolver in hand, he took a step or two forward, to the head of the companion ladder, looking down at the struggling rabble on the deck below. But they seemed intent only on their private differences, and Quick's threats were having their effect. Gradually the tumult subsided, the contestants separated, and sulked forward to their quarters.

"It may have been chance," O'Rourke conceded a bit doubtfully. He swung about and went aft, slowly, stooping and examining the deck intently. In a minute or two he came upon the missile, and picked it up: a long, thin-bladed knife, double-edged and keen as any razor. The point was broken—doubtless had been snapped off at the moment of contact with the deck-house. O'Rourke contemplated it thoughtfully.

"Faith! I don't like to believe 'twas intended for me. But me head would have been split had it come two inches to the left."

He returned to the bridge, drawing Quick aside. "You're armed?"

"Certainly—always armed when I'm dealing with these devils. Why?"

O'Rourke showed him the knife. Quick laughed at his theory. "Nothing in it," he was pleased to believe. Nevertheless, before he turned in, the Wanderer climbed the iron ladders of the engine-room and had a brief interview with Dravos and Danny. He lay down with a loaded revolver by his side, and only dropped to sleep after a long period of wakefulness, troubled with dark forebodings. Ordinarily, too, his slumbers were sound enough, whatever the circumstances; but this night he woke in the grip of nightmare, having dreamed that the Pool of Flame had turned to a ball of malignant fire, and was burning a hole in his breast, working with purpose toward his heart. A clutch at the chamois bag beneath his left arm, however, assured him that it was safe and cool enough. And he turned and slept again.

VII.

The day came out of the east with a windy swagger; as Quick had predicted, thunder-storms swept the sea before dawn, and left it, with the sky, newly washed, clean, and brilliant. The watery waste stretched wide before the *Ranee's* bows, untenanted by sail, unsmudged by smoke. The seas, breaking out here and there with glistening whitecaps, raced the ship eastward, running before the monsoon. As the hours lengthened, the temperature rose, making an awning nothing to be despised, yet the clearness of the atmosphere, the absence of humidity, and the strong, sweet breath of the trade-wind tempered the sun's ardor and made it a day to be marked with a

white stone for the sense of purely animal well-being it induced.

O'Rourke relieved Quick for the forenoon watch, and kept the deck for the rest of the day, his lunch—sandwiches and coffee—being brought to him on the bridge by the maid, Cécile. His duties were simple enough, requiring little more than a display of that habit of authority which sat so naturally on his broad shoulders. It was no great trick to keep the crew in order, for they went about their work peaceably enough, and showed no signs of desiring to renew their disputations.

Otherwise he had to watch the helmsman and see that he kept the *Ranee* on her course, as indicated by Quick ere the latter turned in; and that was simple enough to any man of average intelligence. Naught but deep water lay between the *Ranee* and Bombay, so long as a direct course was shaped and held.

As the sunlit day wore out and nothing happened, O'Rourke's grim suspicions were dissipated into shadows. He began to believe, with Quick, that the affair of the winged knife was a mere hapchance accident, unpremeditated. Lascars use a knife promiscuously; it is their law and their leveler, making all men equal. It is as dangerous to be an innocent bystander when lascars start in to arbitrate their differences, as it is to play that rôle in a Western mining-camp when a shooting is "on."

O'Rourke breathed more freely as this view of the matter obtruded itself the more insistently upon his judgment. The one drawback to his satisfaction with the swing of his world was the fact that Mrs. Mervyn, pleading indisposition, kept to her berth the day long.

Dravos and Danny were keeping watch alternately with the clockwork regularity of the little engineer's beloved engines—the which, it may be mentioned, were justifying his confidence in them and clicking off their twenty knots without a break. One of Danny's "off" spells happened to be the afternoon watch. O'Rourke from the bridge saw him come on deck, dive into the saloon for his dinner, and, later, emerge picking his teeth and grinning self-complacently until his master could have kicked him, had such a course been consistent with the dignity of his office and politic before the lascars. It appeared that the Wanderer's sage advice on the wisdom of abstinence from flirtation had been wasted upon his servant; or else Cécile made herself quite irresistible.

O'Rourke caught glimpses of Danny from time to time, as he sauntered here and there about the ship, smoking and eying the lascars with an ill-concealed scorn. It was toward eight bells again before the valet approached his master, hailing him, with a truly nautical pull at his forelock and an impudent grin, from the foot of the bridge ladder.

"What is it?" demanded O'Rourke.

"A word for yer private ear, sor, if I may make so bold."

O'Rourke glanced at the helmsman, and, having long ago decided that the man was competent, left him in possession of the bridge for a space, and joined Danny on the lower deck.

"What is it?" he repeated.

Danny lowered his voice to a hoarse whisper. "Kape yer oye on thot divvle up there, sor, for the love of Hiven, and don't look surproised at anythin'."

O'Rourke backed a few paces down the rail, to a position whence he could command a view of the shoulders and head of the man at the wheel. "Well?"

"'Tis nawthin' I can swear to, sor, but 'tis meself thot is mortal leary av these dom' naygurs rayspicts to ye, an'—an'——"

"Come, come! Out with it, Danny."

"Sure, sor, 'tis the serang, sor. Have ye chanced to notice him, sor?"

The Wanderer glanced down upon the fore-deck, where the man in question was standing at ease. "What of him?" he inquired, running his eye over the lascar's superb proportions.

Indeed, the serang towered head and shoulders above his fellows, over whom he exercised a boatswain's authority. He was staring out at sea, his arms, naked to the shoulder, folded across

his breast, the muscles and tendons of his long, gaunt legs standing out literally like iron bands. A dirty turban was wrapped about his head, and a gaily colored sash, much the worse for wear, hid his breech-clout and the lower edge of his thin blue shirt. His pose was one of natural and unaffected dignity, and very thoughtful.

"What of him?" repeated the Wanderer.

"'Tis nawthin' I'd take me oat' to, sor, but I could very well belave him the man thot boarded the *Panjnab* at Suez, sor. An' as for the naygur I run against on the s'loon-deck, yer honor, he's his spit an' image, sor."

"Ah!" commented O'Rourke. "Thank you, Danny."

He continued to watch the man, and presently the latter, as if drawn by the fixity of the Wanderer's regard, turned and looked directly into O'Rourke's eyes. For a full minute he gave the latter look for look, his dark eyes steadfast above his hooked nose; then, without a sign that he realized his insolence, calmly turned his back and again contemplated the tumbled line of the horizon.

Soon afterward Quick came on deck to relieve the Irishman, and, eight bells sounding, Danny dived below to take Dravos' place. O'Rourke, unpleasantly impressed by the incident, yet forbore to mention it to either of the ship's owners. He retired to think it over, and spent a long hour consuming an indifferent cigar and studying the cracks in the partition between his room and the cabin.

Without profit, however. Lacking more substantial proof than Danny's suspicions, he could arrive at no definite conclusion. It was possible, of course, that the lascar who had attacked Mrs. Mervyn had divined O'Rourke's purpose; and, leaving the *Panjnab* unobserved for the shore, had succeeded in getting himself engaged as serang of Quick's crew. But this argued that he had almost supernatural powers of divination, or else had managed to overhear O'Rourke's conversation with Mrs. Mervyn immediately after the accident. And then O'Rourke recalled that Danny's lascar had been coming from the direction of Mrs. Mervyn's stateroom.

All things were possible, all more or less improbable. O'Rourke gave it up, merely warning himself to more scrupulous watchfulness. He said nothing of his fears to Mrs. Mervyn, who emerged, quite radiant, to dine with him; and kept his counsel from the captain.

The night passed without incident; the second day dawned the counterpart of its predecessor, and wore away quietly enough. The members of the ship's company had settled into their routine and the confidence that their voyage was to be a prosperous one; barring himself and, perhaps, Danny—though Danny was normally thoughtless, and the Wanderer's own apprehensions were becoming dulled—none had reason for any suspicion to the contrary, thought O'Rourke.

He was in error. It fell to him to stand the first dog-watch, from four to six in the evening; and after he had ascended the bridge, it was presently his happiness to find himself joined by Mrs. Mervyn.

It appeared that the latter wished to express her gratification with the tide of affairs; the king's courier was pleased to be very well pleased indeed. She admitted, under the Wanderer's jocular pressure, that she considered she was roughing it; Captain Quick's quarters were by no means palatial; but that was all a part of the great and fascinating game she played—the game of secret service for His Majesty Edward VII., King of Great Britain and Ireland, Emperor of India.

Not that alone, but she was glad to think that the voyage would soon be over. It was pleasant to know that her mission would presently be discharged and become a thing of the past. She would be glad to see Bombay.

"One never knows, you know, Colonel O'Rourke," with a little gesture expressive of her allowance for the unforeseen.

O'Rourke divined that she had some-

thing on her mind that she hesitated to voice. He looked quickly around, and saw that they were practically alone. The man at the wheel was nothing—a mute, bronze statue in a blue shirt, red turban, and soiled cummerbund.

"Then it's you who will be glad, I gather, to be rid of us, madam?" he asked, with meaning.

She smiled deprecation. "What would you?" she desired to know, dropping into French of the purest, and with a significant glance up into O'Rourke's eyes—a glance that, implying as it did a certain amount of intimacy, a mutual understanding, fairly distracted the Irishman.

"It is not pleasant, precisely, to be constantly apprehensive," she continued, in the same tongue, "even when one has a Colonel O'Rourke to look to for protection."

"Ah, madam!" expostulated the Wanderer ardently, "sure, now, 'tis yourself should know the O'Rourke would lie down and die for ye——"

"Which," she interrupted sweetly, "is precisely what I do not wish you to do."

"But what makes ye so positive I'd not turn tail and run away from any real danger?"

She gave him a glance askance that brimmed with mirth. "A man who is a coward," she said slowly, "does not stand still and draw a revolver when a heavy knife is thrown at his head."

"Quick told ye, madam?"

"No, I saw—heard the quarreling on the forward deck, and got to the companionway in time to see what happened. Had you not been so intent on your search for the knife, you would have seen me. As it was, I went below again without attracting attention."

"But why?"

"To get my revolver, Monsieur le Colonel."

"But 'twas naught but an accident——"

"You do not believe that yourself, colonel, dear; for myself, I——"

"Well?" he inquired, as she hesitated.

"Some one tried my door last night, after you had retired!"

"Ye are sure?" asked the Wanderer, disturbed.

"Quite. I lay awake, thinking; heard you come below and go to your room at eight bells. Long after I heard soft footsteps—some one walking in his bare feet in the saloon. Then the knob was turned, very gently. Fortunately, there is a bolt on the door; some one put a shoulder to it, but it held fast. I caught up my revolver—oh, I am very reckless with it, sir!—and opened the door myself. The saloon was quite empty."

"Ye should not have risked it."

"I had to know. There is too much at stake," she said simply.

O'Rourke hastened to invent a plausible and reassuring explanation to the fact. "Quick—or Danny, or Dravos, mistaking their rooms——"

"It was neither. Captain Quick was on deck; I heard his voice almost simultaneously. I could not mistake that." Her composure was such that she laughed. "No, it was none of those. They would not have been so stealthy, so instant to escape."

"But—but——"

"My theory, if you will have it, is, that mine enemy of the *Panjnab* is one of the crew of the *Ranee*, monsieur."

Mrs. Mervyn made this statement as quietly as though she were commenting on the weather. And her belief chimed so exactly with his own that O'Rourke was struck dumb, unable for the nonce to invent a satisfactory refutation.

He fell silent for some moments, his lips a thin, hard line, a crinkle of anxiety between his brows.

"If only ye had permitted me to attend to him," he growled, at length.

"You are right," she admitted. "But—I am desolated—the evil is done."

"Faith, yes!" He sighed dejectedly. His gaze roved the deck, fastened at last upon the serang. "It might be any one of them," he considered aloud.

"Any one. For instance, though—the serang!"

"What makes ye think that?" he demanded, startled.

"I hardly know. Call it feminine intuition. The man looks capable of anything."

"Yes. But, sure, there's no telling at all."

"No telling," she concurred quietly. "We can but wait, watch, hope that I imagined the hand at my door."

"There might be something in that," eagerly.

"I am neither a nervous nor an imaginative woman."

"At all events, I'll go bail 'twill not happen a second time."

"How will you prevent it?"

"Sure, the simplest thing in the world. I'll stand guard in the saloon, madam."

"I cannot consent that you should take that risk, Colonel O'Rourke."

He was, however, obstinate; and Quick, coming on the stroke of four bells to relieve him, the argument was terminated.

VIII.

That night fell clear as a bell and wonderfully brilliant with stars. O'Rourke left the bridge at midnight, and, fortified with strong coffee, prepared to watch out the early morning hours. To his relief, they dragged interminably quiet and uneventful.

The moon got up at about six bells, and its rays, filtering through the heavy, ribbed-glass skylight, filled the otherwise unilluminated interior of the cabin with opalescent shimmer. O'Rourke, agape, watched this dancing light for several minutes before it conveyed to him a warning; but immediately he received it, he arose from his chair by the side of the center-table and stretched himself at length upon a transom against the forward bulkhead, whence he could keep an eye on the companionway as well as from the chair.

For the latter was beneath the skylight, and the wings of the skylight were open, because of the heat.

"'Tis safer here, be far," he considered. "There will now be no dropping one of those long knives on me, be premeditated inadvertence, I'm thinking."

He yawned enormously. The peace of the night, the singing of the waves against the *Ranee's* sides, the deep throb and urge of the engines, the sustained, clear chords struck by the monsoon in the wire-rigging—these combined to soothe the man, to lull him into a fantastic border-land of dreams. Yet such was his command of self that he would not yield to the caress of drowsiness; merely he lay motionless and at rest, communing with his fancy. And that led him out of the sordid saloon of the *Ranee* and across the seas that lay ahead of that ship's prow, to the far land whither he was to take the Pool of Flame.

Abruptly he leaped to his feet, wide-awake and raging.

A blow was still sounding through the saloon—a dull crash. A knife quivered, buried half-way to the hilt in the bulkhead back of the transom. Instinctively the Wanderer's fingers had closed about the butt of his revolver. He pulled the trigger almost before he realized what had happened, and sent a bullet winging after a pair of long, brown legs that were twinkling out of sight around a corner of the companionway. On the heels of that fruitless shot he sent another, this time with no murderous intent, but with design to warn the captain on the bridge.

Here at last was the issue forced, animus proven, assassination indisputably attempted!

He sprang for the companionway, was half-way up it in a thought, his heart hot with rage within him, his mouth gone dry with thirst for that lascar's blood. Not a third time should the man escape his judgment at the hands of O'Rourke.

A stentorian roar saluted his ears as he gained the deck—a bellow choked and ending in a dreadful gurgle. O'Rourke in a flash swung on his heel. Simultaneously he came face to face with Quick, and guessed in an instant what had happened. Cold fear gripped

his heart; he could have cried aloud for the pity of it.

The captain swayed before him, a massively builded figure, clothed all in white, huge arms trembling toward his head, revolver dropping from a nerveless hand, his chin fallen forward on his chest, a stupid, weary smile on his face, and—a dark and terrible blur spreading swiftly over the bosom of his shirt.

A cry of horror, despair, and rage stuck in the Wanderer's throat. Quick, who had hailed his appearance on the *Ranee* at Aden as a harbinger of good luck, had been slain, foully murdered. His dominant emotion of the instant, an intense and pitiful solicitude for the dying man, threw him off his guard. Under its influence he forgot his own desperate case, and, putting out his arms, received the falling body and let it gently to the deck.

But still, even as he did so, in a trice he was again alive to his own peril. In the winking of an eye he saw a flash of light gliding toward him with resistless impetus. Intuitively he swung to one side, to the right, and leaped to his feet. At that, the knife, a creese, sinuous and keen, ran cold upon the flesh of his chest, slitting through his shirt, catching in the thong that held the Pool of Flame and tearing out, leaving a flapping hole and scraping a hand's breadth of skin from his forearm.

Reckless of what had happened, only subconsciously aware that the chamois bag had fallen to the deck, he caught the arm that wielded the creese, his fingers closing about the wrist, and, bracing himself, swung the assassin off his feet. So doing, his fingers slipped on the man's greasy skin, and he stumbled back.

His object, however, had been accomplished. The fellow hurtled a yard or more through the air and fell, sliding along the deck in the midst of a group of lascars, one of whom, taken by surprise, he knocked over and atop himself.

O'Rourke recovered and stepped forward, revolver raised to administer the quietus to the murderer—an amiable intention, however, doomed to frustration. More swiftly than his eye could follow their movements, the group of lascars seemed to have become involved in a tangle of arms and legs, a mélange of struggling limbs. Where O'Rourke had thought to find one prostrate figure, six squirmed a-tangle on the deck.

For a thought he stayed his finger on the trigger, waiting to pick out the undermost and slay him first of all—unwilling, moreover, to waste one of the four precious bullets remaining in the chambers of his revolver.

And then—unexpectedly the tragedy seemed over and done with altogether. The Wanderer stood nonplused, fairly staggered by the abrupt turn of the tide.

From the bottom layer of the entangled group an inhuman and terrible cry shrilled loud upon the night air. Almost instantly the mob seemed to resolve into its original elements. Five lascars crawled, arose, or flung themselves away from the sixth, who lay inert and prone, limbs yet twitching, a knife buried in his back.

For a thought the tableau held, there in the pure brilliance of the moonlight.

And then the tallest of the lascars moved forward a pace, knelt, and drew the knife from the body of his dead fellow. He straightened up, facing O'Rourke without fear, his eyes afire with excitement, and wiped the blade of the creese on his cummerbund.

"Do not shoot, sahib," he said smoothly, in excellent English. "Do not shoot, sahib, for it is I who have avenged. This dog," and with his toe he stirred the thing at his feet, "ran amuck. Now he is dead."

This was the serang who spoke. O'Rourke, still breathing hurriedly from his recent exertion, eyed him through a long silence. At length, "That seems quite evident," he admitted coolly. "Pick up that carrion and throw it overboard!"

In obedience to a sign from the serang, confirming the Wanderer's command, two lascars seized upon the body, and a heavy splash alongside told the

Irishman that his order had been carried out. But he heard it abstractedly, confronted as he was with a problem whose difficulty was not to be underestimated, the problem that stood embodied in the statuesque, imperturbable serang.

It was hard to know what to do, what to believe, what action to take. If he were right in his suspicion, the serang should be shot down instantly, without respite. Yet the heartless brutality upon which his surmise was based gave him pause. It was difficult to believe that the serang had done what O'Rourke thought he had done, that he, the wielder of the creese, he the murderer of Quick, thrown off his feet by the Wanderer's clever maneuver, had involved his fellows with him and in the confusion slain one upon whom he could cast the blame for what had happened.

The weapon wavered in O'Rourke's hand. More than once in that brief debate he was tempted to shoot the serang on suspicion. Yet he held his hand; he could not be positive. The fellow, with everything against him, might still be telling the truth. The whole horrible affair might boil down to nothing more than an insane crime of a crazy Malay, one who, as the serang said, had "run amuck."

He had not made up his mind—and there were a dozen matters pressing upon his consideration — when his thoughts were given a new turn by a new complication, in the shape of Mrs. Mervyn herself. That lady came up the companion-steps with no hesitation visible in her manner, with neither fear nor apprehension; quietly and confidently alert, on the other hand, she was visibly armed, prepared to face down danger in whatever form she might encounter it.

She came directly toward the Wanderer, without so much as a glance for the group of lascars or the evidences of tragedy upon the deck. O'Rourke could have ground his teeth in his exasperation. Whatever he decided to believe of the serang, whether his judgment said of the man "Guilty" or "Not Guilty," he dared not risk a move with the woman present. He could not tell what hell of murder and mutiny he might not let loose upon the *Ranee,* did he wreak vengeance upon the serang. Alone, he could have faced it with equanimity; with the woman by his side, he felt as though handcuffed.

"You are hurt, Colonel O'Rourke?"

"A mere scratch, madam—an inch of skin shaved off my arm. Will you be kind enough to return to the saloon, awaken Danny, and send him to me?"

She ignored the curtness of his tone, even as she ignored his wish. "What has happened?" she demanded, ranging herself by his side. "Who is that—there on the deck?"—her voice rising a note.

"Quick. Stabbed. I did not wish you to see. A lascar ran amuck, cut down the captain, was killed himself—kindness," the irrepressible grim humor burst forth, "of our dusky brother, the serang."

His eyes never left the latter; nor for an instant did he take his attention from the cluster of dark figures; he was more than ever ready to defend himself, should they commit an overt act, deeming his attention distracted.

"What shall you do?"

"How can I say, madam? Do you, for the love of God, get below, and leave me to deal with these fiends in my own fashion."

"Which," she returned equably, "is precisely what I shall not do."

"If that is the case," he said bruskly, "have the kindness to hand me the revolver by the captain's side, and—you might see if the poor fellow still lives."

There was a quick rustle of skirts, and the woman's hand closed over his, pressing into his palm the grip of the weapon he had desired. As promptly, without further words, she returned to Quick's prostrate form.

The Wanderer deliberated briefly, while she bent over the captain, making a hurried examination. "He is badly wounded," O'Rourke heard her say, as he reached his conclusion, "but not dead."

"Praise God for that! I must ask

ye, madam, to back me up. It is necessary to clear the decks. Are ye ready?" He saw, out of the tail of his eye, that she had sprung to her feet.

"Now, ye curs," he thundered, advancing with a menacing mien and a pistol in either hand, "get forward, the pack of ye! Move, ye blackguards!"

They went with expedition, crowding the alley between the deck-house and the rail, huddling together as if for mutual protection; the serang was the last to move, and went with an ill and surly grace; reluctantly, it seemed.

Yet that was no time to judge him for a minor fault. That could wait. O'Rourke herded them before him, watched them scramble down the ladder to the fore-deck, and backed to the spot where the woman stood above the captain. His arm was paining him somewhat, with the irritating, stinging ache that such wounds produce, and he thrust one revolver into his pocket, clasping the other about the hurt.

In a flash the realization of his loss came to him; he staggered to the rail with a cry. The Pool of Flame, his sacred trust, was gone! His eyes searched the deck wildly, but found no trace of the round, yellow leather bag with its precious burden. Despair gripped his heart in a clutch of ice, and for a space the ship reeled about him.

He found himself gazing blankly into the woman's solicitous eyes. "What is it? What is it?" he heard her voice repeating breathlessly. He knew that his lips moved for a time without sound as he strove to answer her. The words, when they came, must have been unintelligible enough to her—which he realized almost as soon as he had spoken them—"The Pool of Flame!"

But by then he was stumbling forward, crying aloud for the serang. Half-way to the ladder he halted, seeing that individual's head and shoulders lifting above the level of the deck. O'Rourke covered him, and called him aft as he again retreated to the scene of the tragedy.

Had he been in a condition to think coherently, he had acted less recklessly. As it was, he was maddened by his loss, able to grasp but one fact: that the Pool of Flame was gone, and must be recovered at whatever cost.

The lascar came with what might have seemed suspicious alacrity, with consideration for the fact that he was coerced, at the pistol's point. Gaunt and somber in the moonlight, walking noiselessly with bare feet, head up and arms swinging limply, he advanced without a pause to within a score of feet of the Wanderer, at which distance O'Rourke found voice enough to bid him: "Stop!"

The serang halted, passive and unmoved. But the strained pause which followed, while the adventurer was steadying himself and striving to act with intelligence, was broken by the lascar himself.

"The sahib has called," he said, in an even and unemotional tone. "I am come. What is the sahib's will with me?"

His words, with his half-servile, half-defiant, wholly contemptuous effect, supplied the one thing needful to restore to the Wanderer his self-control. O'Rourke drew himself up, master of self once more, and looked the lascar in the eye.

"Ye stand," he said slowly, choosing his words, "on the edge of the grave. Do ye comprehend that, dog?"

"Aye, sahib!"

"I have called ye, then, to demand back that which is mine, the leathern bag which ye stole when ye slew your brother, saying falsely that it was he who had slain the captain. I counsel ye now, speak truth and render back to me that which ye have stolen."

The serang stiffened, his eyes glistening in the moonlight. "Sahib!" he cried, as if in supplication.

"No words, dog!" cried O'Rourke sternly. "Do as I bid ye, or abide the outcome."

"The sahib," said the serang slowly, "is full of eyes and wisdom. He sees what men would believe that he could see. I am content." He bowed his head with curious submissiveness, stretching forth his palms as if in token of surrender.

O'Rourke caught at his breath for very joy. He had scarcely hoped for this; he had but called the serang aft as the first of the lascars, hoping to frighten him into revealing which of his comrades had stolen the great ruby, if perchance he knew.

"Ye have, then, the leathern bag?" he demanded, controlling the exultation in his voice.

"Aye, sahib; or, if not that, I have that which was therein."

"The stone?"

"Aye, sahib."

"Then give it me."

"I am the sahib's slave." The serang flashed a strange smile at the revolver in O'Rourke's hand. His attitude puzzled O'Rourke; he would hardly have believed this of the man; rather, he could have conceived of him as denying the theft to the last, and fighting like an unchained devil to retain his booty. His present pose was out of character, or the Wanderer had misjudged him.

Out of character or no, it was gratifying. The serang, with head bent, was fumbling in the folds of his sash; O'Rourke fancied that he was overlong, yet he forbore to hasten him with threats, in view of his abject surrender.

At length, still smiling craftily, the man lifted his eyes and stretched forth a hand tight closed. "The sahib," he said suavely, "shall see that his servant spoke truth. Let this weigh with the sahib for mercy. Behold!"

The brown fingers unclosed, and in the hollow of his palm trembled that which seemed a ball of crystallized rose fire; the stone that man has named the Pool of Flame. O'Rourke uttered a low cry of satisfaction, stepping forward to snatch up the jewel. Simultaneously he was aware of a quick gasp from the direction of the woman, followed, ere he could account for it, by two pistol-shots so immediate that they all but rang as one.

The Wanderer groaned, pitching forward blindly toward his enemy, one side of his head, from ear to temple, a-quiver with an agony as if a white-hot iron had seared him there. He stretched forth an arm aimlessly, gripped a stanchion of the rail, stopping his fall, and hung there for what seemed an eon, the world swimming blood-red before his eyes; in his ears a thunderous rushing as of mighty waters. Dimly he suspected what had happened—that the yielding of the serang had been but a pretext to throw him off his guard, while another of the lascars—too late now to remember that they had set an after watch—crept up to shoot him from behind.

By a supreme effort of his will he kept himself half-erect, clinging to the rail, and unclosed his eyes. So briefly does sensation blind us! It was plain that not a second had elapsed since the firing of the shots. To his left the stricken lascar was still in the act of falling; before him, Mrs. Mervyn stood motionless, her face a mask of terror, revolver still poised; to the right the serang smiled sardonically, showing his white teeth, and was in the act of drawing his creese, his eyes fixed upon the woman who had set at naught his plans.

O'Rourke strove to cry aloud, to warn her, for it was plain that she was overcome with the horror of her deed, and so made thoughtless for the time; but it was as if the bullet that had creased his temple had momentarily paralyzed him; his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, and he could not move.

Powerless (he believed), he saw the serang gather himself in the air and spring; in two leaps he would be upon the woman, and the night crowned with its most pitiful crime. Yet, in midspring, O'Rourke saw him falter and throw back, dropping the creese and clutching wildly at the air.

Stupidly the Wanderer remarked the smoke rising from the muzzle of his revolver, and knew that, somehow, he had pulled the trigger. His heart leaped in his breast, so keen was his gratitude, and, trembling in every limb, he essayed a second time to fire, to put the final period to the serang's career. But the cylinder had become jammed,

and the hammer would not rise. With an oath he flung the weapon from him, let go the rail, and attempted to bridge the distance between himself and the serang, who now was reeling away toward the rail, at some considerable distance.

But O'Rourke was never to lay hands upon that astute lascar. First, because his overtaxed strength, sapped likewise by loss of blood, failed him; and finally because fate put new vigor into the serang; new power to accomplish his last malicious act.

Grinning with anguish, he evaded O'Rourke's clutching fingers, and, raising the hand that held it, flung the Pool of Flame from him with all his might.

O'Rourke paused, petrified with despair. The great stone, glinting now in the moonlight like the very heart of fire, described a long and flaming arc in the air, and—the sea leaped up in welcome, and it was gone.

A great and bitter cry burst from the Wanderer's lips; and, as the echo of it died, the gaunt serang mustered the last remnant of his ebbing strength, seized hold of the rail, and threw himself after that for which he had given his life.

IX.

Mrs. Mervyn, roused from her stupor of remorse by O'Rourke's cry, saw the curtain rung down upon the mutiny of the serang. She it was who, with some return of her habitual nonchalance and clearness of thought, stepped to the companionway and summoned her maid.

Her voice, in its turn, roused O'Rourke. He passed a hand over his eyes, and brought it away black with blood; but was no more than half aware of this. Dazed and heart-broken by his loss, he stared blankly around the shambles that were the *Ranee's* decks. Then, recovering slightly, saw Cécile join her mistress; and realizing that, whatever his personal grief, pain, and despair, he must play the rôle of the O'Rourke, turned and passed down into the saloon.

Danny was in his bunk, sleeping the childlike and loglike sleep that was ever his; Dravos, below, deafened by the mighty song of the engines, had been no more unconscious of the drama on deck than Danny. O'Rourke roused him with a hand gripping each shoulder cruelly and shaking him into consciousness; then methodically booted the drowsy boy up to the deck.

Once there, Danny came to his proper senses, and fell to with a will at the tasks O'Rourke set him. With Cécile he lifted the unconscious captain and bore him down to his berth, there leaving him to the ministrations of Mrs. Mervyn and the maid, and returned, to lift and throw to the fishes the last dead man—the lascar upon whom the serang had counted to scotch the Wanderer.

The latter proceeded to the bridge, where he found the helmsman still at the wheel, soberly keeping the vessel on her course.

The circumstance at the time surprised him; but it afterward was developed by dint of cross-examination of the remaining crew, that the serang had especially exempted Quick and Dravos from the general massacre he had planned, they being held necessary to the navigation of the ship. He had likewise put strict injunctions on the helmsman not to desert the wheel, whatever the tide of battle, whether for or against his brothers. That he had stabbed Quick seemed to be accidental, or necessary, from his view-point, for the preservation of his life. It had not, it seemed, been intended that the plot should culminate so swiftly; it was to begin with the murder of O'Rourke, and proceed with the gradual elimination of Danny and Cécile, with the overpowering and subjugation of the captain and engineer as a climax.

As a matter of fact, the remainder of the lascars were thoroughly cowed, and proved unbelievably docile for the balance of the trip—only too eager to curry favor with the white men by prompt execution of orders and full confession of the details of the serang's murderous conspiracy.

Thus it was that the voyage of the *Ranee* from Aden to Bombay was car-

ried through without further fatality. To the Wanderer, however, belongs more than half the credit; for the next thirty-six hours he did not once leave the bridge nor once close his eyes in slumber. Wounded as he was, and suffering intense mental distress, he dared not for a single instant leave the lascars in possession of the deck, however meek and humble their attitude.

It was not, indeed, until the *Ranee,* on the stroke of the hour, the evening of the fifteenth day of June, walked smartly into Bombay harbor, the international code signal "NJ" fluttering at her peak, rounded Colabra and dropped anchor off the point; not until Danny and Dravos, relieved from their toil in the broiling engine-room, were free to come on deck and relieve him, that the Wanderer staggered down the bridge ladder, lurched drunkenly to the saloon companionway, and fell, rather than walked, down the steps, his head humming with sleep, his brain so muddled with fatigue and his eyes so heavy with drowsiness that he brushed by Mrs. Mervyn without seeing her or even hearing her low cry of pity and solicitude; and so entered the first stateroom that he chanced upon, and threw himself, already asleep, into the berth. As he did so a loaded revolver dropped from his numb fingers.

It was twilight again when O'Rourke awoke; he found himself staring wide-eyed at the ceiling of the stateroom, upon which rippled wavering lines of light, reflected through the port-hole by the waters without. His mind for the time being was a blank; he was merely conscious that he was rested, that the ship was motionless..

Then, in a blinding flash, memory returned to him. He rose, curiously light-headed and weak pushed open the door, and stepped out into the saloon.

It was lighted, if poorly, by a single smoky kerosene-lamp dependent from a beam above the center-table, and wore a hollow air of desolation, for all that Danny slept there, his crimson head pillowed on arms crossed before him on the table. The ship was utterly silent, and the Wanderer's sensitive intuition told him that it was uninhabited but for himself and his servant.

He clapped a hand on Danny's shoulder, shook him into wakefulness. The boy leaped to his feet with a cry, and, seizing O'Rourke's hand, began to sob upon it—a touching but disconcerting performance, to the last degree exasperating to a man thirsting and famished.

O'Rourke, as gently as he could, disengaged his hand and thrust his servitor away, at the same time indicating in no uncertain tones that he would eat and drink. Provided with a duty, Danny's emotions were diverted; he bustled away, and returned with an excellent cold meal—sandwiches, a salad, cheese, and other edibles, upon a tray graced likewise by a magnum of champagne. And you are to believe that the Wanderer fell to and wolfed it all, to the last crumb and the last drop.

A new man, refreshed, he demanded a cigar, received it, and, with his head cocked on one side and something of his old humor twinkling in his eye (what time it was not clouded with bewilderment and concern at the answers he received), catechized his valet.

"How long," was his first question, "will I have slept, now, Danny, ye divvle?"

"Wan complete round av the clock, yer honor."

"Where are we?"

"At anchor, sor, off the fort, in Bombay Harbor."

"Umm-hm. I'm by way of remembering something of that. What of the captain?"

"Raymoved, yer honor, to a horse-pittle ashore, sor, to con-valesce. At laste, I'm thinking thot's the worrd the doctor used, sor."

"He's on the mend, then?"

"Aw, yiss, yer honor."

"Good! And Dravos?"

"Gone ashore, sor, this afternoon, for a conference wid the authorities, rayspictin' the mutiny, sor. *An'* not come back yit."

"And Mrs. Mervyn?"

"Aw, yer honor!"

"What's the matter, Danny?"

"Sure, sor, an' axin' yer pardon for sp'akin' so, an' m'anin' no manner of disrayspict whatsoever——"

"What the divvle, Danny!"

Danny drew himself up with an air, bristling indignation. "Sure, an' 'tis meself never seen the loike av thim wimmin for rrrank ingratichude, sor. An' afther all thot meself had said to thot black-eyed Frinch vixen——"

"Danny!"

"No, sor, not wan worrd av ut will I widdror, not if yer honor discharges me wid me usual month's notice, sor, this minute. Faix, didn't *I* see? No more an' the anchor was down, sor, and yerself did to the worrld in yer berth, sor, thin thim two hails a boat an' has thimsilves taken ashore, widout so much as a fare-ye-well, and me m'anin' the most honorable intintions in the world toward the maid——"

"There, Danny! Be quiet a bit and let me think. No word, ye say?"

"Nothin', sor, beyant this note an' packidge, come out be spicial missingir no more thin two hours agone, sor."

"Letter? Package? Where? Give them to me this instant, ye limb, if ye would not have me flay ye alive——"

"I have thim here, sor."

The servant produced an oblong envelope of heavy cream paper, addressed in an angular, feminine hand to "Colonel Terence O'Rourke, S. S. *Ranee*. By hand." O'Rourke seized it and tore the flap with eager fingers, while Danny tugged at a bulky cardboard box which he had inserted, for security, in his coat pocket.

Half a dozen sheets of closely written bond paper met O'Rourke's eye. He began to con them aloud, unconscious that the valet could hear:

"APOLLO BUNDER HOTEL,
"Bombay, June 15, noon.

"ME DEAR COLONEL O'ROURKE: Be the time this comes under your eye ye will be far away from Mrs. Mervyn, for I, for safety's sake, am sailing be the——

"Name of the ship scratched and blotted out! Pwhat the divvle is all this?"

From this point the letter ran, in the woman's own words:

I was on the point of telling you my destination and the ship I travel by. That I fail to do so, colonel, dear, is a tribute to your fascinations and my respect for them. It is better that you shall have no inkling as to my plans or my future movements; the reason for which will appear.

First of all, this is to be taken as a confession: I have deceived you unconscionably; I have lied to you and to your friends, Captain Quick—for whose speedy recovery I pray—and that odd, delightful character, Mr. Dravos. I am not, never was, and never shall be a king's courier; my golden greyhound is a trinket that I have worn for years; the significance I attributed to it the result of an inspiration in a moment of extremity, a fib to save me from a greater lie.

The whole of this wretched and terrible business was the outcome of a strange coincidence. Had you not shipped by the *Panjnab*, when we believed that you had discovered the deception that had been practised upon you, the Pool of Flame would to-day have been half-way across the Indian Peninsula, in my possession, traveling to its rightful owners. From Calcutta it would have gone by other hands to Rangoon—by the hands of a man better fitted than I to conduct the final negotiations, and receive the reward.

Through a singularly fatuous oversight—singular in a man of your splendid intellect and acuteness—you have labored until this moment under a great, but not unnatural, delusion. A brief recountal of the circumstances will serve to enlighten you.

It will not have escaped you—indeed, you cannot help but know—that two parties, aside from yourself, have been interested in the return of the great ruby and the receipt of the promised reward. The second party was native, headed by (I believe) the man whom we knew as the serang of the *Ranee*—the lascar of the *Panjnab* from whose assault you saved me.

The first party traced you to Athens, and, failing to catch you off your guard there, contrived the plot by which Captain Hole, of the *Pelican*, approached you one afternoon in the Zappeion, and offered you passage to Alexandria. Had it not been for myself, you would have been murdered and thrown overboard the first night the *Pelican* sailed from the Piræus; it was my woman's heart that negatived the suggestion, fought against it, and planned the plan whereby you were to be hoodwinked. It was I who caused a paste duplicate of the Pool of Flame to be manufactured and given into the hands of Captain Hole, with instructions to substitute it for the genuine ruby at his convenience. Unfortunately, either Hole or his first officer bungled the job and used a cold-chisel upon the

lock of your trunk, thus rendering superfluous the substitution—which you would have been quick to discover.

From the *Pelican* (which had been your grave otherwise) you escaped by something little short of a miracle—and the adventitious aid of Danny, that paragon of loyalty, of whose very existence we were in ignorance. Your grand mistake, however, was subsequently due to Danny, whose joyful triumph at finding the stone in Captain Hole's coat pocket terminated a search which, if persisted in, would surely have resulted in the discovery of the real Pool of Flame upon Mr. Dennison's person.

And so it was that you, since that night aboard the *Pelican,* have been treasuring and believing in a fraud. The jewel you took from Hole and brought aboard the *Panjnab* was merely a clever imitation; had you troubled to inspect it thoroughly you must inevitably have discovered the substitution. But you did not.

To me was assigned the task of carrying the genuine article to Calcutta. How the native thieves learned that it was I who possessed it will never be known, I fancy. Their ways are dark beyond our understandings. At all events, they *knew,* as was clearly proven by the lascar's attempt upon me on the *Panjnab,* while you, at the time, went unmolested.

Then (to my shame I confess it), I thought it would be a fair joke to accept your offer of protection, to permit you to take me in safety—eluding the lascar—to Bombay. The invention of the king's courier story was made necessary. Unhappily, the lascar fathomed our scheme, it appears, and shipped himself as the *Ranee's* serang.

The rest you know, up to the moment when the serang, finding the chamois bag containing the false Pool of Flame on the deck, fancied that I had passed it to you (I suppose) and made away with it. He must have discovered his mistake immediately, for it was clearly apparent that he was undeceived when he so willingly produced and used it as a bait to trap you. His casting of it into the sea was no more than a piece of claptrap malice; for he knew that you believed the stone real, and he was dying. In another minute, had he not thrown himself after the imitation, you would have killed him.

There remains to be penned a brief paragraph explanatory of this final development, which, of all the blood-stained coil, will, I cannot but believe, forever remain to you a mystery the most inexplicable. And yet the solution lies in yourself, the O'Rourke, the gallant and true gentleman who accepted me without question, believing me what I pretended to be, who gave me of his faith, his strength, his wit, his courage, and address; who all but gave, and, I believe, would willingly have given, his life for my unworthy sake. I dare say the sentimental adventuress is seldom to be met with outside the story-books, my dear, but I have watched you more closely than you thought, and—you have made yourself more dear to me than I can say.

My eyes, sharpened by the hunger of my heart, saw how you suffered, believing you had failed in the vow made to your dead friend. I am a woman and—I cannot bear to know that you suffer, you being you.

Accept, then, the true Pool of Flame from me, in token of my sincerity. If it be so ordered that you are to win through and claim at length the reward, remember then that it was partly due to the woman who, a fortnight since, was not, and to-day is no longer

MRS. MERVYN.

At length O'Rourke put down the scribbled sheets. And he stared at Danny and the package in Danny's hands as though he doubted his senses. But finally, in a voice strangely unsteady: "Danny," he said, "undo that parcel."

"Yiss, yer honor."

In a breath the twine was off it, the cover lifted. Scarce daring to breathe, O'Rourke leaned over the table and peered into the box.

Securely embedded therein, in a nest of jewelers' cotton, rested the marvelous stone which, up to within that sixth part of an hour, O'Rourke had believed at the bottom of the Arabian Gulf. Under the dingy lamplight it glowed and pulsed with its secret flame; and the glory of it was blinding to the eye.

But O'Rourke had little mind to dwell upon its beauties. A quick and searching scrutiny satisfied him that he had not been played upon a second time—though he were ashamed to have doubted. And then, in the same queer tones: "Cover it up, Danny," he said; and sat staring blankly into vacancy, without stirring, for the best part of fifteen minutes.

At the end of which his lips opened and he uttered the epitaph of "Mrs. Mervyn."

Said the Wanderer: "Faith! What a woman!"

Ebenezer Brown's Escapade

By Harry C. Antes

An appalling story of how a good man fell from grace—and all because he chose to regard a certain five-dollar bill as a dispensation of Providence rather than a temptation of the devil. As Mr. Antes paints him Ebenezer presents a very comical figure, but we think he will claim your sympathy as well as your smiles

MR. EBENEZER BROWN did not look like a man who would loom up in the calcium-light of publicity and take the center of the stage as chief actor in an escapade. On the contrary, his intimate friends would not have thought that he would have known what an escapade was if he met it face to face. He was as commonplace in appearance as in name—a mild little man with weak, blue eyes, and a small, yellow pair of mutton-chop whiskers as his most prominent outward characteristics. Strangers sometimes flattered him by taking him for an English clergyman. But gossip broadly hinted that when he married he lost such individuality as he had ever possessed, and wondered how on earth a small man like him ever happened to marry such a large woman.

One Friday, the thirteenth day of the month, Mr. Brown strayed from the narrow way of accustomed rectitude. That day was as a lurid picture, set in a gaudy frame, that hung long on the rather blank walls of Ebenezer's memory.

Events began with the arrival of a special delivery messenger who came while breakfast was being eaten, and brought a letter from Mr. Brown's revered mother-in-law, a widow lady who resided in the suburbs. The letter contained a tale of woe. Mrs. Brinks was afflicted with periodical ailments; "blues" her daughter tersely termed them; and one of the seasons of depression was upon her.

"Now, Ebbie, my dear," said Mrs. Brown in her decisive manner, when she had read the missive, "mother is in trouble again, and I shall go right out home this morning and see what ails her. I'll take little Ebbie along. We won't be back until to-morrow. Here is fifty cents—fifteen cents for lunch, twenty-five cents for dinner, and ten cents for a magazine in the evening, so that you won't be lonesome. You can drop in to Sister Jane's for breakfast in the morning, and you will draw your pay by noon to-morrow. Now, mind you come right home after work this evening, and don't let *me* hear of your carousing around in the streets after dark, that's all!"

Mr. Brown nodded with meek acquiescence, but without any great display of enthusiasm. The warning was scarcely needed, he reflected. A man could not get much "carousing" out of a ten-cent surplus.

He started for the office with no intention of rebelling against the fiat of his connubial autocrat. But in the air of spring there is a potent influence that spurs men on to strange deeds. Ebenezer thrust out his chest and inhaled deep and long as he walked to the car, when suddenly a nectar of wickedness permeated his being, and flowed fast through tingling veins.

"By jiminy cracks!" he exclaimed, stopping short in his tracks and addressing an imaginary person as he brought his right fist down with a whack upon his left palm, "I'll do it, I will! I won't stay at home and read an old magazine, nixy me! I'll borrow a dollar of Stokes, and go to a

variety show. Gee! Maria would have a fit if she ever found it out. But she won't. When she counts my wages I can tell her that I lost a dollar."

Ebenezer swelled up like a toad as in imagination he burst asunder the shackles of his serfdom and strode forth in the glorious air of the bright morning an emancipated man.

Then, as if Providence was cognizant of his proper assertion of independence, right before him on the walk lay a direct manifestation of approval—a five-dollar bill; a new, crisp bill, emblematic of his new and joyous freedom! Not a soul was in sight upon the quiet street as with one fell swoop he sprang upon it, and thrust it deep down in his trousers pocket.

Pious people might have thought that the money was a snare of the evil one instead of a providential dispensation, but not Ebenezer. All morning he glowed with an unholy and unwonted exultation. Jinks! he would have a time!

At noon, instead of wending his way as usual to the modest lunch-room where he was accustomed to go for his daily coffee and rolls, Ebenezer Brown repaired to a gilded place technically known as a saloon. Here he chanced to meet a boon companion of the days of long ago, Thomas Ryan, a ponderous man, who lived well and dressed well, no one knew how. Certainly he was never known to work.

Mr. Ryan was delighted at the chance meeting. He greeted his former friend exuberantly.

"Why, strike me dead, if here ain't little Ebbie Brown; and wearing whiskers and spectacles, too! Shake, pal of Auld Lang Syne! Heard you were dead."

"No, married," corrected his friend.

"Aw, what is the difference? What are you doing now? Still pushing a pen in the office, eh? Cut it out, man; cut it out. Follow me, and you will wear diamonds."

Ebenezer admitted that the prospects of the free and easy life of the gentleman of fortune had, at times, an alluring fascination for him—but then, you know—duties of a family man—wife would object—boy to raise——

The affable one alluded to rodents, and seized the little man peremptorily by the arm.

"Say, you come with me, do you hear? Quit your blooming job for the rest of the day. Come out to Harlem, *and* follow me, and to-night you will dine on porterhouse and mushrooms, and bathe your feet in champagne!"

Ebenezer had never been to the races in his life; once only had he dined upon porterhouse and mushrooms; his pedal extremities had never known a bath more ambrosial than hot water and soap. Straightway he began to itch.

"Well, I would like to, if I could only get off——"

"Of course you can get off. Dollars to doughnuts that you have not been absent a day in the last year, have you? Thought not. Now you trot right down to Mr. Thingumbob at the office and tell him that your wife has the epizoodics; or, ever try the dead mother-in-law racket? Boy fell down the well; cat's got the measles; house is afire—oh, Jerusalem the Golden! I could think of a hundred reasons in five minutes. Now you strike a gait."

Such enthusiasm was irresistible. Ebenezer fabricated a yarn, and told it to the chief clerk without winking. Then Tom had one on Eb, and Eb had another on Tom. These libations to Bacchus cemented their friendship together with the adhesive plaster of conviviality.

Oft had Mr. Ryan burned the midnight oil, figuratively speaking, in the pursuit of knowledge gained from the fascinating study of the form-books used by the racing man. Therefrom had he evolved a system, elaborate and intricate, known to the professional as "dope." With this dope he proposed to smite his Ishmaelites, the bookies, hip and thigh, as strong-armed Samson smote with the jaw-bone of an ass.

The anxious, seething crowd about the betting-stands, the monotonous chant of the book-makers as they gathered in their harvest, the blatant voice

of one of the fraternity cursing a man who was so inconsiderate as to request change of him, the gay and bright-hued ladies in the grand stand, the exhilarating selection played by the band, and above all, and over all, the dust (fitting aroma of the race-course), stirred up by the trampling of a myriad feet—all was strange to Ebenezer; and he viewed the passing show through the rosy spectacles of novelty.

But Mr. Ryan sniffed the air like an old charger, and butted recklessly into the throng to scan the various placards above the stands, calling out his favorite slogan: "Follow me, me boy; follow me and you will wear diamonds! Play my system, Ebbie—Lucien Appleby is a good horse, but Fore and Aft wins this race. Eight to five—can't lose. How much have you got, anyhow?"

"Well—er—you see, I did not expect to come, and am rather unprepared——"

"How much, man alive? Give it a name?"

"Four dollars——"

Mr. Ryan made a gesture of despair.

"Four dollars! Ghost of dead Julius Cæsar! Come to the races with four dollars! That's rich. My unsophisticated friend, you can't play the races with four dollars; all you can do is to lose it. Here! See those two stalls down there at the end of the row, with the sign 'field-book' above them? Well, butt into the crowd around them, and bet a dollar on any old plug; the longest shot in the bunch by preference."

Ebenezer, aglow with his first attack of the gambler's fever, worked his way into the press. A colored man in front of him reached up a dollar to the man in the stand with the demand: "Gimme Ol' Hutch foh place!"

Our embryo plunger made the same bet; the "bookie" grabbed his dollar as he hoarsely chanted: "O' Hutch, place, twelve to one," and thrust into the upraised hand a square, striped ticket marked with unmeaning hieroglyphics to Ebenezer's unaccustomed eyes.

His companion met him at the edge of the crowd.

"Who did you bet on? Old Hutch for place, eh? Worst old selling-plater in the bunch," he remarked, forgetting his previous advice to bet on the longest odds. "Well, never mind, you have got three dollars left. Let's have a drink and forget it. But you should have bet on Fore and Aft. He's as good as the wheat. I have a hundred on him, and he will just walk away from the rest of the ponies."

Fore and Aft did—for half the stretch. Then he wilted, and Lucien Appleby strode by and left a broad streak of daylight behind him. Old Hutch, the despised selling-plater, crept up on the flanks of Fore and Aft, and would not be shaken off. The race belonged to Lucien Appleby, and the struggle was between Fore and Aft and Old Hutch for place. Inch by inch, foot by foot, the old-timer, under punishment, wore up on the favorite, and at the critical moment thrust out his long neck, and ran second under the wire by the length of a nose.

Mr. Ryan voiced his sentiments in a manner that surely would have pained the judges if they could have heard him. His friend, however, viewed the matter in an entirely different light, and reminded him that it might have been worse, as one of them, at any rate, had won. Whereupon the angry form-player turned upon him with vituperative personalities, and a certain coolness sprang up between them.

Systems went smashing to destruction that day long remembered as the "Black Friday of the pikers." But Ebenezer Brown, with the confidence of a man playing his first races, sowed with reckless abandon, and reaped an abundant harvest of the "long green."

He had heard of Jockey Robbins, then in the zenith of his fame, and bet on the horses he rode in the second and third races—Allista and Huzzah. Allista brought him in nine dollars; Huzzah twenty more. He dared to play If You Dare in the fourth race; and was well repaid for his bravery. He was now fifty dollars to the good, while the man of system was several hundreds to the bad. Still, with grim resolve, the latter stuck to his line of play, believing

with the blind trust of the devotee of chance that his luck would change.

Now came the fifth race, for an even mile.

"Bet on Collonade, Ebbie from Plungerville," said Mr. Ryan, with a feeble attempt at jocularity that was belied by his worried brow and the haggard lines about his mouth. "He can't lose. Got my last dollar up on him. If he don't win, why"—he uplifted his eyebrows, shrugged his shoulders, and spread out his hands, palm upward—"I am all in, sure. But he will win; you hear me talking! Who's your choice?"

"Big Ben."

"Big Ben, sixty to one! Why, you're daffy! This is the colt's first race, and he is ridden by a stable-boy."

"Never mind, Tommy from Bustedville," retorted the metamorphosed Ebenezer. "I've got a hunch. That nigger that I followed in the first race is betting on him. Saw him put up ten dollars. It is all in the running, anyhow. Big Ben has as good a chance as the favorite."

"But a long shot like that! Sixty to one! Why, I wouldn't dare—still—oh, I don't know, a fool for luck, every time! If you fell in the river to-day you would not get wet. I guess that I will try a chance myself. Lend me ten dollars, will you?"

"No," replied Mr. Brown laconically.

"Why—why not?" demanded the other, staggered.

"Because I bet every dollar I had—fifty-four in all. Here is fifty cents left, if that is any good to you."

Ryan declined with needless profanity.

"Show me your ticket."

Ebenezer produced it. Thomas stretched out a hand that trembled in spite of his forced attempt at composure, and with dilating eyes stared at the little strip of pasteboard that, within ten minutes, would not be worth one cent, or else would be worth three thousand two hundred and forty dollars! He clucked as he handed it back.

"Keep a tight fist on it, my boy. Holy smoke, Eb! but you certainly are the gamest ever! Good thing that you have a return ticket, or you might have to walk home."

"You forget. I've got fifty cents left. Anyhow, I'd have company."

"You are either an idiot or else an inspired genius. On the whole, I believe that you are a composite—an inspired idiot. Well, there goes the bugle. Here they come, and soon will we know."

Out from the paddock in single file pranced six horses, long-limbed and agile, deep-chested. First came the favorite, Collonade; sober, sedate, and calm as befitting the hero of many a gallant struggle; then sulky Serge, vicious of temper, ears laid back. Third was Sidney C. Love, tossing his head, pawing daintily with his right forehoof, as if to show off his one white stocking. "Oh, such a perfect beauty!" said the ladies; and surely they knew. Next was Airlight, black as night and wicked as an imp; after him Sir Hugh, a nervous roan; and last of all, Big Ben, large and bony, deep bay of color—an unknown colt, ridden by an unknown jockey.

"He'll be left at the post," predicted the wiseacres, as he reared and tried to bolt. But a few old foxes, watching the boy who rode him, whistled softly and hurried to place a few dollars on the long-shot before the gong sounded. The boy, Grey by name and wearing gray colors, softly soothed his restless mount with kind words, gently patting his neck. In the tedious maneuvering for position he guided Big Ben with the cunning and intuition of the born jockey.

Down fell the flag, forward sprang the racers as only thoroughbreds can spring; the electric gong clanged; all bets were closed. One breathless second, then to the blue skies rolled the thunder of five thousand throats:

"They're off! they're off!"

They were off, Sir Hugh in the lead, Collonade and Serge neck and neck; Sidney C. Love, Airlight, and, last of all, Big Ben trailing along in the dust full six lengths in the rear!

Mr. Ryan trained a pair of field-

glasses upon the track, and in his big voice called out the running to all who might care to listen:

"Sir Hugh in the lead; Collonade, Serge. Aha! Collonade, Sir Hugh, Serge. Collonade, Serge, Sir Hugh, Sidney C., Airlight, Big Ben. Collonade in the lead at the quarter; Collonade, Collonade. There goes Serge to the front—no, not yet; hurrah for Collonade! C-o-l-l-o-n-a-d-e still in the lead, and the half is p-a-s-t! Collonade, Serge, Sir Hugh. Big Ben coming up, but he'll never be in the money. Snakes! just look at him cleaving the landscape and circling them all! That Jockey Grey is lifting him right up in the air. He's running like a house afire—past Airlight, past Sir Hugh, past Sidney C. Three-quarters—Collonade, Big Ben, Serge. Come on, Collonade; come on, c-o-m-e o-n, Collonade, C-o-l-l-o-n-a-d-e!"

On came Collonade, on came Big Ben and Serge abreast; down the last quarter pounded the three. The hoarse shouts of a thousand form-players rose in the prayer to Collonade:

"Come on, Collonade! Collonade, Collonade, come on; oh, come on! Collonade, come on!"

Perhaps half as many more, who had bet more on the reputation of the famous Jockey Henry than upon the speed of the horse he rode, besought Serge:

"Come on, Serge! Come on, Serge!"

But there were two men who had a mighty word of encouragement to Big Ben. Down to the left of the stand was a large colored man with a throat of brass:

"Hi, hi, Big Ben! Come erlong like er wind, Big Ben! You's got 'em all beat, mah honey Ben; you's got wings toh you's feet. Make 'em fly, Ben! Come on, Big Ben! Come on, come on, Big Ben!"

Down in front, jammed tight by the mob against the fence by the wire, was a crazy little man with yellow side-whiskers and rumpled hair; wild-eyed, furious, his spectacles hanging by one hook and dangling unheeded under his chin as he pounded the impassive pickets with his hat and split the atmosphere with his shrill shrieks:

"Big Ben, Big Ben! Come on, Benny, old hoss! Come on, Big Ben! Hike yourself, Big Ben! Oh, come on, Big Ben; hi! hi! hi! hi!—Big Ben, Big Ben—wins, *w-i-n-s! Yeow!*"

Big Ben won; and Ebenezer rivaled his speed in the last quarter as he ran to the betting-booth of the unfortunate book-maker, who, by the laws of chance, was doomed to cash the ticket. Ebenezer's heart throbbed and his bosom swelled in wild, hilarious, glorious exultation as he crammed the fat roll deep down in his pocket and clutched it tightly lest it vanish as suddenly and mysteriously as it came.

Ebenezer felt a good deal as if struck by lightning; and lightning, it is said, never strikes twice in the same spot. Therefore, having no hopes of a second such stroke, Ebenezer viewed the last race from a far distance—and saved all his gains.

Coming home on the special that night, there was a big coffee-colored man who loudly bewailed his luck.

"Yessah! Ah done put up ten dollahs on Big Ben, an' Ah done tak' down six hunnered, yessah; an' den Ah done lost mah haid, jesso; an' Ah put it all up on ol' fool hoss Fake! Fake him name, an' Fake him am, suah enuff! Done run like him got fly-papah stuck ter hims feet; an' done come in las', yessah, jesso; done come in las'!"

A little man with yellow whiskers and mild blue eyes thrust a five-dollar bill upon the surprised colored man, and left him without a word of explanation.

In the court of a certain unpretentious apartment-house one warm spring evening, men, lounging in their shirt-sleeves and smoking the pipe of peace, discussed the performance of Big Ben; while their wives criticized the furniture of the new family who had moved in that day, and settled the quarrels of the various broods of children.

Came there suddenly in the glare of the electric light on the street corner,

within full sight of their scandalized vision, a little man with familiar yellow whiskers, tacking from side to side unsteadily, and smiling serenely at the world at large through the naked rim of a pair of glassless spectacles; the brim of what had once been a respectable straw hat perched jauntily over one ear, a huge watermelon under one arm and the hand of the other arm thrust deep in his pocket, singing as he warbled:

"In 'er goosh ol' shummer-shime, in 'er goosh ol' shummer-shime!"

Before him appeared a grim and revengeful specter—his wife Maria!

Down fell the melon and broke into a dozen pieces. From far and near came whooping children, and fell upon their prey. The sinner regarded them not; his eyes were glued upon the wrathful countenance of his spouse. His run of luck was over.

"Why — why — dearesh, thoughtsh you wash stay wish mosher. Howsh mosher?"

Mrs. Brown, mindful of the grinning audience, spoke only four words, but they acted upon Mr. Brown like the spur upon a jaded horse.

"Mr. Ebenezer Zachary Brown!"

There was a scuffling on the stair, and Mr. Brown's voice rose in meek protest—a door slammed, and all was quiet. The women giggled, and each man took a long draw at his pipe, grinned, and winked a solemn wink at his neighbor. But the next day, when the news became known, Mr. Brown could not have attracted more attention if he had suddenly sprouted a pair of horns.

The Browns now live in a handsome cottage in the suburbs. They own it. And at rare intervals, when Mrs. Brown has gone to visit "mother" for a day, Mr. Brown hies away to a certain place of refreshment upon the corner, buys a drink and a cigar, strolls casually over to the ball-score and racing-card, and proceeds to expound wise discourse upon the art of winning at a horse-race; illustrating his remarks with the history of what befell him upon one balmy spring day; and forecasts what he is going to do again, one of these days, when business affairs will permit of his taking a day off.

And the man behind the bar winks a solemn wink at his crony in front of the bar, and the crony in front of the bar winks a solemn wink at the man behind the bar. For, you see, they have heard of Mrs. Brown.

AT THE CHRISTMAS CONCERT

IT was the annual Christmas concert in the village, and the local band was helping to swell the evening's enjoyment. The slight young man who performed upon the slide trombone was a very enthusiastic player, and was putting in all he knew—so energetically, indeed, that he went red in the face.

An old lady who sat in the front row watched the movements of the slide with interest, and appeared to have eyes for nothing else.

At last came the grand "climax" in the piece the band was playing, and the slide shot out to its full length for a long, deep note.

Up jumped the old lady, and, seizing hold of the slide, snatched it out of the bandsman's hand.

"See here! what do you think you're doin', missus!" yelled the astonished musician. "Do you want to ruin the instrument?"

"Young man," said the old lady kindly, "I've felt sorry for you all night the way you have struggled to get that sliding thing off, and I couldn't sit and see you in difficulties any longer. So I sez to myself, 'Jane,' I sez, 'help him,' and I have."

Cleopatra's Necklace

Being Another Remarkable Adventure in the Life of Tommy Williams, Artist, Hypnotist, and Detective

By J. Kenilworth Egerton

Author of "The Adventure of the Bahama Cay," Etc.

(In Two Parts.—Part I.)

AN expression of anxiety and concern replaced the customary stolid placidity on the face of Duck Sing, Mr. Tommy Williams' Chinese servant, as his master refused or barely tasted dish after dish of his culinary masterpieces. Tommy, who was ordinarily a vivacious and charming dinner companion, had been strangely quiet during the meal, and when we adjourned to his studio, a beautifully weird apartment where he always prepared the after-dinner coffee himself, he lighted the charcoal in the brazier and blew it into a red glow with a small bellows without speaking.

Long and intimate association with Tommy had taught me to respect his moods, and I knew that his confidence, which was freely given when he was quite ready, was not to be forced; so I possessed my soul in patience and smoked my cigarette in silence, until he poured the coffee into the small cups.

"It answers the Arab requirements," he said, as he tasted it. "It's 'black as the devil, hot as hell, and as sweet as love.' Heigh-ho! I wonder if love *is* sweet?"

"I am suspicious that you are experimenting with it—you seem to have lost your appetite, and that is usually a symptom, I believe," I said, grinning; and Tommy's answering laugh was mirthless.

"I reckon that the tender sentiment is not for two crusty old bachelors like us," ne said, but his eyes were fixed steadily on his cup. "I *am* off my feed, but it's because I'm getting stale. My work doesn't interest me since the spur of necessity no longer drives me to it; hypnotism bores me, for I have no interesting problem to solve by it; and, although Detective-sergeant Clancy is continually bothering me to help him out in some picayune, commonplace criminal investigation, the thought of the associations which it implies is nauseating."

"Why not take a run abroad and try a little change of scene?" I suggested.

He gave an impatient shrug of his shoulders. "That means studio associations and talking shop," he said irritably. "Easels and sun umbrellas form part of the landscape, even in the remote deserts, these days, and it would bore me more than remaining here. Besides, I believe that I have half-promised to be D'Armenthal's best man next month, and I can't decently get away."

"Isn't that rather rubbing it in?" I asked sympathetically, for I knew that his last excursion in hypnotic investigation, successful as it had been in its results, had left him a heartache to embitter the victory over Wakefield, the notorious gambler.

"It isn't that which bothers me," he said moodily. "I hate to think of the responsibility I have assumed in making that marriage possible—but not

entirely from personal reasons. I should much prefer to have nothing more to do with it, and I almost wish that Longley had never entrapped me into the affair." He smiled as he took from the tray the card which the silent-footed Duck Sing held out to him. "Speak of angels, or the devil; here's our friend again. Show the gentleman in, Duck Sing."

The Celestial, after a respectful "Allee lightee," departed as silently as he had come, and a moment later Longley, the assistant district attorney, joined us in the soft light under the Arab tent where we were smoking and lounging on the cushioned divans.

"If I hadn't convincing proof to the contrary, I should believe that you were the two laziest chaps in New York," he said, after he had lighted a cigar and Tommy had poured a cup of coffee for him. "It tempts me to give up law, and adopt art as a calling, when I drop into luxury like this after racking my brains all day in building up cases against crooks."

"You'd find painting all right as a recreation, but the detection and conviction of criminals offer a less precarious livelihood," answered Tommy, laughing.

"Yes, when you can detect the convict," said Longley irritably, "but when you spend day after day and night after night working at a case and only get more mixed up as you go along, it's mighty unsatisfactory."

"I don't; I go at it differently," answered Tommy complacently. "The trouble with your methods is that you give your imagination no play, and, instead of trying to put yourself in a criminal's place and reasoning as he would, you go out with a net and gather in a lot of suspects, and immediately put the guilty ones on their guard."

"I've no right to resent your criticisms nor to question your methods," admitted Longley good-naturedly. "I don't know what the latter are, but you have given me convincing proof that they produce results. In this particular case, your criticism is unjust, however; the very nature of the crime and the position of the probable criminals makes the ordinary police methods impracticable. Would it interest you to hear about it?"

"Provided that you don't try to induce me to work at it," said Tommy suspiciously; and Longley laughed.

"I *did* put up a job on you in the Stuke case; I acknowledge it; but, if you come in on this, it will be a purely voluntary act," he said. "Here are the facts, so you can judge for yourself. For two years there have been steady complaints made to the detective bureau of serious jewel robberies; not ordinary shop-lifting, window-smashing, or safe-cracking jobs. Those are simple matters which are dealt with by the ordinary police methods; they have the criminals who specialize in those forms of crime marked down and classified, and it never takes long to round them up. This crime—or, rather, series of crimes—has been perpetrated under different conditions, and we can safely exclude the experienced professionals from our consideration. Only a very small proportion of the thefts have ever been given publicity, for the circumstances under which they occurred made the victims hesitate to speak openly, for fear that they might cast suspicion on their friends. The losses have all been sustained by wealthy people, to whom the intrinsic value of the articles stolen made but small difference, while any scandal arising from police investigation would have been intensely disagreeable."

"You are referring to the class usually spoken of as the Four Hundred, I suppose?" said Tommy interrogatively.

Longley nodded. "Yes, and since certain revelations concerning the complacency with which they have stood blackmailing to avoid publicity, you can understand that most of the victims are shyer than ever about risking this kind of notoriety. The first serious theft, that of a pearl necklace, occurred at a very exclusive social function about two years ago, and since then the robberies have regularly taken place on

yachts, in country houses, at fashionable hotels, and during entertainments of one sort and another where only the most eminently respectable people were present. In the two years the aggregate value of the property which has disappeared reaches over the tidy sum of one million, including as it does the Whitbridge emeralds, the Poulter sapphires, the Van Sutten rubies, and, last but not least, the Cleopatra necklace."

"Great Scott! not the Parkington one?" exclaimed Tommy incredulously.

"That is the only one bearing that name, I believe; at any rate, it is the one which has disappeared," continued Longley. "That theft can't be long concealed to spare any one's sensibilities, but, with a nominating convention and a campaign which will probably be bitterly contested, ahead of me, I am not looking to give offense to influential people, so I am hiding it from the press as long as possible."

"But that must have been taken from the Metropolitan Museum," said Tommy. "Not more than six weeks ago I was permitted, as a special privilege, to see it at Tiffany's, where it had just been cleaned, and I was told that it was to go to the museum immediately."

"Well, unfortunately, it didn't," replied Longley. "The recent history of that necklace is interesting, and its theft is the culmination of all the robberies. You know that Parkington, who inherited a large fortune, devoted nearly all of his life to a study of Egyptology, and to carrying on excavations around Luxor. His discoveries have enriched the Egyptian collections of all of the great museums, but the thing which possessed the greatest sentimental and intrinsic value of all he unearthed was that necklace, which the accompanying papyri and inscriptions on some of the gems proved to have formed the most valued article in Cleopatra's jewel-chest. Tiffany's experts estimate the intrinsic value of the stones separately at considerably over half a million, but the historic associations and undoubted genuineness make its value as a whole simply incredible. Every museum curator in the world has been crazy to get hold of it, and Parkington received fabulous offers for it. He never let it out of his possession during his lifetime, and until his will was opened it was not known that it had been bequeathed to the Metropolitan Museum."

"But tell us about the circumstances of the theft," said Tommy impatiently. All of his listlessness had disappeared, and his face had assumed the Mephistophelean expression which indicated intense absorption in any problem which appealed to him, and I realized that his interest in life was renewed, and that Longley had gained a powerful ally.

"I'll come to that directly, but there are certain things which you must know first," answered Longley placidly. "Parkington had but one child, a daughter, Catherine, who was his constant companion up to the time that she married Arthur Faxton, the well-known polo-player and amateur sportsman. Parkington, who was a scholarly man, absorbed in his studies and investigations, nevertheless felt keenly the desertion which her marriage implied; and I have reason to know that he was bitterly disappointed that her choice had not fallen on some one who would have been more in sympathy with his work, and who would, perhaps, continue it. The will bequeathing his most valuable possession to the museum was made two years ago, just after that marriage, and when his remaining estate was inventoried it was found that most of his fortune had been spent in paying the modern Egyptian fellaheen to dig for the lost treasures of their ancestors. Mrs. Faxton's inheritance consisted of but a small proportion of the value of the necklace, and she was naturally disappointed that this wonderful relic, which, alone, would make its possessor a personage, was to pass out of the family."

"But Faxton is a very rich man, so the diminished inheritance could not cause suffering," suggested Tommy.

Longley laughed. "My experience

of the world has taught me that rich people object most strongly to any upsetting of the proposition that, 'To him who hath shall be given,'" he said dryly. "At any rate, the possession of the Rothschild fortune would hardly compensate for the loss of the jewel; a half-dozen of our oil and railway kings have exceeded the former, but all the wealth in the world could not duplicate the other. Perhaps that is what led Mrs. Faxton to retain possession of it as long as possible, and it was not until the museum directors made a peremptory demand for it under the provisions of the will that she set a date for its delivery to them."

"By Jove! I can sympathize with her!" exclaimed Tommy. "I smashed one of the commandments when I saw it at Tiffany's, for I coveted it; and I don't know but I should have broken another, if they hadn't guarded it so jealously. It was fascinating, and an awful temptation. If I'd been in her place, I should have put up a fight for it."

"She couldn't—legally," said Longley, with a significant pause. "The will was unbreakable, and she promised to submit to the inevitable and deliver it on a certain day, but she was unable to keep her agreement, because it mysteriously disappeared from her possession the night before. It was taken from the safe-deposit vault about six weeks ago and delivered to Tiffany to be cleaned, and she promised to hand it over to the directors on a Saturday, at noon. Instead, her husband appeared at the formal meeting, pale in the face and very much disheveled in his ordinarily immaculate attire, and made the startling announcement that it had been stolen from their country house the night before."

"How did it get there—I thought it was at Tiffany's?" asked Tommy eagerly.

"Unfortunately, it was not. You know the accounts of extravagant and eccentric entertainments which appear in the society columns—an evidence that a jaded society craves something new," said Longley contemptuously. "Well, Mrs. Faxton decided to rival those ingenious inventions—which have led to raccoons jumping out of floral centerpieces on to the startled guests, and equally side-splitting, humorous innovations—and issued invitations for a farewell appearance of the necklace for Friday night. Their own house, a very large one, was filled with guests, and pretty much all the other people of their immediate coterie were domiciled at neighboring country houses; so the invitation-list was a long one. The necklace was taken down on an afternoon train by two of Tiffany's most trusted employees; and Faxton, who knew of the many precious jewel robberies and was nervous about the whole affair, had the Pinkenhams send with them two of their best men, who were to remain overnight and accompany Mrs. Faxton back to town the next day when she brought it to the museum. The necklace was duly delivered, Tiffany's men received a receipt for it and returned to town, and the private detectives remained on guard. But in spite of all the precautions, the Cleopatra necklace vanished that night. The museum directors were furious, and it was only out of consideration for Faxton, who implored them to grant him time to recover it, that they refrained from making the whole thing public. Of course the Pinkenhams knew of it. It was reported to the police and referred to me, but the papers have not gotten hold of it, and I am confiding it to you in the strictest confidence."

"Naturally!" exclaimed Tommy impatiently. "Go on—give us the details."

"Just a moment, please; it will save time in the end," protested Longley. "This thing has meant a tremendous amount of work; for there is an undoubted connection between it and the previous robberies. I have a mass of information which is at your disposal if you care to go into it. Are you willing to give us your assistance in this investigation?"

"Of course I am," said Tommy heartily. "The theft of that necklace is a crime against civilization, and it

makes me heart-sick to think that ignorant hands may destroy it to realize on the intrinsic value of the stones. Only, I warn you that you'd better watch me; for if by any chance I do recover it, I should be strongly tempted to elope with it myself."

"I think that I can trust you; I believe that I have seen you resist a greater temptation and make a greater sacrifice," said Longley kindly, and it seemed to me that the redness of Tommy's face was not entirely due to the reflection from the brazier on which he was preparing fresh coffee.

"Go on with the story," he said curtly. "I'll help on this case all that I can, but I don't care a hang about the other robberies."

"Unfortunately, I have to consider them," answered Longley, "and, in any case, they may all prove helpful in solving the greater mystery. As I told you, the circumstances under which they took place precluded the employment of the police methods which you ridicule, but which, after all, keep our prisons comfortably full. There was never any cry of 'Stop thief!' and the nerviest police captain would have hesitated to arrest a roomful of society people, load them into 'hurry-up' wagons, and cart them to the station-house to be searched and possibly put through the third degree. Practically the same difficulty confronted us in quieter investigations; the official detective, promoted from the ranks of the uniformed police, is a good man to deal with the professional criminal who is on the wrong side of the law and can be handled without gloves. The kind of detective so prominent in fiction, who is able to assume the dress and manners of cultivated people and mix with them without exciting suspicion, doesn't exist in fact, and there isn't a man on the force who wouldn't trip over his own feet in anything but thick-soled police boots."

"But how about these wonderful private detectives?" asked Tommy, smiling, and Longley gave an exclamation of contempt.

"A large proportion of them are crooks and blackmailers, and, outside of a very few reliable agencies, incompetent, or worse," he said. "These robberies have been a perfect gold-mine for them, however, and I suppose that there is hardly a pretentious establishment in town that hasn't an alleged sleuth masquerading among the domestic servants, doing anything from blacking boots to serving as butler. Their employment has proved a nuisance to us; for, whatever disguise they assume, there are many whom the police recognize as wolves in sheep's clothing, and, when they run across one, waste time over him because he is known to have a criminal record. That brings me down to our methods, and I will explain what we have done. I will outline our general plan, and you can have copies of all the documents to-morrow, and go over them at your leisure."

Tommy, who knew how to listen when he believed that a man really had something to tell, poured himself a drink, assured himself that a supply of cigarettes was at hand, and, nodding to Longley to proceed, settled himself comfortably on the cushions.

"First," he resumed, "I have had a full report of each of these robberies carefully prepared. These are arranged chronologically; they give the time, place, and all the circumstances, together with as accurate a description of the stolen property as we could obtain, and a list of all persons present and of all servants who might possibly be involved. Each one of these descriptions is kept up to date, and the rare instances of recovery or discovery of the stolen property are duly noted. The documents in each case are kept together and numbered consecutively.

"Second, we have gone through all the cases and made two lists. One contains the names of every person present at any of the robberies; and when a name recurs, the number of the case in which it is found is noted after it. In such a limited circle of people, who are constantly together, it is hardly surprising that many of the names

have quite a string of numbers after them, and at least twenty have been present when the great majority of the thefts took place. The second list comprises the names of all servants connected with the houses or places where the robberies have occurred; and it is needless to say the police have thoroughly investigated the records of every one of them and found out some very curious things, but nothing warranting an arrest."

"And have the records of the 'upper crust' been neglected?" I asked.

A grim smile came to Longley's face. "No," he said; "the discoveries there were even more curious, and a good many frivolous ladies and gentlemen would be threatened with nervous prostration if they knew how much we had discovered of their peccadillos by the very close shadowing to which they have been subjected. Fortunately for them, we remember only the things applicable to our particular business, or there would be a terrible shattering of peaceful homes, and a startling exposure of how some extravagant households are kept up on an income of nothing a year. Some notations are made in the cases, as showing possible motive for robbery; but we are not trying to stir up domestic infelicity, so we omit everything which does not bear directly on the case in question. Many of the people have courted the fullest investigation, and in more than one instance have cheerfully submitted to the greatest personal inconvenience to assist us. You cannot have the slightest idea of how general the consternation in society has become as robbery after robbery—there are ninety-four in all—has been committed and no clue discovered. People are beginning to look askance at their friends, and to read suspicion in the answering glances."

"Are there any on the list who have been present at every robbery?" asked Tommy.

"No, not at every one, or there would have been arrests before this," answered Longley seriously. "There are eight people who have been present at all of the most serious ones, and more than a score who were there at the great majority; but we have not a scintilla of legal evidence against any one. I have tabulated the results very carefully, trying to arrive at a solution by inclusion and exclusion. If any one, two, or three people *might have been* guilty in every case, I should have assumed the responsibility of ordering arrests; but I have only succeeded in eliminating every blessed one, because in some cases it was physically impossible for them to have committed the theft."

"Do you believe the same person guilty of all of them?"

"Of all the big ones, yes; the same person, or persons; for there may be more than one. In fact, some of the cases bear strong evidence of collusion. Here is the list of names with the number of each case at which the owners have been present noted against it. It reads like the list in the society columns of 'Among those present' at any fashionable society function."

"We'll take that up later," said Tommy, glancing at it indifferently and tossing it on the table.

Longley looked at him ruefully. "By Jove! Williams, you'd treat that with more respect if you knew how much police shoe-leather and wear and tear on my gray matter it represented!" he exclaimed.

"I'll give it my most respectful consideration, after you have told me the circumstances surrounding the last robbery," answered Tommy, laughing. "You're working the 'continued in our next' game on me, but I want the climax right now."

"All right, but there are some mighty interesting deductions which lead up to it on that paper," answered Longley. "Practically every one of those people was there, and the list must contain the name of the thief, if we could only select it. There were, in all, something over two hundred people asked to Mrs. Faxton's entertainment. The house-party consisted of twenty guests, and there was a dinner for one hundred and ten people, followed by a dance, to which others came, and a

cotillion commenced at twelve. The special favors for this—in fact, the only thing which made the entertainment distinctive—were facsimiles of the Cleopatra necklace, the paste jewels set in silver-gilt. Mrs. Faxton wore the famous original; not as a necklace, for it would be uncomfortably tight for the neck of an American woman; but it was firmly sewed across the front of her bodice, the great ruby, emerald, and sapphire pendants swinging loose. Faxton was so apprehensive that he never let the necklace get out of his sight from the time of its arrival until his wife was dressed, and he assured himself that it was carefully and securely fastened to the bodice, and then he gave strict orders to the Pinkenham men to keep it constantly under observation.

"Seats were prepared for the detectives in the dining-room behind screens of palms, and one of them sat on either side of her and within ten feet. Afterward, except when the lady was actually dancing, they kept as close to her as possible, and she was never free from their observation. After the cotillion, about half of the guests departed, the remainder staying for a second supper of hot birds and cold bottles; but Faxton, who had been on pins and needles all the evening, insisted upon his wife going to her rooms to remove the necklace, which was to be placed in a safe in his study.

"A couch had been drawn up in front of it, and the two detectives were to remain in the study all night, sleeping on the couch and watching, alternately. Mrs. Faxton laughingly excused herself for a few minutes, and went to her rooms accompanied by her husband, and followed by the two detectives, who waited in the hall outside of her dressing-room door until Faxton should bring out the necklace. They had been there for, perhaps, five minutes, when they were startled by a piercing shriek, quickly followed by the sound of a heavy fall and a scuffle, coming from the dressing-room. The door was locked, and one of them immediately started to break it open, while Hooper, the more experienced one, having made himself perfectly familiar with the house, ran through Mrs. Faxton's boudoir, which also communicated with the dressing-room. They broke into it at the same time, each with a drawn revolver, expecting to find an attempt at robbery by force; but, instead, saw Mrs. Faxton lying unconscious on the floor in front of her dressing-table, and Faxton vigorously tearing at the heavy draperies in front of the windows to get something to wrap about Mrs. Faxton's maid, who was rushing madly about the room with her dress in flames. No one gave any thought to the necklace until the maid had been rolled in curtains and rugs and the fire extinguished, and then Hooper, who still had it heavily on his mind, gave an anxious look about for it, but did not see it. Mrs. Faxton lay on her back, and it was evident that it had been cut off before the accident happened. Faxton leaned over and raised his wife from the floor, and Hooper gave an exclamation of relief as he saw that she had been lying on it.

"He picked it up and held on to it until she was restored to consciousness, and the maid, who was more frightened than hurt, had been taken out by some of the other servants. Then he spoke of it to Faxton, who calmed down when he was reassured about his wife's condition and found that she had only fainted, and the three men together took it to the study and deposited it in the safe. They took the precaution to examine the room and window fastenings thoroughly and to lock all but one door. Faxton assured himself that the safe, of which he alone knew the combination, was safely locked, and left the room, with renewed injunctions as to watchfulness and orders to keep the electric lights burning until broad daylight."

"You have got it safely through the evening and practically delivered to the detectives, then," said Tommy, grinning, when Longley paused to pour himself a drink.

"Just wait; I don't know whether we have or not," answered Longley doubt-

fully. "If we were sure of that, I think we could lay hands on it in short order. Faxton apparently thought so, for he became a light-hearted host, urged his guests to remain, and laughed at his wife's indisposition; but the party very soon broke up. In the morning Mrs. Faxton was so ill that she gave up all idea of taking the necklace to town in person; but Faxton volunteered to deliver it, laughingly assuring her that it would be reasonably safe with his detective body-guard in the broad daylight. He opened the safe in the presence of the two detectives and Abdul, the Egyptian body-servant of Mr. Parkington, who after Mr. Parkington's death attached himself to his daughter's service. This man begged for a last look at the necklace, which he claimed to have seen unearthed from the tomb where it had rested for two thousand years, and Faxton unlocked the case to show it to him. Abdul gave a cry of rage, and Faxton dropped the case to the floor; for in place of the Cleopatra necklace, whose brilliant gems would have dazzlingly reflected the light, lay one of the cotillion favor facsimiles, the paste imitations dead and lusterless in the daylight.

"Well, you can imagine what happened. The place was immediately in an uproar; but Hooper, who is a well-trained and skilful detective, assumed charge, and instituted a systematic search. The dressing-room, which the servants were putting in order, was carefully gone over, and Faxton, who was almost crazy about the thing, crawled under furniture, clawed at the rugs until his finger-nails bled, and got himself in a pretty mess. When everything had been thoroughly searched, without finding the slightest trace, Faxton rushed off to the railroad-station, to come to town, leaving Hooper in charge with authority to search any one or any place in the house, and threw his own keys to him as he drove off. There's the outline of the case; I'll answer any questions you care to ask, and all the evidence which we have is entirely at your disposal."

"You've given me quite a bit already," said Tommy thoughtfully. "What steps are being taken now to solve the mystery?"

"I can speak definitely only for the official police," answered Longley. "So far as possible, every one connected with the household is kept under observation, all of the great jewel markets have been notified, and are constantly watched, and every professional has been arrested and closely questioned. We are taking all of the usual —and some very unusual—steps in the investigation. Faxton has employed every available private detective, and is himself working unceasingly. The Pinkenhams, too, are exhausting every possible effort, for they feel that their reputation is at stake. As usual, I believe that they claim to have a very plausible theory and a definite clue which they are following up, but they always work independently, and there is more or less friction between their men and the police. Now, what do *you* say about it?"

"I'm like the owl; keeping up the devil of a thinking, but not saying a word," answered Tommy, grinning. "If you'll let me have the documentary evidence to-morrow, I'll try to formulate a plan of investigation. Are you going out to Miss Stuke's wedding?"

Tommy looked at me with twinkling eyes, after Longley had taken his departure.

"I reckon that we shall have to become society men," he chuckled. "This thing promises to be the biggest we have tackled yet, and, much to my surprise, Longley and his men have exhibited human intelligence in the way they have gone at it."

"What do you think of it—is it likely to be a case of the 'gentleman burglar,' whom the novel writer and the actor are portraying so attractively?" I asked.

"Perhaps it is even more up to date; it may be a lady," he answered, laughing. "We shall go through Longley's stuff to-morrow, and then you will probably see me giving pink teas to entice the little society flies into my hypnotic parlor. It promises to be in-

teresting, and I am curious to try my hypnotic power on that descendant of the Pharaohs; I never worked with a son of the desert. We'll sleep over it before we commence, but as my appetite seems to have returned, I'll go out and eat a rarebit with you now."

II.

We were still at breakfast, Duck Sing beaming over Tommy's demand for an extra portion of bacon and eggs, when Detective-sergeant Clancy, bristling with importance, arrived with a heavy despatch-box which contained Longley's documents.

"Sure, I'm glad to be workin' wid youse again," he said, as he deposited it on a table and sat down with us. "It's great work we've done together before, an' this is goin' to be th' real thing that'll make me an inspector."

"Yes?—and what suggestions have you to make as to how we shall go to work at it, Clancy?" asked Tommy dryly; and the detective's air of self-importance suddenly collapsed.

"Aw, come off, now, Mr. Williams," he answered, flushing. "I ain't meanin' to put on any side wid youse, but I have to throw a chest at headquarters. I know that youse done th' work an' I pinched th' guys at th' end an' got a lot o' credit; but I done my best, too."

"We'll make the same partnership arrangement in this case, then, if you understand it that way," said Tommy, smiling good-naturedly. "I'll promise not to claim the credit, and if there is an arrest to be made at the end of it, you shall make it. Is that a bargain, Clancy?"

"Sure!" exclaimed Clancy eagerly, and so confident was he of success that his hand instinctively crept toward the pocket where he carried his handcuffs. "What youse says goes wid Mike Clancy, an' I'll not butt in till youse tips me th' wink."

"Clancy, you have caught the idea exactly," said Tommy approvingly. "Just leave me the key of that box, and I'll call you up if I need your services."

Never did Tommy work harder than he did at that mass of papers for the entire day. I helped him with them, looking up point after point in the different cases while he jotted down memoranda and tabulated results. He did not confide his plan to me, but as the day wore on I saw that he was working along the same general line that Longley had adopted, only he was tabulating the nature of the property stolen and the surrounding circumstances, instead of tracing the possible perpetrators. We stopped the work only for a hasty luncheon, which we ate in silence, for Tommy was absolutely absorbed in his thoughts, and it was not until six o'clock that he threw himself back in his chair with a sigh of relief.

"Now, old chap, if you will kindly rearrange those documents according to these lists, I think that we can formulate a working hypothesis," he said, as he handed me a paper.

The numbers of the cases were arranged in three columns, the first with a "plus" sign over it, the second with the "minus" sign, and the third headed by an interrogation point. The envelopes, each bearing a case number, and containing all of the documents relating to it, I sorted into three piles, and on checking them up found that there were twenty-eight in the first, twenty-two in the second, and forty-four in the questionable pile. Longley's lists of names Tommy had absolutely neglected to examine, but he kept them together and placed them carefully away.

He smiled when I asked him if he were not going to use them.

"Not yet, for we want to avoid just the error into which the police usually fall," he said. "In the ordinary cases their power is unlimited, and their first instinct is to exercise it and make an arrest, or any number of them, on suspicion, and then try to secure evidence against their prisoners. We shall disregard individuals and analyze the cases, and if the results point conclusively in any one direction, follow the indications and look for the criminal; not examine possible culprits and try

to fit the crime to them. The police have done very valuable work here, but it is all at the wrong end. We shall avail ourselves of it when the time comes; but I wish to absolutely ignore it until then. Now, as a first result of this examination, I find it possible to place fifty of these crimes in two absolutely different and clearly defined classes; and as we go more deeply into the other forty-four, which I leave as doubtful after a very cursory perusal, we shall probably be able to assign most of them to one or the other.

"In the first, or plus, class, consisting of twenty-eight cases, I have found that they all have four characteristics in common. First, the stolen property consisted solely of jewels. Second, not the slightest trace has ever been found of the missing stones, although every possible effort has been made. Third, all of these thefts were committed under circumstances which practically exclude the professional criminal from the possibilities. Fourth, it is possible for one person, or set of persons, to have committed all of them.

"The second, or minus, list, is made up of twenty-two cases which, for the moment at any rate, we can absolutely refuse to consider. They were only included by Longley because the victims happened to belong to the same social set. In each of the twenty-two instances the property stolen was miscellaneous, including plate, jewels, money, and even furs and clothing. Many of these articles have been recovered from pawn-shops or through shyster lawyers, and might easily have been taken by dishonest servants, sneak-thieves, or burglars. They all fit into the general police classifications. The doubtful list we shall go over again; the cases present features which are common to both classes, and careful analysis will probably put most of them into one or the other; but we have enough data to start with in the twenty-eight. Let us examine the first doubtful one, and I will explain why I exclude it from either class, and you will understand my method better."

"It happens to be 'number one,' the first of all the robberies," I said, as I picked up the envelope; and Tommy nodded.

"Yes, and that may—or may not—be significant," he said. "Just read Longley's account; never mind the police entries."

And I read:

"Case of theft of a pearl necklace, valued at thirty thousand dollars. The necklace was worn by Mrs. Patrick Thornton to a dinner dance for one hundred and eighty people, given by Mrs. Pasmore at her private residence. Mrs. Thornton, who was among the last of the guests to leave, having remained for a supper which was served at two, says that she gave no particular thought to the necklace, which consisted of a rope of perfectly matched, medium-sized pearls, fastened by a firm catch, and worn in a single strand. They had been very recently restrung, and she had examined the fastening and stringing carefully. Distinctly remembers playing with the pearls at the late supper, and has no positive recollection of having noticed them after that. Returned home in her own carriage, accompanied by her husband, and first noticed her loss when she reached her dressing-room. Carriage, supper-room, ballroom, and dressing-room at Mrs. Pasmore's thoroughly searched, but no trace of missing property discovered. The following people were present at the entertainment——"

"Cut that out!" interrupted Tommy. "Of course, some one who was present stole it—if it was stolen—but we will consider that later. I exclude that case from the plus class, because it does not fulfil the third proposition—the act of the professional criminal cannot be eliminated. It answers three of the requirements: the stolen property consisted of jewels only; no trace of them has ever been found; and a member of Mrs. Thornton's particular set may have been the thief. Then, there is too great an element of uncertainty in it. She may have dropped the necklace, either at the ball, in the dressing-room, or in her own carriage or house. The pearls were not uncommon enough to excite remark—I suppose there were a half-dozen finer strings at that very entertainment—and, although a good deal of fuss was raised over it, and thirty thousand is not a loss to be lightly disregarded, the case offers no special evidence which points

to premeditation or a careful plot. The chances are that it was accidently dropped and picked up by some one who yielded to a sudden temptation and kept it. The largest private domestic establishment would hardly comprise enough servants for such an entertainment, and, if you look farther, you will find that a large number of extra waiters, kitchen assistants, and dressing-room attendants were supplied by one of the large catering establishments. That offered endless opportunity for a sneak-thief to gain admittance, so we can hardly classify that case under the plus sign, and still we cannot so absolutely disregard it that it goes under the minus. The loss took place during or after the second supper, presumably after the greater part of the extra servants had left and the guests were thinned out. As it occurred two years ago, it would probably be impossible to obtain all those details. There was nothing distinctive about the pearls, so the necklace could have been broken up and the stones easily disposed of separately. Now, take the first case in the plus class."

"Case number four; that's the Whitbridge emerald robbery," I said, as I opened the envelope.

"Yes, two and three are in the minus class; in two the stolen property consisted of watches, plate, and money, and some of the articles were afterward found in a pawn-shop. In three some papers of value were taken, and afterward returned for a reward through the agency of a lawyer with a large criminal practise, so they are both absolutely out of it. Go ahead!"

And again I read:

"The famous Whitbridge emeralds were stolen from Mrs. Whitbridge on the yacht *Pastime*, owned by Mr. Edward Mordaunt, between New York and Newport. Mr. Mordaunt was taking eighteen guests to the Rockley wedding at Newport. The jewels were removed from the safe-deposit box by Mrs. Whitbridge in person, on her way to the yacht. They were placed in a small dressing-bag, which she took with her in her carriage. It was carried by her personal maid to the pier, and she held it in plain sight on the launch, and herself carried it to Mrs. Whitbridge's stateroom, where it was locked in a drawer. So far as is known, it was not taken from that drawer until they left the yacht at Newport, when the maid again carried it, and only discovered that the emeralds were missing after they had reached Mrs. Whitbridge's room on shore. The lock of the bag, which was a very peculiar one, had apparently not been tampered with, and the key had been in Mrs. Whitbridge's possession all of the intervening time. The maid is above suspicion; she has been with her present mistress for twelve years, and is absolutely trustworthy. She admits that the only time the bag was out of her immediate possession was while it was locked in the cabin, and asserts that she never left the stateroom unoccupied without carefully locking the door. The yacht servants who could possibly have had access to the cabin are also freed from suspicion, for the *Pastime* has been continuously in commission for four years, and they have all served on board most of that time and bear good reputations. The extra ladies' maids and valets have all been examined and their records investigated, but there is nothing suspicious about any of them nor their records. The yachting party consisted of——"

"That we can also omit," said Tommy quickly. "Now, you can see that this crime is entirely different in character. Assuming these statements to be correct, that bag must have been opened on the yacht; and the party were on board only one night, during which time the bag was securely locked up in an occupied cabin. The bag itself was locked, and the lock was unbroken, and Mrs. Whitbridge had the key in her possession all the time, so the jewels could hardly have been removed while the maid held the bag. The professional criminal can be pretty safely eliminated from this case, for the yacht was at sea with a well-known crew, and, although the bag held a considerable sum of money and other jewels which could easily have been disposed of, nothing but the emeralds were taken. Now, these emeralds are famous, and every stone is known. They were collected by a Spanish Governor of Colombia, before that country gained its independence, and they were the pick of those famous mines for many years. The principal piece was a tiara containing fifteen stones. The largest, of tremendous size, was very dark in color and set in the center. The others

were arranged seven on each side; gradually decreasing in size and getting lighter in color; but all were absolutely flawless stones, and that one piece was of inestimable value. Not a trace of any of these stones has ever been found, and the offer of a tremendous reward with the 'no questions asked' proviso tacked on has not brought even a single response. This case, therefore, presents all of the evidence—both positive and negative—which makes it eligible for the plus classification.

"There is no use in going into the others in detail. The Van Sutten rubies, which are even more celebrated, were stolen from Mrs. Van Sutten's dressing-room at Tuxedo between the time they were removed from the safe and the time she expected to put them on—an interval of not more than an hour—during which time she and her maid were either in that room or the immediately adjoining bedroom, with the door wide open between; and the other circumstances prove conclusively that it was what the police call an 'inside job,' and not the work of a professional. Again, these stones were of tremendous value—pigeon bloods of large size and without a flaw—and neither the offer of a reward nor the most careful search has brought a single one of them to light.

"The Poulter sapphires, another very famous set of jewels, were stolen from their owner's private car; and over five thousand dollars in cash and a quantity of other valuables in the same dressing-case left untouched. In all of the other cases which I have included in the plus class, the circumstances all point in absolutely the same direction, and I feel that I have taken the right course in classifying them that way."

"Why not take Longley's lists of names, and do some more analyzing, then?" I suggested; but Tommy shook his head in emphatic negation.

"That is just what I am afraid to do, for fear I shall be led away on a false scent," he said. "I shall devote a lot of time to these cases, and try to form an opinion of the mental characteristics of the person, or persons, who planned these robberies, and of the physical ones which it required to carry them out. For instance, even the slight progress we have made points conclusively to one fact: the thefts were not committed under the stimulus of a pressing need for money. Actual cash was overlooked in many cases, and, so far as we know, not one of these twenty-eight robberies has been followed by an attempt to market the stolen property or to obtain a reward. The inference is that the thief must be in fairly easy circumstances. This would eliminate many of the people on Longley's lists, for his private investigations have shown that some of them are in desperate need of money to keep up appearances. Suppose that another examination proves that most of the robberies necessitated mechanical ingenuity, the possession of very small hands, of great physical strength, or any other special mental or physical characteristic. That again excludes a large number, and narrows the list of possible suspects. I don't care to go over half the Four Hundred unnecessarily; but give me a certain lot of data, and I am willing to make deductions as to the mental and physical characteristics of the persons who have been able to commit these thefts. If I can find such a one, or such a group, on Longley's lists, then I shall use hypnotism, and—well, Clancy can get ready to use his handcuffs.

"Many of these cases are so old that it would be profitless to try to get further details, but I am going to make a personal examination into the last and most serious one, so I shall ask Longley to bring Faxton to the studio while the details are still fresh in his mind. In the meantime, it may be helpful if you will go to Tiffany and the other large jewelers and find out the names of their best customers for precious stones of large value. Stranger things have happened than that we may run across some one who is not averse to mixing bargains in stolen property with legitimate purchases. I am going to sift over these

papers again to-morrow, and I shall ask Longley to bring Faxton here to-morrow evening."

I had little difficulty in obtaining the information which Tommy required, for I had made the acquaintance of all the great experts when we had the Blackbeard jewels—of which they had each purchased many fine specimens—appraised. I found that their best customers were not New Yorkers, and was laughingly told that many of the purchases were made with the greatest secrecy, and that they never appeared on the persons of the purchasers' immediate and recognized families. Each firm had a special list of customers, whom they notified when anything particularly unusual or beautiful came into their hands.

The lists included most of the very wealthy and prominent families, and I noticed the names of Faxton, the Van Suttens, the Poulters, and several others which appeared among the victims of these very robberies we were investigating; but there was no one in the lists who would be open to suspicion as an illicit buyer.

Tommy had spent the entire day on the records, and when I called at the studio late in the afternoon and reported the results of the investigation, he smiled amiably.

"There is nothing very instructive about what you have learned," he admitted, "but you never can tell when it will prove useful. I haven't done very much better; I have succeeded only in excluding a woman as the sole thief. Of course there may be one mixed up in the robberies, but no woman could have perpetrated some of them without masculine assistance, so it isn't primarily a case of *cherchez la femme*. That excludes a good fifty per cent. of Longley's suspects, and, if it appears later that there must be a woman in it, we can easily locate her after spotting the man. I have been carefully through the doubtful list again, and transferred six cases from it to the plus and twelve to the minus, and that is the extent of my day's work; but there is still an interesting evening ahead of us, for Longley is bringing Faxton here at eight."

The two men arrived promptly at the appointed time and joined us in the studio, which showed to the very best advantage in the evening. Faxton was apparently very much impressed by the beautiful effects of light and shadow which Tommy had arranged with such artistic skill.

"This sort of a room has been one of the desires of my life, but I have never been able to obtain these effects and this atmosphere, Mr. Williams," Faxton said after we had been introduced. "I suppose that you have great art treasures here, but please don't show them to me now; I want to enjoy the restfulness of the place and the general effect without knowing a detail. I feel that a man might sleep and forget all of his worries here."

"It has been known to produce drowsiness," answered Tommy, with a significant wink at me; "but I trust that it will not affect you that way, for I am going to bother you with a lot of questions."

"Yes, Longley has told me the object of our call, but this atmosphere almost made me forget my troubles for a moment," said Faxton a little wearily; and Tommy suggested that we make ourselves comfortable while he prepared coffee.

Faxton was a handsome young fellow, very tall and slender in figure, but every movement indicated muscular strength and wiriness. His features were almost feminine in their delicacy, but there was no trace of weakness or indecision about his face. His hair and eyes were jet black. His skin, naturally dark, was tanned by sun and wind almost to the copper hue of the Indian. His reputation as a polo-player, cross-country rider, and gentleman jockey made him very prominent among the young men of wealth who find their chief recreation in horses. His build was eminently suited to the amusement which he affected. Long of arm and leg, light in weight in spite of his height, and without a superfluous ounce of flesh about him, he was ap-

parently in the very pink of condition.

"Mr. Longley tells me that you are interested in this unfortunate loss which I have sustained, and that you possess marvelous skill in unraveling mysteries," he said when Tommy handed him his coffee. "I am beginning to be absolutely hopeless about this one, for none of the people who are working on it have succeeded in finding the slightest clue to the thief nor the whereabouts of the necklace; so I sincerely trust that you may be able to offer a suggestion which will be helpful. So far, I have heard only cock-and-bull stories, and listened to the most absurd suspicions against my intimate friends and most trusted servants. I suppose that it is only because I am paying the bills for the investigation that they don't accuse me."

"Well, it is entirely a labor of love on my part, so I sha'n't let any little thing of that kind stand in the way," said Tommy, grinning. "I am afraid that Longley overestimates my ability, but I shall do the best I can, for this case has a strange fascination for me. I felt half-tempted to steal the thing myself when I saw it at Tiffany's."

"I believe that there must be a curse connected with it," said Faxton bitterly. "I suppose that it has tempted many an honest man to become a thief, and I know to my sorrow that it causes unhappiness. I sincerely wish that I had never set eyes on the cursed thing."

"Do you mind telling me the whole history of the robbery, as fully as you can remember the details?" asked Tommy. "I suppose that you have been asked to do that many times, but something may strike me as significant which the police have overlooked."

"I can repeat it as glibly as a parrot asks for a cracker," answered Faxton readily. "As you suggest, I have had considerable experience in telling it, for every new detective who has come into the case—and there must be a hundred of them—has had to hear the whole thing."

After lighting a cigar he settled himself easily, and told the story of the entertainment and the loss of the necklace, essentially as we had heard it from Longley; and Tommy gave him his closest attention.

"I can only add that every possible effort which I can think of has been exhausted to solve the mystery," he concluded. "As you probably know, thanks to the foresight of my ancestors and some very successful speculations of my own, I am a very rich man, and have spared no expense in the inquiry. Of course I am prepared to indemnify the museum for the loss—in so far as money can do it—but the intrinsic value of the thing is a bagatelle when compared with its historic value; and I know that any reparation which I can make, except the discovery of the necklace, will be absolutely inadequate. I would willingly pay double its intrinsic value to have my name cleared from all connection with the miserable affair."

Tommy paid little heed to the latter part of the story, but when Faxton ceased speaking he was alert, and looked at him sharply.

"Now, Mr. Faxton, I understand that the cotillion favors were exact copies of the original," he said. "Are you satisfied that the original was delivered to you at Westchester, and that it was not an imitation which had been substituted for it?"

"If you had seen the original and the imitations together that night in the ballroom, you would not ask that question, Mr. Williams," said Faxton positively. "The imitations were absolutely perfect facsimiles in size and color, and they were not mere tinsel things. They were as well made as a genuine piece of jewelry; and the paste stones were specially colored by experts. They would have been handsome ornaments in the absence of the original, but that made them look cheap and tawdry. You may be incredulous, but I can assure you that it fairly radiated light that night when my wife wore it, and one of my guests laughingly remarked that it was spitting fire in anger at my audacity in thinking that I could rival it." Faxton's face had

grown pale, and his eyes glistened with excitement as he spoke, but Tommy was not in the least disturbed by his half-angry protest.

"Very good," he said quietly. "Then we can assume that it was the original which Mrs. Faxton had fixed to her dress when you both went to her dressing-room. Do you know if she had one of the imitations with her also?"

"I am positive that she had not!" exclaimed Faxton. "In the first place, they were limited in number—there were just one hundred of them—and Mrs. Faxton was very desirous that each of the ladies should receive one as a souvenir. There were more people there than we had originally expected, so there were barely enough of them, and during that figure of the cotillion she had several times refused to be favored, offering the excuse that she dared not offend the original by putting anything so modern next to it."

"Can you tell me how the maid's dress happened to catch fire?" asked Tommy.

Faxton shook his head. "Not definitely," he answered. "My back was toward her when I heard her scream, but I think that she must have dropped an unextinguished match. Mrs. Faxton had asked her to heat a curling-iron for her, and she was fussing with an alcohol-lamp. The first I knew of it was from her screams; and I was too busy attempting to smother the flames to ask questions."

"Has she made no explanation since?"

"No, nothing intelligible that I know of," answered Faxton slowly. "She speaks very little English, and I believe that since the accident she has been hysterical, and has made no connected statement. She is an Egyptian, and has been with my wife for years, but as Mrs. Faxton speaks Arabic fluently, the maid, Mira, has never learned much English. She is still confined to her room, and Mrs. Faxton has been so ill since the night of the robbery that they have not seen each other."

"Now, Mr. Faxton, you say that there is such a difference between the original and the imitations that it would be impossible to mistake one for the other. In that case, it must have been the original which was picked up from the floor. You saw it plainly, and could not have been deceived, so that traces it up to the time that the fire was extinguished and you started for your study; and the substitution must have been made during the night."

"No, I am not positive as to that," answered Faxton hesitatingly. "With the two side by side, even in a dim light, no one could be mistaken; but you must remember that the circumstances were very upsetting. In the first place, the dressing-room was so filled with smoke that the electric lights showed as in a fog, and we were all very much excited. My eyes smarted from it so that I was almost blinded, and it was several hours before they became normal. Everything happened so quickly, and I was so impatient to reassure my guests, that I made no particular examination before putting the necklace in the case, and had not the slightest suspicion that there had been any substitution until the following morning."

"In that case, the substitution may have been made in the dressing-room," said Tommy thoughtfully. "Is there any possibility of any one else having gained entrance to it during the excitement?"

"After our experiences, I hesitate to say that anything is impossible," answered Faxton; "but I don't see how any one could have got in there. There are three doors into the dressing-room—one from the hallway, which was locked, and had to be broken down; the second from Mrs. Faxton's boudoir, which Hooper came through at the first alarm, and saw nobody; and the third into Mrs. Faxton's bedroom. That door was open, but the door from the bedroom to the hallway was locked, and I am almost positive that there was no one there. In fact, I don't believe that any one could have entered that room without some of us noticing, and it was some minutes after the fire was extinguished before any of the other

servants answered our repeated ringing."

"We shall assume that no one did enter, then," said Tommy seriously. "Is Mrs. Faxton able to throw any light on any of the circumstances?"

"She has not been questioned," answered Faxton coldly. "As I told you, she has been seriously ill since that miserable night, and in any case I should object to her being harassed as I have over this unfortunate affair."

"I don't think that it will be in the least necessary," said Tommy quietly. "It was only to obtain information about two members of your household who are unusual servants to find in America; but I suppose that you can tell me everything. I refer to Abdul and Mira. Have you any objections to telling me how they happen to be in your service?"

"Not in the least; it is really very simply explained," answered Faxton readily. "You know that Mr. Parkington spent at least six months of each year in Egypt. He had his private dahabiyeh on the Nile, and lived on it while he was directing the excavations. After his first year he found it unsatisfactory to depend upon his American servants, so he employed natives exclusively, and found them so competent that his own personal man and his daughter's maid were retained all the year. Mrs. Faxton always accompanied him until our marriage; and she was very fond of Mira, who has been with her for more than ten years. After Mr. Parkington's death, Abdul did not wish to return to his own country, and, although he is absolutely useless to me, and more or less of a nuisance to have about, I have kept him on at Mrs. Faxton's earnest request. He occupies a rather unique position, does pretty much as he likes, and is such a superior sort of a person, that I should hesitate to ask a service of him. Mr. Parkington thoroughly understood the Oriental habit of thought, and they got on together—in fact, Abdul was more of a secretary than a valet. But, as I am not interested in deciphering hieroglyphics, he is rather a white elephant on my hands."

"Then you could spare his services if I wished to have him come here?" asked Tommy; and Faxton gave eager assent.

"You can keep him as long as you please," he said, laughing. "Mind you, I have no more suspicion that he knows anything of this robbery than I have of myself; but he is so exercised about it that it will be a relief to have him out of the house. He seems to think that we committed an act of sacrilege in using the necklace as we did; and in view of the results, I am not sure that he is far wrong. Can I send him to you at any particular time?"

"To-morrow evening, if it suits your convenience," answered Tommy. "I am sorry to have bothered you so much, but I think, with what Longley has ascertained, and the point or two you have made clearer to-night, that I am in possession of the material facts."

"It's no bother, for you can imagine all that this means to me," answered Faxton gravely. "My wealth, my position, and my past record should, I suppose, raise me above suspicion in this case; but there have been so many mysterious thefts from my friends that we are all getting morbid, and I shall never know absolute peace of mind until this last one, in which I am so vitally interested, is cleared up."

"Then here's to a speedy solution of it!" said Tommy, laughing, as he raised his glass; and Faxton looked at him earnestly while they pledged each other.

TO BE CONTINUED.

On Board the "Tie Ping"

By F. Walworth Brown

It was a very unusual cargo that the "Tie Ping" carried, and it caused the skipper of the bulky little schooner no end of trouble. Mr. Brown tells of the ingenious plan by which the captain fulfilled the terms of his contract

COURSE I know it's ruination to the country to let them yellow heathen in promiscuous, for to trample on our glorious institutions and make trouble all around. I'm for the Chinese exclusion law all the way. America for Americans, says I; and Poles and Hebrews and dagoes. If it wasn't for the Chinese exclusion law, I'd be trampin' the deck of the *Tie Ping*, 'stead of livin' on the income of my money.

'Twouldn't be so bad, neither, for the *Tie Ping* was a bully little schooner, let me tell you. I get kind o' homesick for her sometimes even now; homesick for the lift of her under my feet and the excitement o' runnin' into 'Frisco with a hold full o' Chinks and the immigration fellers on the lookout for you. Yes, sir, I get homesick for it.

Speakin' about Chinks, they certainly do appreciate the benefits of a free government. You wouldn't think now, offhand, that a grown man would fork up two hundred for the privilege o' runnin' a laundry in a country where he can't vote. But you just give them fellers the opportunity to land on this sacred soil at the price of two hundred per head, and they'll come at you so thick you'll think the yellow peril is headed your way sure.

It's the Tongs that pay the money; and the Chinks that come in are pretty much slaves till they get it paid back. But they're plenty glad to be slaves. China must be a God-forsaken country considerin' what they'll go through with to get shet of it.

When Congress passed that exclusion act, the *Tie Ping* was workin' round the Pacific, and makin' about one comfortable livin' the which had to be divided among four. The 'Frisco papers were howlin' 'emselves blue in the face with joy that the country was saved from the yellow hordes of Mongolia; and it struck me all of a sudden that if white folks were so dead anxious to shut them fellers out, the yellow ones would be pretty middlin' willin' to pay for the privilege o' comin' in.

When I'd thought about it awhile I seen my duty to my family clear as a bell; and after I'd had a back-room talk with the head o' one of the Tongs, I realized that my chances o' dyin' rich were a long ways better'n I'd ever thought 'em.

I had to lay a mortgage on the *Tie Ping* to raise the necessary capital, but, say! if I pulled off the trick, the profits would make that mortgage disappear like an elephant with a peanut. Not that I needed such a lot of money, either; for a Chink, you know, will sleep curled up in a rat-trap with the bait for a pillow. I just built twenty bunks in the main hold of the schooner, shipped a crew of Kanakas, and sailed for Canton, hopeful and anxious.

It wasn't any pink-ribbon snap I had, though. I've noticed that that work don't count for much in this world. It's brains that bring the money; and this proposition of mine called for brains. If I could have dumped my cargo somewhere on the beach and let 'em shift

for 'emselves I wouldn't 'a' worried, but my contract called for delivery at 'Frisco, and I didn't get my money till they were safe in Chinatown.

There wasn't any trouble at Canton about the cargo. I had letters to agents of the Tong; and they must have had applicants standin' in line waitin' for the doors to open, for in less than a week I had those twenty bunks occupied, and we cleared for 'Frisco, without takin' the trouble to call on the consul, and feelin' something like an old-time slaver.

One of the twenty knew enough pidgin so we could talk by stretchin' our vocal cords; and long before we made Honolulu I had them Chinks drilled careful in what was expected of 'em, the which was mainly to keep their mouths shut and act meek no matter what happened to 'em. It was my first trip, and, bein' green at the business, I was nervous, and kept gettin' more so the nearer we got to home. Afterward I got used to it.

What I aimed to do was to slip into the harbor, show a set of bogus papers to prove I'd just run in from Honolulu in ballast—there wasn't any cable then—and send the Chinks ashore at night, a few at a time.

Well, we were slidin' down the coast on the northwest trades, a day's run from 'Frisco, with me walkin' the deck screwin' up my nerve to face the business when we got there; and about then we sighted a little harbor tug up-endin' its way over the rollers, and evidently doin' all it could to head for us. I set the *Tie Ping* on a course to meet her, and we run down past. They poked her round under our stern, and a red-headed man took our name with a glass. Then he hailed.

"Got a passenger for you, cap'n," he says.

"Can't take him," says I, scairt blue for fear it was the police.

With that a Chinese appeared out o' the engine-room, and I threw the *Tie Ping* up in the wind, and waited for him to come aboard.

He turned out to be a messenger from the Tong, and he had some nice, cheerful news. I gathered that somebody had peached. Whoever he was the Tong had wiped him out sudden, but the immigration officials were lookin' for the *Tie Ping* with blood in their eyes.

"Well," I says, "what am I goin' to do?"

That Chinee tucked his hands in his sleeves and smiled. He was a cheerful sort of a heathen.

"You land those China boys Chinatown, you get money, cap'n," he says, placid as a watermelon.

"And if I don't, I don't," says I.

He smiled some more. It was a helpful proposition, me plannin' to slide into 'Frisco as unnoticed as possible, only to find all 'Frisco waitin' for me with an ax. I was nervous to start with, and that come near givin' me St. Vitus' dance.

I couldn't run for some other port, for my water was low, and I wouldn't get my money, anyway, unless I landed my cargo at 'Frisco. 'Bout the time my brains got so hot I was afraid to trust 'em, I caught sight of the tug a-heavin' up and down on the face o' the waters, as the poet says, and the red head of her captain stickin' out of her pilot-house like an anarchist flag on a Russian cruiser.

With that I grabbed that Chinee by the slack of his blouse and hustled him to his boat, bobbin' alongside.

"Come on," I says, "I'm goin' back with you."

He smiled some more, like it wasn't his funeral; and I shoved him into the boat, jumped in myself, and the tug's fireman and deck-hand rowed us over to the tug. I was the first aboard her, and hurried to the pilot-house.

"I'm Cap'n Asa Clubb, of the schooner *Tie Ping* yonder," I says. "Have you room for twenty men aboard here, cap'n?"

"I'm Cap'n Logan McPhail, of the tug *Bully Boy*," says he; "and I have not room for twenty men."

"Not if they're Chinks?" I says.

"H'm," says he. "That's different. Chinks, eh? There'll be money in that, Cap'n Clubb."

"I'll pay you twenty-five dollars a head," I says quick, "if we pull it off."

"And if we don't?"

"If we don't I'm a broke man," says I. "My schooner'll be sold from under me." And I told him how matters laid.

"'Tis a gamble," he says. "I doubt I'll lose my boat, too, if we fall down. Twenty-five ain't enough, cap'n."

"It's five hundred dollars for one night's work," I says, disgusted with him.

"I'll have to shut my crew's mouths," he says. "An' my fireman's a union man. Make it a thousand, cap'n, fifty dollars apiece, and I'll see what I can do."

"All right," I says. "Run her alongside."

It wasn't any time to haggle over terms. I was up against it good and right. If he'd stuck for two thousand I'd have had to take him.

He watched his chance, and ran his boat alongside the *Tie Ping,* where we made her fast, with the swell runnin' under us, and grindin' the rails pretty bad. I jumped aboard the schooner and called to Sam Tinker, my mate.

"Get them Chinks up in a hurry, now," I says. "Here's where we leave 'em."

They come up a-chatterin', and gettin' blue under the yellow when they saw nothing but water round 'em. Cap'n McPhail was emptyin' his coal-bunkers, heavin' overside all but enough to fetch him home. And as fast as he made the room, we packed the Chinks away head and tail like sardines in a tin, till one way or another we'd jammed the whole twenty out o' sight, though I was afraid some of 'em would never be real lively again. But they were meek and willin'.

When they were all aboard we cast off the tug, and I set my Kanakas to cleanin' up. We opened up the hatches, and let the air blow through her while we poked her along toward 'Frisco. I stood on deck a-watchin' the *Bully Boy* a-teeterin' on the billers, as the poet says; and more'n once 'fore I lost sight of her I thought sure she'd teeter right on under. She didn't carry any too much freeboard the best o' times; and with those twenty men packed into her she looked like a submarine with her decks awash.

But that was McPhail's lookout, and I said good-by to 'em finally, and let the *Tie Ping* hum for 'Frisco.

Waitin' for us? Great jumpin' Jonah! The papers had got hold of it, and the labor-unions were passin' resolutions and appointin' select committees for to interview me with a section o' gas-pipe; and the mayor was frothin' at the mouth and callin' out the police reserves every fifteen minutes; and the immigration officials' eyes were hangin' out on their cheeks from lookin' for us.

"Yes, sir, they'd worked 'emselves into a reg'lar frazzle. The *Tie Ping* was growed to a tramp freighter, and I was smugglin' in two hundred and forty Chinks, besides women and children. I was an escaped convict, with San Quentin a-yawnin' for me. One paper claimed it had searched up my record, and I was a grave-robber named Boyle, masqueradin' under a *nom de guerre;* whatever that meant.

Well, the immigration official come aboard about as soon as we made quarantine; and I met him polite, and asked him into the cabin.

"Where's the Chinks, cap'n?" he says, the first thing.

"Chinks?" says I, astonished. "Chinks?"

"It's no go, cap'n," he says, sarcastic like. "We know all about it. We got you dead to rights. You might as well knuckle under. Where are they? In the hold?"

"What makes you talk that-a-way," I says. "I'm in from Honolulu in ballast," I says; and fetched out the papers to prove it.

He never looked at 'em; just laughed in my face.

"Come, come, cap'n," he says. "There's no use in our wastin' time. I know you've got a bunch o' Chinese aboard you're plannin' to smuggle in. Now, where are they at?"

It was my turn to laugh, and I laughed till he got hot in his mind.

"I'll search your vessel," he says, jumpin' up.

"Search an' welcome," says I, polite as could be. "Somebody's been stringin' you."

With that he hops up to the deck and started through the vessel. We'd had the hatches off all the way in, and he plumped down the forward hatchway with the help of a rope, and come up again sayin' cuss words to himself.

Then he went down the main hatch, and this time he stayed longer. He stayed so long I leaned over the hatchway, and asked him if he wanted any help, and with that he come up cussin' some more.

"You've had 'em aboard," he says. "I can smell 'em."

"Chinks?" I says. "What do Chinks smell like?"

Then he turned loose another string o' bad ones.

"Maybe I put 'em aboard some other vessel 'fore comin' in," I says.

"More likely you landed 'em some-'ers along the coast," says he, lookin' shrewd as a weasel. "We'll get 'em yet; and we'll get you, too, and don't you forget it."

I looked more solemn than what I felt. "Say!" I says, "can't we get together on this? Can't we talk it over and——"

"Bribe me, will you?" he yells. "I'll show you whether you can bribe Aaron Snook, you smuggler! I'll show you!" And he went ashore to telegraph from Mendocino to Monterey for 'em to be on the lookout for a string o' strange Chinks. The papers told all about it next day, and how they "confidently expected to intercept them."

My Kanakas were all healthy, and I showed my Honolulu papers, so quarantine passed us that afternoon, and we went on up the harbor. Come dusk I went ashore, and hotfooted it for Chinatown, where I hunted up the Tong man and made arrangements. He seemed surprised to see me, and told me immediate that the price of the tug would come out of my profits.

"Don't you worry about the tug," I says. "I'll fix it up with the tug." And I hurried back to the *Tie Ping*.

I hung two lanterns, a red and a white, on her quarter, and sat down on the house to wait for Cap'n McPhail. He was a long time comin', and I begun to wonder if he'd run the *Bully Boy* under and pickled them yellow sardines in brine.

It must have been close on one o'clock and dark as the forehold, with a 'Frisco drizzle comin' down, when I heard the soft *poof, poof* of an engine not a great ways off. It might be the *Bully Boy*, and it might not, so I waited. Then there come a bump under our stern, and a voice whispered: "Hello, Cap'n Clubb!"

"Hello, Cap'n McPhail!" says I back.

"There's the divvle to pay," says he immediate. "My fireman's a union man. He give his word, all right, but the minute we was inside, he slips the boat and goes ashore. They're after us. That's them yonder." And he pointed toward a movin' light not so far away.

"We're done now," thinks I, and asked him about the Chinks.

"Smothered, I'm thinkin'," says he. "They quit makin' any noise an hour gone. You take 'em aboard, and I'll go talk to the coppers."

We hustled to the bunkers, and pulled up the starboard hatch. Top layer o' heathen never moved. They were certainly a meek bunch. I grabbed one by the cue, and he groaned like he didn't want to but couldn't help it. We dragged 'em out and put 'em aboard the *Tie Ping;* and Sam Tinker stowed 'em away in their bunks and fastened down the main hatch.

There was nothin' else to do, though I was fearful o' consequences. I'd 'a' took 'em ashore then, but the Tong's men were to meet me at two o'clock, and it was only a little past one. McPhail cast off the *Bully Boy* and went off down the harbor; and a minute later I heard a voice yell:

"What boat is that?"

Then come McPhail's voice: "Is it a tow ye're wantin'?" says he, innocent as a fresh aig.

I could hear the puffin' of the *Bully Boy's* engines as she drew away; and then the first voice yells again:

"Stop that boat now! We want you!" And the engines stopped. They weren't fifty yards away from the *Tie Ping,* and I could hear everything that went on.

"Are you the tug *Bully Boy?"* came another voice.

"I am that," says McPhail; "an' I'd be pleased to know who ye are."

A police lantern flashed, and showed McPhail with his head stickin' out of the pilot-house.

"We'll take a look at yer coal-bunkers, me bye," said the first voice.

"Me coal-bunkers!" says McPhail. "Faith, an' 'tis empty ye'll find 'em!"

"We'll see about that," says the officer; and the light of the lantern climbed aboard and went aft. A minute later it came back.

"Where's the Chinks ye had aboard?" says the officer.

"Chinks!" yelled McPhail. "Will ye come aboard me boat an' insult me? I'm not runnin' a laundry."

"None o' that now," says the officer. "We know all about ye. Ye're under arrest."

"Under arrest is it?" says McPhail. "All right, but I'll make it hot fer ye, arrestin' a dacent man in the pursuit of his livin'."

"Git yer boat goin' now, an' take us ashore," says the officer.

McPhail sung out to his engineer to let her go, and the engineer come out o' the engine-room a-ragin'.

"There's not a shovel o' coal aboard of her, an' ye tell me to let her go!" says he.

"Ye hear him?" says McPhail. "Me momentum wud 'a' tuk me in if ye'd let me go. Now me steam's low, an' I've no coal."

Meantime the tide was driftin' 'em down toward the *Tie Ping;* and directly I called Sam Tinker, and pointed out two dock lights to him.

"Sam," I says, "you see those two lights ashore there?"

"Sure," says Sam.

"Well," says I, "between 'em there's a wharf. If I'm busy when two o'clock comes, I want you to get them Chinks into the long-boat, and take 'em to that wharf. You'll find a Chinee waitin' for 'em. Understand?"

"Sure," says Sam.

"And mind you move careful. Bring the Chinks up barefoot, and if you make any noise gettin' the boat out, there'll be the devil to pay, and nothin' to pay him with."

About then the tug come scrapin' along our side, and everybody jumped. I ran to the rail, and the minute McPhail laid eye on me he begun to yell.

"Hey!" he says; "you pay me what you owe me!" And he starts to scramble aboard the *Tie Ping.* The officer grabbed him.

"Here," he says, "cut it out!"

"Pay me!" yells McPhail. "Pay me, you Chink smuggler! Arrest him, officer! He's that man Clubb. He owes me money."

"You stand quiet now," says the officer, with his fingers down McPhail's neck.

"He owes me money," yells McPhail, like he was crazy. "I towed him in, an' he gimme the slip. Lemme git to him."

"Shut up, will ye?" says the officer, shakin' him.

"Lemme collect me money an' I'll go with ye peaceful," wails McPhail.

"Is this the *Tie Ping?"* says the officer to me.

"*Tie Ping,* of 'Frisco," I says; "in this mornin' from Honolulu in-ballast."

"Ye stick to it handsome," says the officer. "Come on, Tim. 'Tis the smuggler himself. Maybe somethin's doin'"; and with that all three of 'em climbed over the *Tie Ping's* rail. I saw the officers lookin' round mighty suspicious, an' I jumped to get in a word first.

"Come below, out o' the wet," I says. "I've some of the real stuff in my locker. It'll warm you. We'll talk this matter over, an' see if we can't come to an agreement."

"Ye owe me thirty dollars," cut in McPhail.

"I'll never pay it," says I. "Ye didn't

earn it. But come down where it's dry, an' we'll talk it over."

The officers were Irish, and they accepted my invitation. I set out a bottle; an' while they examined the insides of it I winked to McPhail, an' we begun our argument. It was a quart bottle, and the officers weren't in any rush to be goin'. McPhail and me argued, bein' at all times five dollars apart. Two o'clock come, and I strained my ears. Once I thought I heard the slap of a bare foot on the deck, and once the squeak of a davit block, but it wasn't noticeable above the wranglin' of McPhail and me.

I hammered the table with my fist, and swore McPhail was a robber, and I'd never pay him ten dollars. And McPhail, he hammered back, and called me names I'll not repeat, while the officers watched the fall of the stuff in the bottle, and didn't seem to care if we come to blows.

I give Sam plenty of time, and then I winked to McPhail. We split the difference, and I paid him seven, fifty for towin' me in, which he didn't do. He pocketed the money, the officers divided the tailin's of the bottle, and we went on deck.

"Tim," says one of 'em, "shall we look through her?"

"Cap'n," says Tim, turnin' to me, "ye have the look of an honest man. Have ye any Chinks aboard?"

"Nary a one," says I, hopeful I was tellin' the truth. "Some Kanakas, but no Chinks."

"Yer rayfreshment was furrst rate," says Tim, "an' we'll take yer worrd fer the Chinks."

Then they fell overside onto the deck of the tug. McPhail followed, and helped them into their own boat.

"It's obliged to ye I am," says McPhail, "fer helpin' me collect me debt."

"'S all right," says Tim. "We'd ought to arrest ye, but ye're Irish, an' we'll let ye go this wanst."

McPhail shoved them off, and they disappeared in the darkness, rowin' wild and in many directions. McPhail come to the rail.

"Are they ashore?" says he.

I investigated the vessel. "They are," says I.

"'Tis a good night's work, Cap'n Clubb," says he. "When do I get my money?"

"When I get mine," says I.

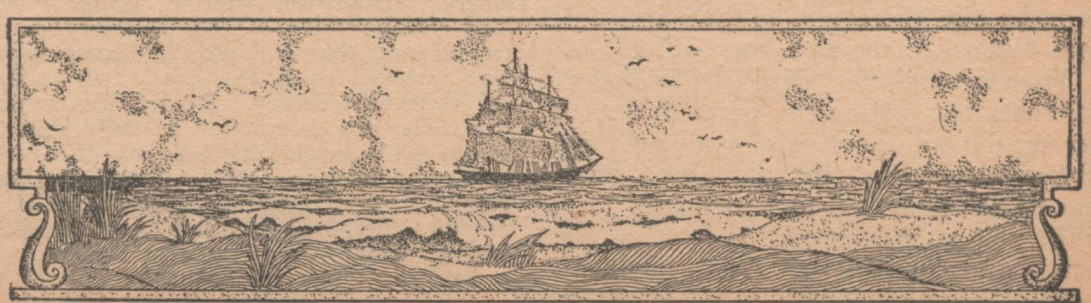
"I've seven, fifty here," says he. "Suppose we celebrate?"

"I'm with ye," says I.

We waited till Sam come back with two Kanakas rowin' the boat, and reported no trouble, and the Chinks delivered to the Tong's men. Then McPhail and me went ashore and hunted up refreshment. He was arrested next day on his fireman's complaint, and I collected from the head of the Tong and bailed him out.

The trial didn't amount to shucks. McPhail got next to his fireman, and the sight of a little real money made him lose his memory. So there was no evidence, and McPhail went free.

I paid him his thousand, and made a contract with him on the spot. The tugboat game was a good one, and the police never did get onto it, though we worked it trip after trip. Maybe we swelled the Chink population some, but it ain't worryin' me, for, all things considered, dagoes and Poles and United States Senators and all, I don't believe it did the country as much harm as it did us good.



The Fortunes of Geoff

By K. and Hesketh Prichard
Authors of "Don Q.," "Roving Hearts," Etc.

IV.—SPANISH GOLD

(A Complete Story)

IT was within an hour of sunset, and the sun, as is his custom for two hundred days out of the year in Patagonia, had flooded the sky with his crimson deathlights, making the little iron-roofed town of Trelew look like a gigantic forge set in the center of the pampas of harsh grass. Incidentally, also, it fell through the small, dirty window of a back room attached to the best wine-shop in the settlement, and illuminated the blond head of young Gerald Hostault as he spoke.

"I say, Hay, I want to go into the interior; will you go with me?"

Geoffrey Heronhaye, who chose to be known as Hay in the settlement, stretched his long legs and met the blue eyes of his companion.

"You know nothing about me," he objected.

"I have heard that you have a pretty good knowledge of the wilder parts of the country."

Geoff laughed. "And a gallows reputation in it," he said coolly. "You are perhaps not aware that until two months ago there was a thousand dollars reward on me as a horse-thief."

Hostault smiled. "No, I hadn't heard of that, but you were pointed out to me on the transport coming down from Buenos Ayres as the man who managed Wintrom's concession. . . . Will you go with me? . . . as my guide and compañero. As to payment, why, I'm good for that. I'm son to Tremenheere Hostault, of Buenos Ayres."

"Yes," said Geoff reflectively; "only son to the biggest financier in Argentina."

After a pause he added: "What part of the camp do you want to go to?"

To Geoff's surprise, the young man lowered his voice mysteriously. "I'll tell you that later," he said. "In fact, once you promise to go with me you shall know all that I know."

"I'll go," said Geoff.

"Splendid. Now look here." Hostault took a pocketbook from his breast and drew from it a newspaper cutting, which he handed across the table.

Geoff was not by any means an accomplished Spanish scholar, and it took him some time to master the contents of the frayed and dirty paragraph, which had been taken from the local paper. Translated, it ran something as follows:

EXTRAORDINARY STORY!
ROMANTIC DISCOVERY!

Great excitement has been caused by the reports of an individual who has recently emerged from the interior, bringing with him strange tales of the discovery of the treasure of the Spaniard, Quillanarte, who was wrecked upon the coasts of Chile in the sixteenth century. He led his companions, after the destruction of their ship, far into the Andes in the hope of discovering human habitation. How he died there, having first secreted his treasure, which he caused to be borne with him upon the shoulders of men, was narrated at the courts of subsequent kings of Spain by one of the two survivors, who, after many adventures,

found their way back to Madrid in the third year after the death of their leader. At a later date, Philip IV. despatched an expedition to search for it. How this failed forms one of the most extraordinary pages in history. This old story, we say, has been recently pushed back into the daylight, by the appearance in the colony of Trelew of an old gaucho, named Mercado, who is stated to have staked upon one of the local gaming-tables coins bearing the superscription of the sovereign who ruled in Spain in the days when Quillanarte and his stout-hearted companions sailed away to found, among others, the great republic beneath whose banner this paper is printed.

Geoff knitted his brows and read it over again.

"Well," said Hostault, who had been watching him, "what do *you* think of it?"

Geoff was slow to answer, and before he could reply his companion burst forth again:

"Isn't it too extraordinary to think of this old gaucho stumbling upon such a find?" The blue eyes in his young sun-reddened face kindled as he went on. "After riding out of this very settlement, as he did, with his three horses and two ostrich-hounds—all he possessed between him and starvation—think of his returning here with such knowledge as this! After all these years to come by chance upon old Quillanarte's treasure!"

"I suppose Mercado returned to Trelew while I have been away at the estancias trying to get together a tropilla of horses. I started the day we landed."

"And he arrived the day after, on the Sunday, in fact. He came straight to this *boliche,* and drank as I have never seen a man drink. In the evening, some of the other gauchos and loafers started one of their Argentine games of cards. Mercado joined in, of course, and lost. To begin with, he paid in dollar bills, but afterward he pulled out a handful of discolored, dirty coins. At first no one guessed the truth, and thought he was trying to cheat them. Mercado lost his head, and said more than he meant, I suspect, and at last his fellow gamblers awoke to the meaning of it all."

"And then?"

"Mercado was not too drunk to comprehend he'd been making a fool of himself, for he sat on a bench against the wall, and finished his game without a word. They were all at him for detail, but he just nodded his high old beak of a nose, and staggered into the sleeping-room. The crowd at the bar sat up nearly through the night, handling the coins, and going in to stare at the old man sleeping like a log. Perhaps they hoped he'd talk in his sleep!"

Geoff sat listening with his elbow on his knee.

"They didn't get another word from him. About twelve next day he awoke, went out quickly, saddled his horse, and rode away to the ford on the Shubut River, where he made his camp."

"I don't suppose he lacked visitors at that camp."

Hostault laughed. "Hardly! He was there two days, and then he could stand it no longer. He had *too* many friends! On the third morning his camp was empty; he had slipped away in the night."

"Or been kidnaped."

"He was not kidnaped," said Hostault, bending across the table, with an exultant light on his face.

"Are you sure of it?"

"Quite certain. He went off of his own free will and alone. . . . Look here, Hay, he's gone to keep a rendezvous with his partner in this business!"

"And you know who his partner is?"

"Why, yes, it's myself! . . . We have fixed up an arrangement by which he undertakes to show me the treasure, and I—on condition that I pay him a sum down—take my chance in the subsequent lifting of it. And if the thing goes well, as I hope it will, you shall stand in with me on anything we find."

Geoff rose. "Thanks," he said. "And where do we meet with Mercado?"

"Of course we could not start from here without the whole colony on the trail—so he's gone on to Olnie Eike, and will wait there till I join him. . . . If you have horses enough, let's start."

"All right." Geoff got as far as the

door, and turned. "May I inquire what you came to Patagonia for in the first instance?"

"Oh, to look at a concession my father has between this and Gallegos, a couple of dozen square leagues, I believe. He thinks I might do for a sheep-farmer, as I haven't shown any conspicuous ability like . . . like his . . . you know," said Hostault, with a constrained smile. "I'd like to succeed in this thing, you know."

As good fortune would have it during one of his journeys into the interior, Geoff had passed the place known as Olnie Eike. He remembered it, black basaltic cliffs, about a verdant valley that was watered by streams which flowed sluggishly through its green marshes. Olnie Eike is an Indian name, and signifies "the valley which flows with grease"; in other words, the valley where animals are fat—a rare advantage among the wild creatures of Patagonia, where leanness in the kills is a quality that can be relied on.

To reach this place it was necessary to follow the Chico River for some seven days. As he and Hostault rode on beside the stream, now through brown *vegas,* now over arid tablelands, the talk was perpetually of Mercado and of Quillanarte. It appeared that in his two conversations with Hostault, the old gaucho had been very guarded.

"You see, Hay," argued the young man, "the whole affair is really perfectly plain. I can't move without Mercado, because he alone of all the gauchos and ostrich-hunters who have traversed the country has happened upon the spot where the old Spaniard laid his treasures; on the other hand, neither can Mercado move without me. First, because he is a marked man, and the government would appropriate the greater part of the treasure-trove; secondly, because he has no money, and without money he cannot take it out of the country. If he lifted the treasure and packed it on his *cargieros,* every comisario in Patagonia would be on his heels. No, the thing is as simple as can be. Mercado will guide me to the place; I will pay him, and then I will lift the treasure, take it to Punta Arenas, which is within the Chilean boundaries, and ship it away beyond the reach of all the comisarios in Argentina."

"But why," said Geoff, "should Mercado have chosen you as his partner?"

"Oh, I think that's plain enough. I suppose he came to the conclusion that I will deal straight with him. Another thing, we English in this country are not half so subject to interference as the natives. I tell you, I'm quite convinced that if Mercado will but show us the treasure, we shall have little trouble in getting clear away with it. The one difficulty is the old man's suspicious nature. If only we can get over that——"

Such was the orbit of thought round which the conversation swung.

As they journeyed on through the loneliness of the interior, it was but natural that the two men should grow daily more intimate. At first Hostault, who was young enough to expect to find his confidences returned in full measure, was a little disappointed by Geoff's unalterable reserve, but he presently tided over this irritation, and began to entertain a warm feeling for his rather grim and silent comrade. As for Geoff, Hostault's youth and ingenuous frankness raised in him a feeling of friendship. Fate had been kind to the young man; among her best gifts being the excellent items of a large allowance from his father, and a roving disposition. Hostault was high-spirited, in the early twenties, his own master, and, without being aware of it, dominated by a strong romantic strain. This quality of romance is, after all, the best gift of the gods to mortal men.

Early on the sixth afternoon they turned aside from the Chico, and, accompanied by a mirage of men and horses, etched in black and blue upon the rim of their world, they climbed across a steep barranca, and saw far below them the gleaming river Olin. Their meeting with Mercado did not occur as Hostault had made up his

mind that it would, at the camp of the old gaucho, but suddenly and with picturesqueness.

They had rounded a little gravelly hillock, when not two hundred yards from them an ostrich with two hounds in hot pursuit swept into view. The bird turned swiftly; the leading dog overshot his mark, but even as he did so, his companion pulled the bird to the earth.

"Mercado's dogs!" cried Hostault; and in another moment the old gaucho himself had ridden up.

Geoff looked at him with interest. His high-featured, lean old face was dark as that of an Arab; his hair, which he wore long, was gray and coarse. He rode an excellent horse, of the color known in Chubut as *bayou*. Country-fashion, he had but one stirrup; his dress included poncho and *chiripa*, both stained with the bright colors that Indians love. As a matter of fact, they were the sole remaining indication of the fact that Mercado had married into and lived for a long period with a tribe of Senguerr Tehuelches.

The old man dismounted and drove the dogs from their quarry, and then, having given them the offal of the bird by way of their payment, turned to Hostault.

"*Bueno!* so you have come?" he said. "But who is this?"

"I am Señor Hostault's guide," said Geoff.

Mercado scanned him. "Inglese?" said he; and, without pausing for an answer, led the way to his camp.

Its plenishing was meager. A couple of hide ropes were hung upon a bush in order to preserve them from the voracious foxes. In the lee of this bush a couple of ponchos were spread upon the ground, before them a fire smoldered—that was all. The gaucho understands no roof save that in which the stars burn.

It would be wearisome to describe the happenings of the next forty hours. Distrust and evasion on the part of Mercado were met by the ill-concealed impatience of young Hostault. With characteristic impulsiveness the latter flung Geoff's councils to the winds, and by his very eagerness to hear apparently raised in Mercado an instinctive and vigorous opposition. Hour after hour the three sat round the fire and drank their maté. Again and again the conversation veered toward the subject upon which all their minds were set, and as often the old gaucho led it away again. It was clear that Mercado understood every move of a diplomatic game.

At first Geoff thought that the old man merely withheld his information in order to gain better terms by exciting Hostault's ardor; but after awhile he began to seek for some other motive. At length in reply to a repeated question, the situation was made amply clear.

"If, as it appears, you have nothing to say to me," Hostault had said, "why did you ask me to meet you here?"

Mercado slowly sucked in his dose of maté.

"Pardon," he replied, "but in such matters as these, one moves gently and speaks man to man. Words that are wise when spoken between two are sometimes foolish when there are three to listen."

At this Geoff rose. He quite understood that so direct a hint meant much more from an Argentine than it would had it been spoken by an Englishman. For the Argentines are the most polite of men.

"There are some *picaso* ducks upon the *laguna*," he said; and walked out of camp with his gun.

The evening had grown late, and Geoff had gathered quite a little pile of birds behind him in the reeds when he heard footsteps approaching, and a very petulant and shamefaced Hostault joined him.

"The suspicious old fool!" said the young man.

"Won't he tell you anything?" asked Geoff.

"Oh, yes, he'll tell *me* right enough."

"Then it is as I thought. Our old

friend does not like the presence of the unexpected third?"

"That is just it. It's most annoying!"

"But easily remedied."

Hostault stood awkwardly fingering the wing feathers of a duck. "But look here, I don't like it," he began. "I made the engagement with you. Of course you will be paid just the same. Still, I —I don't know what to do."

"Do as you like; it won't make any difference to me."

"Then you don't mind!" exclaimed Hostault.

"No, I don't mind," replied Geoff; "that is, on one condition."

"Let me hear it," cried Hostault eagerly.

"That I go without seeing Mercado again."

Hostault heaved a sigh of relief. Evidently he had expected something far more rigorous.

"That's easy," he said. "If you come back to camp now, you can get off before he returns. He has gone to look for the young *bayou* colt he was riding this morning, and which has strayed."

Ten minutes later and a full half-hour before Mercado returned with the *bayou,* Geoff had collected his little tropilla of horses and had disappeared down the windings of one of the many *cañadones* that cut great rifts all over the surface of the pampas.

"You seem mighty ready to go," remarked Hostault, half-huffed by the haste of the departure.

At which remark Geoff laughed as soon as he was out of hearing.

After leaving Hostault, Geoff rode steadily back along the old track, until he was nearing a series of uplands, where the ground, or, rather, the rock, was so hard and arid that the horses left no trace of their passage across it. There he deliberately broke his trail, and, fetching a big compass, began once more to approach the camp of Mercado. He was well aware that his actions, were they discovered, would be open to grave misconstruction, but for that he cared not at all. He was a man who now seldom bothered himself about the opinions of others. He had his reasons, and there was an end of it.

For two days he remained encamped within a couple of leagues of his former companions. Geoff understood Mercado's delay. The old gaucho wished to let him get well away before moving on with Hostault upon their quest. The little fire which Geoff lit each evening mixed with the ether long before it soared above the dark rock-face which shielded it from observation. The sun rose and set; the guanaco bucks neighed at him from the heights, while once and again he would climb the barranca to assure himself that Mercado and Hostault had not departed. Then he would return and resume the lazy patience of his existence.

At length, on the third day, the gaucho broke camp and moved away, driving his tropilla before him, Hostault riding rather in the rear. Geoff allowed them to get well ahead before he set himself to follow. They shaped their course west by north in easy stages, neither of them dreaming that four leagues behind their horses' tails Geoffrey Heronhaye held on his even way, or that the ashes of their fires were not cold before he blew them into new life.

At length, on the second afternoon, while the sun was still hot, Geoff, as he rode at his leisurely pace through a billowing ocean of coarse grass, with not a bush upon its whole expanse that would have sheltered him to the shoulder, saw far ahead what he at first took to be a mirage. It seemed to be the figure of a man sitting with bowed shoulders over a smoke so thin that it might have arisen from the pipe of a giant. Mirages are not uncommon on the pampas, and this lonely figure might be one of them, but, as heavy clouds drifted up and covered the sky, and the vision only became clearer and nearer, Geoff knew it to be a reality. Even then it did not occur to him who the man might be, and it was not until the figure rose and looked slowly round to each quarter of the compass that he recognized Hostault.

As he galloped up, the young fellow met him with a cry of delight.

"What has happened? Where is Mercado?" asked Geoff.

"Our camp was raided last night and Mercado carried off," answered Hostault.

"What?" cried Geoff, in genuine surprise. This at least he had not expected.

"Yes, we were attacked in the night by two men. I could see no more than that they wore ponchos and big hats. They held us under their guns until they had saddled Mercado's horse. I think they tied him on it. They wrangled a bit in camp Spanish, and I heard poor old Mercado give a cry. Then they got him away at last. I was rolled up in my blankets, and could not move. They took my weapons, of course, then rode off, driving all the horses before them. I'm rather grateful they didn't kill me on the spot."

"The only difference between shooting a man on the spot, as you say, and leaving him without horses and weapons three hundred miles from anywhere, is a difference on the wrong side, to my mind."

"Yes, by Jove! But I was so rattled about not being able to follow them, I hadn't thought of that. Only for your coming, Hay . . . the *coranchos* would have had me." Hostault's voice altered.

"The thing," said Geoff slowly, "is what to do next."

"Follow them!" exclaimed the other. "I'd never forgive myself if those pampas brutes forced Mercado to give up his secret. I tell you I heard him howl before they got him to mount."

"Better take the *oscuro,*" said Geoff briefly, indicating one of his tropilla.

"What I don't understand yet, Hay," said Hostault, as the horses loped forward at a good pace, "is how you came along so opportunely. It couldn't be chance."

"It wasn't chance, and when I decided to do it, I was quite aware that if I came across you, my motives might be misunderstood."

"Oh, drop that! How was it?"

"I turned about—out of curiosity. That's all."

Hostault looked hard at Heronhaye. He saw that he was holding back something.

"Lucky for me, anyway. . . . I say, what do you think these fellows will do?"

"What they will do seems pretty simple. They'll just shove a revolver into Mercado's back and order him to take them straight to the place where he found the Spanish gold, or take the consequences."

"Poor old boy! He'll have to give in, I suppose."

"Perhaps he has hope of a rescue. Did he give you any idea of where he was leading you?"

"He said to the cordillera."

"Then we may catch them." Geoff glanced at the snow peaks, which with every mile seemed to be advancing upon them as though the mountains themselves were moving forward like an army to crush them. "Near as they look, it will take us a good day and a half to reach them."

"How far can these horses of yours go in a day?"

"Sixty miles in one day, or one hundred in two."

Hostault nodded, and they rode on in silence. Soon they began to notice the change of vegetation, which heralded their approach to the mountain region. Their way now lay past dark and windy pools; game disappeared from the landscape, and only scavenging birds and beasts seemed to dwell in thicket or in air. As they drew closer to the cordillera, they entered upon a league-long area of little hills covered with *maté negra,* and patches of poison-scrub. Before them ran the trail that they were following, clearly marked in the soft, dry earth.

It was no longer possible to ride with a loose rein; the hills closed in the view on every side, and, as the tracks were growing fresher, Geoff was just about to ride on to make a reconnaissance, when in a miniature defile between two bush-grown mounds, his eye caught a flash of color alien to the landscape.

Two objects, purple and white, were sticking out from behind a thicket. It was not until they were quite close that Geoff recognized these objects for what they were.

"It's a man's legs!" he whispered. "Purple store socks and white hempen shoes."

The dead lay sprawled face downward upon the grass; there was a heavy clot of blood at the back of his neck, where the bullet had found exit. His hat, which lay at a little distance, bore the impress of a man's heel.

"Mercado!" cried Hostault.

"No," said Geoff, as he turned the body over; "not Mercado. Mercado's work, I think."

Neither his knife nor anything of value had been taken from the dead man. He was swarthy and dusky, evidently a half-breed gaucho; and it was plain to Geoff's experience that he must have died on the instant, for his left hand was cut with the thorn and grass he had torn up in his death-grip.

"It must be one of the rascals who raided our camp." Hostault was frowning down at the dead face.

"Yes. It seems that Mercado is a dangerous man to deal with as those two dealt with him."

"Mercado?"

But Geoff was searching the thickets. His experience in another and an earlier existence as a hunter in the Rockies and in Norway had given him some skill in reading trails. All the hunter's craft had come easily to him, and his recent life had converted what had been the mere pastime of an amateur into the hard certainty of the professional. When he came back to Hostault his face was grave.

"Mercado did not kill this man," he said.

"Who else?"

"A man who lay behind that rock fired the shot. It was a regular ambush," he said.

"But who——" began Hostault.

"Only three men know that."

"Three?"

"Mercado and two others. As to that," went on Geoff, "it answers a question you asked me a little while back. You asked me why I followed you. Now, you did not notice that Mercado threw a lot of green brush on his fire as soon as we arrived in his camp?"

"No."

"Yet he did it, and be sure not without a reason."

"I don't understand. Though now you mention it, I did notice the smoke. Why did he do it?"

"As a signal. He wished to warn these three men that he was coming."

"But," objected Hostault, "he said he had no compañeros."

Geoff shrugged his shoulders.

"I think that Mercado is playing a deeper game than you give him credit for," said he. "Though precisely when the game is I cannot imagine. Unless——" He broke off.

"Unless?" repeated Hostault.

"What's the good of guessing when the answer is at the end of this"—Geoff pointed to the trail. They at once commenced to ride down it.

The sun had already fallen from the zenith as they rode up a high summit of land. From this point the two looked down upon a broad depression below them. The wind was wailing mournfully through the thickets and the grass; the sun had disappeared into a smother of claret-colored cloud; a spur-winged plover uttered his harsh, complaining cry as he tossed in the wind. A small, half-ruinous hut far distant in the center of the hollow gave the last expression of desolation to the scene; the smoke which struggled from its earthen chimney was cut off at right angles by the fierce wind. The sight came upon both the onlookers in a high color of surprise. They had traveled so long without sign of human habitation that they found something strange and menacing in the aspect of this one.

"A house! It can't be a house! And some one living in it, by Jove!" exclaimed Hostault.

"This must be the Casa Alparani," said Geoff.

"Mercado said something about the

Casa Alparani, now you mention it. Who lives here?"

"A man named Alparani once lived there. He had a farm of horses. That is his house unquestionably, but he himself was taken away five years ago by the Comisario of Trelew, who found three foals with Alparani's brand on their flanks following their dams, who happened to carry some one else's."

"It is not deserted now, at any rate."

"No, we have run Mercado & Co. to earth."

They tied up their horses and went down into the hollow on foot. For a space of time, which seemed unnecessarily long to Hostault's impatience, they watched the hut. But no one entered it, and no one left it; after a little the smoke diminished, and at last almost died away. As they approached the place with caution, there came to them through the door the mutter of a voice, and occasionally a groan.

Geoff raised himself with his hands against the crumbling framework of the wall, and through a jagged hole saw the gray ashes on the hearth, and the evening light aslant across the empty floor. But the muttering voice seemed almost at his ear. He raised himself another inch or two, and looked down upon something which sent him hurrying round through the open door, with Hostault at his heels.

In a corner stood a bedstead of rusted iron, probably left there by Alparani in the hurry of his flight. On this a man lay spread-eagled upon his back; he did not stir at their entrance; a second glance showed that he was securely lashed by wrist and ankle to the rusty frame, his yellow beard pointed to the roof, and the apple in his throat worked convulsively.

"You, Siegfried," said Geoff, recognizing a gaucho he had met.

"Why, I believe it's one of the thieves that raided our camp," cried Hostault.

"Poor devil! Look here!" Geoff pointed to the breast of the man's shirt, which was stiff with blood.

As they spoke he opened his eyes, and looked at them.

"Ease, then, these thongs," he gasped.

"Where is Mercado?" asked Geoff, as his knife ran swiftly through the rawhide.

"He has gone to find the son of Tremenheere Hostault. For dear Heaven's sake, make a haste with these thongs!"

"How do I know you haven't killed Mercado?" exclaimed Hostault. "You are one of the two who carried him off from my camp."

"Yes," muttered the wounded man, "I am one of those two, but a good service deserves a good service, compañero."

"What is this talk of a good service?"

"The best ever man did for another. It's my life for yours . . . that is how it stands." He tried to raise himself. "Mercado's compañeros will be coming back——"

"We are his compañeros. What do you mean?"

By this time they had him supported on their ponchos. He sank wearily back upon the roughness of his improvised pillow.

"Yet you are not the man who killed Diaz . . . who wounded me and tied me to this bed. . . . Make a haste, I tell you, the two come back quick."

"All right," said Geoff; "but go on, tell us what you did with Mercado."

"After we catch him, he give in, and say he take us to the treasure. We say we compel him, of course . . . but never mind . . . he agree easy. *Que hombre!* Two rides from here we make fire. . . . much fire . . . much smoke . . . to cook ostrich, Mercado say. No! the smoke was his signal to his compañeros. They ambush us in the little hills; Diaz they kill, and me they shoot here—in the bosom. . . . That is the service I did you. I die in your place."

Hostault looked at Geoff. "I cannot understand why Mercado should want to ambush me."

Siegfried's voice rose more clearly. "Not again shall I come to Elfdalen, as I had desired! no, not again! . . . Yet I had a good hope when I left it.

I who spoke four tongues, not counting the Russian." He lapsed into his native language.

"Siegfried," said Geoff, raising him to an easier posture, "I never thought that you would join in a business of this sort."

The high, bald forehead of the Swede wrinkled a little.

"Nor me," he said simply. "Yet many years I have desired to go home to Elfdalen. And this money would have taken me there. . . . But I have this bullet in my bosom!"

"Let me see your wound."

The knotted hand went up. "No, it bleed no more, and when it bleed again I die. . . . Six-and-twenty year have I worked in this land. Never before have I desired Elfdalen with such a hunger! It is strange one should have the homesickness after so great a time."

"Can't we do something?" whispered Hostault.

"No, only wait by him. He's dying; we can't take him away, and we can't leave him."

Meantime, the wind cried through the hollow, and beat in the one tree that stood beside the house. A loose board in the roof creaked and rattled as they sat waiting in silence. The Swede seemed to have passed into an uneasy sleep; sometimes he talked a little, but always in the tongue which he had used in his beloved Elfdalen. They watched him, not without pity.

Thus half an hour slipped away. Then Geoff lifted his hand; his keen senses had caught the sound of approaching hoofbeats. Soon the riders were abreast of the hut; they could hear them moving outside; and with noiseless steps they tiptoed across the room, and took their places by the door which opened inward.

From without there came the clap of a hand on a horse's flank, followed by the cantering hoofs and the neigh with which it made off to join its companions upon the vega. Almost immediately the door swung open, and a couple of men carrying their saddles thrust their way in.

"Not dead yet?" cried one, as they both advanced toward the bed.

For a moment the Swede made no reply, but, as the man stood beside him, the big frame reared itself up, and the mighty hands gripped the speaker and flung him with incredible strength against the rough angle of the hearthstone.

Meantime, Geoff had stepped softly from his concealment, and with outstretched hands had followed the second man. His rope-soled shoes gave no warning; but perhaps a look in the eyes of the Swede caused the yellow-clad gaucho to leap round. His hand clutched at his revolver, but he could not use it, for he was in the grasp of the strongest man in the South. Not a sound was heard but the indrawn breath as the two joined battle. For a moment Hostault looked on like a spectator at a play; and indeed it was not until Geoff was kneeling upon his foe that he moved forward, and gave help in securing him.

Then they hurried to Siegfried. He had fallen back upon the bed, the flame had died out of his blue eyes, the bland wrinkles took form again. He smiled, muttering: "Elfdalen!" and with a sigh the huge vitality surrendered itself.

In a little they turned away, and remembered their prisoner in the yellow poncho, who lay bound on the floor.

"What do you intend to do with me?" the man repeated. No one had noticed his question before.

"I should think that wouldn't need much guesswork."

"No, no," he cried out; "not with my hands tied!" reading his own meaning into the words.

"Come, you've got to lead us to Mercado's treasure-trove. Don't lie! You know where it is."

"Suppose I won't?"

"That is stupid talk . . . for you will."

"If I do, will you swear to let me go?"

"Yes. We promise. Get along."

An hour later, the man in the yellow

poncho turned like an angry rat in the cave-mouth to which he had conducted them. "Yes, we had it all beautifully dovetailed, when sheer luck ruined everything. Had not those two fools of ostrich-hunters captured Mercado, we should. . . . But the ball of my luck bounces wrong every time!" The glib, rapid speech betrayed the town-dweller.

Geoff looked him over. Beneath his yellow poncho he was clad in black; the black beloved of a certain class in the cities of the Spanish Main. His coat was cut away in tails; his trousers, with the hard wear of the pampas upon them, shone greenish, but were of the conventional fashion. But the point about him that the beholder never forgot was the claret splash smeared with a peculiar cogency of disfigurement across his features. By some freak of position or of shape, it lent the effect of a leering mask, which no play of the man's individual expression appeared to have the least power to alter.

"Confound you! Don't look at me!" snarled the man of a sudden. "I know what you're thinking. I've had no chance to do anything with the outside of my head, so I have had to use the inside. And now, thanks to luck, even that has failed me! . . . Well, there is Mercado's treasure. Take it!"

With a gesture of his bound hands, the man pointed to the corner of the cave. The two Englishmen took turns at the labor of excavation and search; and a considerable time had elapsed before Geoff rejoined his prisoner.

"So the treasure is a fake," he said.

"You've found that out, have you?" The leer deepened to malevolence on the claret-splashed countenance. "Yes, it's a fake. I salted it. I provided the properties. I bought the coins in the Calle Florida, in Buenos Ayres. I arranged that excellent mise en scène in the cave. I persuaded Aristides, whose head that accursed Swede smashed in, to accompany me——"

"Well, I fancy we have about a couple of hundred pounds' worth of your salt in this sack," interrupted Geoff, rubbing his earth-stained hands.

The complacency faded from the man's face.

"Double two hundred pounds, confound you! And I hope you may break your back taking it down to Trelew!"

"It will repay us for our trip, anyhow."

"Bah! that was the smallest part of it. The real treasure stands behind you."

Geoff turned and came face to face with Hostault, who was just emerging from the excavation.

"Yes," resumed the man, his lip shortened scoffingly. "If we had captured him, Don Tremenheere, his father, would have paid one hundred thousand dollars as a ransom for him!"

"Then the whole thing was a trap for me?" exclaimed Hostault.

"Just so; a trap to catch a tenderfoot; a nice, gaudy-colored, romantic kind of a trap to suit you, my lad!"

"And Mercado? By George! I'd almost forgotten him!" said Geoff.

"Hired by the month," said the man with the claret splash. "If there was a national theater in Patagonia, he'd do credit to it, wouldn't he?"

WITH THE TIDE

IT had been raining for twenty-four hours, and the ground was more like a lake than a football-field, but the umpire could not see his way to postpone the game.

"Surely, you aren't going to make us play in this?" asked the visiting captain.

"Of course, you must play," declared the man with the whistle. "Now, don't hang about. You've won the toss. Which end are you taking?"

"Oh, well," came the reply, with a sigh of resignation, "I reckon we'd better play with the tide."

In the Cause of Freedom

By Arthur W. Marchmont

Author of "The Eternal Snare," "When I Was Czar," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

Robert Anstruther, an Englishman visiting Count Ladislas Tuleski in Russian Poland, becomes acquainted with Volna Drakona, a young girl whose uncle, Count Peter Valdemar, is a famous Polish conspirator. While Count Valdemar is out driving with Volna his carriage is upset and he is killed. Robert Anstruther comes to Volna's aid and they take possession of certain papers which Count Valdemar was carrying to friends of the Polish Freedom Fraternity in Cracow. Volna declares that her mother's life is in danger unless the papers are delivered, and she and Anstruther start for Cracow under the names of Robert and Margaret (Peggy) Garrett, assuming the characters of two of Anstruther's friends whose passports he carries. They are pursued, and after many adventures they reach the village of Kervatje, and are given shelter by Father Ambrose, who advises Anstruther to give himself up to the authorities, thus saving Volna from arrest. Anstruther is flung into prison, and, despite his pleas that he be allowed to communicate with his friends, is ironed and subjected to many indignities. Finally, through Volna's aid, General von Eckerstein appears on the scene and orders Anstruther's release. The general demands an explanation of the matter, but Anstruther hesitates to declare the truth.

CHAPTER XVI—(*Continued*).

I HESITATED no longer, but told General von Eckerstein the whole story from the meeting with Volna at Bratinsk railway-station down to that moment, omitting only the part which referred to Father Ambrose and the Fraternity signals.

"The portion I don't tell you doesn't affect my case, general; and I am under my pledged word not to reveal it."

"You've told me about enough," he retorted grimly; and for awhile we sat and smoked and looked at one another in silence.

Presently, with a short laugh, he took his cigar from his lips. "You're a hot-headed young fool, Bob; just that and nothing more. But"—he paused, brushed back his gray hair, sighed, and then smiled—"I suppose at your age I should have done pretty much the same, and I'm cock-sure your father would."

"I'll take my grueling, sir, if it comes to it."

"Don't talk nonsense, boy. Do you think I'll let 'em touch you? But we must move very warily. Will you apologize to Colonel Bremenhof?"

"I'll see him hanged first!" I cried.

He grinned and nodded. "You mean to make it as stiff for me as you can. That's always the way with you young folk."

"Would you have me apologize to him?"

His face stiffened and his eyelids came together till they were mere slits through which his pupils gleamed. "I'm glad you hit him; although that blow is just the toughest nut to crack. But we must get to work. Thank Heaven he put himself in the wrong, as usual!"

He rang the bell and sent for the governor. His manner became suddenly as stern as it had been kind.

"There has been a very serious miscarriage of justice here, Major Pruladoff. This is Mr. Robert Anstruther, the son of a man who was the intimate friend of half the Berlin court and

This story began in the September issue. The back numbers can be obtained through any newsdealer.

trusted by the emperor. His imprisonment is nothing short of an outrage, and what makes it really serious is that his demand, made as his right, to see the British consul and to communicate with me, was refused."

"I know nothing of that, of course, general. He was brought here on the order of Colonel Bremenhof."

"Oblige me by calling him up on the telephone, and let me speak with him."

Some minutes passed before the governor announced that the colonel was waiting. My old friend went to the instrument.

"Is that Colonel Bremenhof? This is General von Eckerstein. I wish to know why, when the young Englishman, Robert Anstruther, was brought before you, you refused to allow him to communicate with the British consul and with me, his friend? What's that? That does not answer my question. By what right did you refuse? What's that? I can't hear you. Oh, your mouth is swollen and you can only speak with difficulty?"

This was for my benefit, I knew, and I would have smiled if Major Pruladoff hadn't been frowning grimly at me.

"You can give me a direct answer, all the same," continued the general at the instrument. There was a pause, filled by the insistent buzz of the voice replying. "That is no reason. You know that, sir. What? Well, you can't treat Englishmen like that. It will be my countryman's turn next. But you had his papers. Very well, then, I am going now to the governor."

There was a long pause, then——

"Nonsense. What your men thought doesn't touch the point of your refusal. You know that. Well, if you don't think the thing had better be hushed up, there's an end of it. Mr. Anstruther will communicate with the consul here and wire to the ambassador at Petersburg. What do you mean? Do you dare to try and make me a party to your illegal act? Then you shouldn't suggest it. Certainly. If you don't send down an order for his release I shall not exert any further influence to restrain Mr. Anstruther from using his unquestionable rights, and shall myself wire to the minister of the interior. An hour? No, sir, not five minutes. At once." And the general hung up the receiver.

The telephone-bell rang furiously.

"Just write a short note to Mr. Hardy, the consul, Robert, and I'll take it to him myself. He will at once communicate with Petersburg, and in the meantime I'll wire to the minister. You'll permit the letter to be written, major?"

The bell was going all the time.

"I am in a difficult position, general," replied the governor. "That is probably Colonel Bremenhof. Won't you answer?"

"Certainly not. You'd better ask him if he persists in his refusal; and you may add it doesn't matter, because I shall see Mr. Hardy."

"The colonel wishes to speak to you again, general," said the major, from the instrument.

"I have no more time to waste over the telephone." My friend put on his overcoat. "You must go back to your cell, Robert; but Mr. Hardy is a prompt man, and before morning we shall have word of some kind from Petersburg. Good night, boy." He shook my hand —and winked.

"General von Eckerstein is going, colonel," said the governor through the telephone. "The colonel wishes to know where you are going, general."

"Tell him to mind his own business and I'll mind mine," was the angry reply; and it was repeated over the wire.

The general walked to the door and opened it.

"The colonel urgently begs you to speak with him, general."

"Am I to wait for that letter to be written or not, sir?" His face might have been a stone mask in its sternness.

"Please wait a moment, general. As a personal favor to me. I really don't know what to do."

"I have no more time to waste, I say. I demand a reply now."

"Mr. Anstruther, will you ask the

general? It may be of the highest moment to you."

A very different sort of governor this from the one who had lectured me so sternly in my cell, and then glibly sentenced me to the knout.

"No. I have been treated too infamously. I prefer to put the matter in the hands of the British authorities," I answered. "All Europe shall know how foreigners are treated in Warsaw."

A glance from the general approved my reply.

"You can write to your consul, then."

We both understood that this was merely intended to gain delay, and we wasted some time in pretended difficulty about phrasing the letter, while a conversation continued over the wire which clearly showed that the man at the other end was in trouble.

"That's enough, Bob," said the general presently. "You can tell him all when he comes."

"Thank Heaven!" breathed the governor, with a sigh of relief, as the receiver was hung up again. "One moment, general. The colonel is sending an order for Mr. Anstruther's release upon your giving me your assurance to be responsible for him."

"Just in time!" exclaimed my old friend curtly and ungraciously, as he tore up the paper, on which, by the bye, I had not written a line. "And about that infernal knouting?"

"The affair is now out of my hands."

Half an hour later the order arrived, and we left the prison together.

CHAPTER XVII.

"DO YOU LOVE VOLNA DRAKONA?"

The next day I did nothing except fit myself out with some new clothes, and speculate about my future course.

I could not decide anything until I saw the general; and before I rose he had gone out and had left word for me to wait in the house for him.

I had plenty to think about, of course, but it was more like floundering speculation than consecutive thought.

"I have settled your matter," said the general, when we were closeted together in the evening. "Here are your papers, passport, and letter of credit; and I have succeeded in making Colonel Bremenhof understand that the affair with him had better be regarded as a personal quarrel. I have pledged my word for you—that you are no more a revolutionary than I am; that in anything you may have done you were just a tool in others' hands."

"That's rather rough on the 'others,'" I protested.

"There will be an opportunity given to you the day after to-morrow to say all you know about the partner of your flight from Bratinsk."

"It will be devilish awkward," I murmured.

"Better than three hundred lashes, isn't it?" he returned dryly. "But you don't see the point. The day after to-morrow."

"One day is just as awkward as another."

"You're not as sharp as your father, Bob."

"Sons never are," I agreed, with a grin.

"He'd have known what to do with a day and a half's grace, and a passport put back in his hands."

"Oh! You mean I should bolt?"

"Are you going to make an egregious young ass of yourself again?"

"It looks like it to you, no doubt," I said a little sheepishly.

"Umph! There's a train west at midnight."

"Do you think my father would have bolted?" I asked.

He pursed his lips and frowned. "Is she so much to you?"

"She is the one woman in the world to me."

He appeared to expect the answer, and yet to regret it. "Then, of course you'll stay. You see what it means?"

"I don't care what it means."

"I've got you out of this mess, but if you give Bremenhof another chance against you, you'll have to shift for yourself. I shall be powerless to help you. I can't tell you official secrets, but I may warn you that we are face to face with events the results of which

no man can foresee. It may spell revolution and bloodshed; and to be even a suspect, then, will be full of hazard and peril."

"The more reason for me to stop."

"Bremenhof has already great power, and if a crisis comes, he will have a free hand. He hates you—not only for what you have done to him, but for another reason. Volna Drakona is betrothed to him."

"To that brutal bully? I can't believe it."

"I know what I say. If he gets half a chance at you, you'll feel his hand. Take my advice and go." He was very earnest.

"Not for fifty infernal Bremenhofs," I cried passionately.

He flung the end of his cigar away and rose. "That's your last word? It may prove a serious mistake for the girl's sake."

"My last word—absolutely."

A half-quizzical smile relieved the earnestness of his look for a moment. "I believe you'll make an awful mess of things, Bob; but it's glorious to be young. If I can help you, I will; but——" a shrug of the shoulders and a toss of the hands finished the sentence, as he turned away to his desk.

I bade him good night a few minutes later, and thanked him again for his help.

"Sleep over it all; perhaps it will look different in the morning, and you may be able to see how your staying can help the girl. I can't."

Sleep over it I did not, at least for some hours; but worry over it I did certainly, tossing and turning restlessly until near the dawn; striving to understand this new complication of Volna's betrothal to Bremenhof.

If he knew or suspected that I had helped her at Bratinsk, I could understand his treatment of me. A beast by nature and a bully by official opportunity, if his jealousy had been roused it was quite likely to render him the brute he had shown himself to me.

It would explain his having brought her to my cell. He had probably wished to confirm or dissipate his suspicion that Volna had been my companion in the flight. Yet he could have done that in a moment by confronting her with either of the police agents. Why had he not done that?

Puzzling over this question, I stumbled on what might possibly be the key. He might wish, for private reasons, to convince himself, and yet be unwilling to do this officially. If the police agents recognized her, he might be unable to shield her from the consequences of her act.

This gave me another idea. If he was afraid to have Volna publicly and officially identified, I saw how to bluff him. I could demand to have my examination a strictly official one, and so outplay him.

His object was now to frighten me away from Warsaw by threatening to have me examined as to my part; but if I could convince him that I meant that examination to end in the public identification of Volna, he would be as loath to hold it as I was to face it.

But I must first satisfy myself of the facts behind this betrothal. I recalled her reference to an entanglement; but I laughed at the notion that she cared for him. Yet how could I get at the truth?

This question was still unsettled when I rose the next morning; and then fortune did me a good turn and put the answer in my reach.

The general looked a little troubled when he met me. "I have had a telephone message about you, Bob, from Count Ladislas Tuleski."

I beamed. He was the very man to tell me all I wished to know. "He's one of my best friends, general. He saved my life a couple of years ago in the Alps at the risk of his own. It's a stroke of luck if he's in the city."

"There are two kinds of luck—so that may be true. He had heard you were here and wants to see you."

"Not half so badly as I want to see him."

"You know he is one of the Fraternity leaders?"

"He's the gentlest soul in the world, and wouldn't hurt a fly."

"If you go to his house under the circumstances, it will be looked upon as suspicious; to-day of all days in the year. I warn you."

"Why to-day?"

"I forgot you had been in prison for nearly a week and don't know the news. Every eye in Russia to-day is waiting on events in Petersburg. The strikers are going to the Winter Palace to petition the czar, and if bloodshed follows, as seems inevitable, it may spread over the whole empire."

"What has that to do with my seeing my friend?"

"You are playing with words, boy," he answered sternly. "He is the leader of this movement; you are half suspect now; and if the trouble we fear comes, you will give Bremenhof the chance he seeks against you."

"I am not afraid of Colonel Bremenhof. I have some questions to ask Ladislas that cannot wait."

"I can only warn you, of course, but if you were my son, I declare I'd put you under lock and key to stop this madness," he burst out almost fiercely.

His vehemence seemed to me quite unwarranted and all out of perspective. "I shall come to no harm, sir."

"You don't see what you are doing, boy. It is madness—nothing short of it. Remember my warning when the trouble comes—as it certainly will." And he turned away.

"I am sorry to anger you, sir; but I fear I haven't made you understand all that this means to me. I value your friendship, and, believe me, I would take your advice now if I could. But all I care about in the world is concerned in this, and I must find out the truth."

He turned, paused, appeared to hesitate, and then shook his head. "No, I will be no party to foolishness of this kind. I must not. You are taking a risk you don't or won't understand." And he left me.

I knew that real solicitude for me was at the bottom of my old friend's anger, and I was genuinely sorry for the misunderstanding which had arisen; but I could not listen to his counsel. Find out the truth about Volna's betrothal I must and would; and short of going to Volna herself for it—an obviously impossible course—to see Ladislas was the only thing to do.

As I hastened to his house I perceived one thing, however. I could no longer remain under the general's roof. That might compromise him: and I resolved to write him from Ladislas' house that I should not return.

I found my friend in a condition of excitement unusual even with him. He was always impulsive and a slave to the mood of the moment, and I had long ceased to be surprised by his neurotic impetuosity and feverish unrest.

It was this very impetuosity, indeed, which had led him to offer his life for mine when he had dashed to my rescue in the mountaineering incident which had bound us together in bonds of close and affectionate friendship.

"I had no idea you were in Warsaw, Ladislas," I said, as I gripped his hand. "I can't tell you how glad I am to see you."

He held my hand and wheeled me round to the light as he stared into my eyes. "Let me look at you. Do you come as a friend?"

I should have smiled but for his careworn, harassed, eager expression as he put the strange question. "I hope I shall never come to you as anything but a friend."

His black eyes shone for the second he continued to stare at me. Then he dropped my hand and exclaimed: "I hope so; I hope so. But there are things which turn even friends into enemies."

He sighed as he thrust his fingers through his hair—he had the head of a poet or musician and wore his fair hair quite long—and began to pace up and down the room. It was difficult for him to keep still at any time; and in moments of unusual excitement he was as volatile as quicksilver.

"It will have to be something serious to turn us into enemies, Ladislas," I replied. "But tell me what it is you think might do it. I sha'n't shirk a test, I promise you."

"Ah! you know there is something, then, Robert?" he cried, wheeling round abruptly and with quite a suggestion of fierceness. He was the only intimate I had who refused to call me Bob. He considered it undignified, he had once said.

"I only know that you sent for me, my dear fellow, and I can see for myself that you are upset. Tell me."

He started on his walk again, and in the pause I lighted a cigar. Five or six times he crossed and recrossed the room, his hands in his hair, in his pockets, and tugging at the lapels of his coat in turn. Then he came and stood over me and fixed his great eyes on mine.

"Do you love Volna Drakona? Answer me; on your solemn word of honor, for the love of God!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

FOR FRIENDSHIP'S SAKE.

My friend's question came like a clap of thunder in the clear blue of a summer sky, so absolutely startling was its surprise.

In the second's pause before I replied, many of the complicating possibilities involved in it flashed upon me as his burning gaze was bent upon me.

I pushed my chair back, rose, and gripped his hand. "We must talk this over, Ladislas, as friends."

"Answer me," he cried, trying to release his hand. "I must know, before we talk of friendship."

"I will answer you. I give you my honor you shall have nothing but the truth from me; but I must first know all that lies behind the question and all that depends upon it. Come, man, speak out. Don't try to drag your hand away. We are men as well as dear friends; and whatever has to be said or done, must not and shall not break our friendship." I placed my other hand on his shoulder. "Can't you agree to this?"

"Not if you have come between me and her."

"You are unbalanced in your excitement, or you would never say that to me. Understand what I say? Nothing—mark, nothing shall ever make me other than your friend."

I felt him trembling under my hand; and again he tried to free himself.

"No, Ladislas; I do not let you go until you agree in that. You saved my life once. Do you think I forget? I told you then that if the day ever came for me to pay the debt, I should be glad. Now, what is this girl to you?"

"More than my life—much more. More than even my honor, I believe, God help me!"

I steadied myself and spoke firmly. "What is it you ask of me?"

His large expressive eyes lighted with eagerness. "Can you do this for me? Can you give her to me?"

I clenched my hands until the nails dug into the palms, with the intensity of my effort for composure. It was the crisis of my life.

"Ah! you cannot? You will not? And you pledged your oath. I saved your life; and you are false to your word." He said this rapidly, vehemently, fiercely. Then, with a sudden change, he flung himself into a chair and covered his face with his hands, crying: "Heaven help me, what a coward I am!"

I resumed my seat, and as I faced the sacrifice that was now demanded of me, the old scene flashed vividly into my thoughts.

On a treacherous slope of crumbling rubble not thirty feet from the edge of an Alpine abyss, dropping a thousand feet sheer to the rocks below, a young fellow lay on his back, sweat-strained and staring, heels and hands dug desperately into the yielding surface as he measured the inches and reckoned the moments between him and the death yawning just below him.

Slip, slip, slip, an inch or two at a time, he slid. Clutch as he would with his bleeding fingers, and strain as he did, he could not prevent himself from being carried down, down, down, with slow but heart-sickening certainty.

Death seemed inevitable; and as it is better to die quickly than to linger with

nerve-racking hopelessness, he had made up his mind to let himself go and get it over, when a cheery call came from above, and the light of hope was kindled once again in his beating heart.

At the hazard of his life another man launched himself on that death slide, and, with a courage equaled only by his mountaineering skill, carried a rope to his friend and saved his life just as his feet reached the very brink of the abyss.

I was the clumsy fool who had stupidly jeopardized my life, and Ladislas the friend who offered his to save me.

And now Volna was to be the price! He had called for it; had thrown in my teeth the pledge I had given; and had chided me for my unreadiness to redeem it. This the friend whom I had always deemed the type of honor and chivalry! Bargaining for the body of the woman he loved!

In the first bitter moment my soul rose in passionate rebellion against the sacrifice. Nothing in all my life had ever moved me so deeply. To make myself a party to the bargain was to do dishonor to Volna herself. What right had we to take this thing into our hands and settle her life for her? It was for her, not for us, to make a decision so vital to her happiness.

Such a price as this had never been in contemplation. He knew this as well as I. And at that point my memory played me a curious trick. My thoughts flashed back to the moment of cold despair when death lay gaping just below me on that mountain slide; to the dazzling change to hope at the sound of Ladislas' cheery call of encouragement.

I saw him again working his way toward me, death the certain penalty of a single unskilful step; and once again the warm glow of gratitude for the dauntless courage and devotion which had prompted my pledge then, came back in all its force now.

It ended the struggle. I would pay the price, let the cost be what it might.

I sighed heavily and turned, to find him leaning forward, watching me intently, and waiting, as though he divined the struggle that was rending me.

I smiled. "I won't pretend that it hasn't cost me a struggle, Ladislas; but it's over: and we can still be friends."

"How strong you are!" he exclaimed.

"You wouldn't think there was much strength in me if you knew the bitter things I was thinking just now of you."

"You love her, then?"

"I can't help that—but I can trust myself for the rest. Would to Heaven I had known before this had happened at Bratinsk! So little did I suspect, I came to-day to ask you the meaning of her betrothal to Colonal Bremenhof."

"It is an awful mess," he said, and began pacing the room again. "Count Peter arranged that. It was a blind to keep the Drakonas from being suspected. Volna consented for her mother's sake; but she was candid, telling the man she did not care for him. She is as true as a crystal. Her sister and brother—do you know them? No?—they fed him with lies and blinded him; all at the count's instigation."

"Well?"

"Bremenhof is a devil for cunning. He was not deceived; and he saw at once that his hold over Volna was her fear for her mother. So he wormed and moled and got a case against the mother; and now he swears that if the marriage does not take place at once—to-day or at latest to-morrow—he will have the mother arrested, and Volna, too."

"You know of my affair with him?"

"Volna told me you struck him. He took her there to satisfy himself privately that she had been at Bratinsk; and have that to hold over her."

"Why have you let her stay in Warsaw?"

"Count Peter was bringing her to Cracow to be married to me."

"Married to you! I don't understand. Were you secretly betrothed?"

"No, no. She had no thought of it, until Count Peter told her at Bratinsk. But she knows how I love her; and we should have won her to consent."

I remembererd her statement to me at Bratinsk: that she had meant to escape and return to Warsaw. But I kept this to myself.

"And now?"

"She is changed. It is you who have changed her. She can scarcely be kept from breaking with Bremenhof. I don't know what to do."

"It's plain enough. Take her and her mother away from Warsaw."

"How can I go, man? In Heaven's name, how can I go? We are on the eve of the most glorious crisis in our country's history; and we leaders dare not leave our posts."

"Send them away, then, in some one else's care."

"Why? This city is the safest place in all the empire for them. To-day the great demonstration at Petersburg will show the czar and those about him and all the world that the people's just demands can no longer be resisted. The power of these tyrants will be shattered against the greater might of the people's will. You know my dreams of old. They are coming true! We are on the eve of the greatest revolution the world has ever seen: greatest in purpose, widest in area, most beneficial in results—and what is greatest of all—to be achieved without the shedding of a drop of blood."

"A bloodless revolution will be a new thing in history, Ladislas, especially under Russian methods."

"You do not understand, and so you doubt. But we know. The army is with us almost to a man. They are of the people, blood of blood and bone of bone in close-knit kinship; and when the hour strikes, the people will rise in every city, town, and hamlet—rise as one man. And at that rising the musket of every soldier will be grounded and not a sword will leave its scabbard. Peace is our watchword; peace our method; peace and brotherhood our end."

"It is not only Polish independence, then?"

"Poland will be free. Poland will lift her head again, a nation among the nations; but all Russia will be free in the gigantic upheaval."

His eyes gleamed with excitement as he strode up and down, flinging his arms about. He was very much the dreamer; and he gave the reins to his dream with voluble energy.

"Have you any practical men among you?" I asked, when at length he paused.

"We are all practical. My dear friend, you do not know us."

"True; but suppose you are wrong, and that in some places the troops stand by the government, what will you do?"

"Should we legislate for the impossible?" And he went on with a hundred and fifty unconvincing and inconsequent reasons why nothing of the kind could occur. "We are offering liberty—liberty, the grandest gift on God's green earth—not only to the people, but to the soldiers themselves. They are not fools, or blind, or idiots to refuse it."

"But your troops here are not Poles, but Russians hating the Poles; and the disposition of the regiments all over the empire is on the same principle. Do you tell me that national and tribal hatreds are going to be smothered just because a few good fellows like you hold up your hands and cry 'Liberty'? To put it in a nutshell, if you believe this, why are you afraid of what Bremenhof can do in regard to Volna?"

To my surprise and concern, he collapsed entirely. He threw himself into a chair and pressed his hand to his face.

"Don't, don't," he cried. "You give life and form to the one deadly fear that chills me when I can't suppress it; that haunts me at night like a specter. I dare not think of it, my friend; I dare not."

I said no more. He was curious material for revolutionary work; but if there were many like him, the Fraternity was a much less formidable body than I had deemed, despite the evidence I had had of its wide-spread organization.

Presently he roused himself, stood up, and apparently with only the slightest effort shook off his depression.

"I didn't mean to inflict this on you," he said, with a smile, charming but almost pathetically weary.

My patience was nearly exhausted,

however. "What are you going to do to save her?" I asked bluntly.

He shook back his long hair and smiled. "To-morrow there will be no more thought or talk of danger."

Just then he was called out, and when he returned a few minutes later his face was gray and drawn and haggard with anxiety.

"You must take her away from Warsaw," he said.

"I? Ladislas! What do you mean?"

He held up a paper in his trembling hand. "News from Petersburg. The soldiers are drawn up in thousands all over the city there. Guns are posted in all directions. If there is bloodshed there, hell will break loose here. You alone can save her."

"But, Ladislas, you forget. For me to do anything now——"

He caught both my hands in his agitation. "You'll do this, Robert? For our old friendship's sake? For her sake? If she stays here, God alone knows what may happen. You must do it. You must. You must." He was almost hysterical.

"But after what I have told you about her and what you have implied to me, my position——"

"What is all that compared to her safety? Do you think I would not trust you? Come to the house with me at once—this instant. Would you leave her in Bremenhof's power?"

"No, no, I cannot go with you. You ask too much. For her sake, no less than mine, you must find some other means," I protested.

"There is no other way," he cried impetuously and vehemently. "She shall know the truth. I will tell her that you renounce—that—you know what I mean. For God's sake, don't hesitate, or it may be too late! At any cost she must be saved; and her family can do nothing. She shall know that you are acting for me. I will explain everything. It is no time for mere scruples or personal feeling. If I trust you, surely you can trust yourself."

I was dead set against the plan; every impulse and instinct protesting, except the desire to help Volna. But that she would be in grievous danger, should there be a rising in the city, was a fact nothing could explain away; and that Ladislas was about the last man in the world to be able to save her in such a crisis appeared no less certain.

If anything was to be done, some one capable of taking a practical view of things must do it; and her friends appeared to be a set of most unpractical theorists.

But if I was to do anything, it must be made absolutely plain to Volna that I was acting for Ladislas—to save her for him. Surely a most awkward situation to explain. But he continued to urge me, and declared he would leave no doubt in her mind; and at length I yielded, and we started for the Drakonas' house.

CHAPTER XIX.

TURNING THE SCREW.

Embarrassing as my position must have been in any case, it was made much worse by the manner of my reception at the Drakonas.

Volna's half-sister, Katinka, received us; and the moment my name was mentioned she left me no room to doubt that so far as she was concerned, I was a most unwelcome visitor.

In appearance she was a complete contrast to Volna. A slight, wiry, straight-backed, acid-faced little woman of about thirty, with a pair of lustrous dark eyes so disproportionately large that the rest of the features, except her thin straight lips, seemed to pass unnoticed. She gave me a very frigid bow.

"We have, of course, heard of you from Volna, Mr. Anstruther," she said, her tone implying that what she had heard was by no means to my credit; and before I could reply, she turned to Ladislas. "Has anything happened that you are here?"

It was plain to see that he was not at ease with her. "Where is Volna?" he asked.

"She is out. You have not brought Mr. Anstruther to see her?" That he

would be mad to think of such a thing was her meaning.

"I have decided that she cannot safely remain in the city."

"Indeed! Why? Or, perhaps, I should ask this gentleman. You had no such thought when I saw you last."

"I have had grave news from Petersburg this morning, Katinka."

"Oh, are you going to run away?"

"Of course not."

"Then how can Volna go?" She was a past master in the art of insinuation.

"I have induced my friend here to consent to take her."

Her large eyes opened as if in profound astonishment as she looked first at him and then at me, and coughed most suggestively.

"*You* have done this?" Had she put the thought in blunt words she could not have expressed more plainly her conviction that I had concocted the plan for my own ends and that Ladislas must be blind and mad to consent to it.

"Yes, I have. Mr. Anstruther understands precisely the relationship that exists between Volna and me."

"You mean which should, but does not, exist, between you," she corrected significantly.

"Anstruther is my loyal friend, Katinka."

"Have I expressed any doubt on that point?"

"Miss Drakona is prejudiced against the English, Robert," said Ladislas, turning to me. He flushed with vexation, and appeared anxious to apologize for my reception.

"That is surely my country's misfortune," said I.

"That is insincere; but, being English, you, of course, cannot help it," was the reply, very unpleasantly spoken.

Ladislas very foolishly took this up. "Anstruther is my friend, Katinka," he said warmly.

"I don't see that that affects the sincerity or insincerity of what he says. Mr. Anstruther may as well know that he has caused a great deal of trouble in our family, and that so far as my brother and myself are concerned, we do not thank him for it."

"My remark just now was merely intended as one of common politeness, madam," I said. "I am not glad when I find any one prejudiced against my countrymen. And I am quite sincere in expressing regret if I have caused trouble to any of your family."

Her large eyes were fixed coldly upon me while I spoke, and at the end she paused and said: "Indeed!" with a most disconcerting effect.

An awkward pause followed, broken by the entrance of the brother, to whom she introduced me in these terms:

"This is Mr. Anstruther, Paul, who has come with Ladislas to induce Volna to run away from Warsaw at a moment when the flight of any one from this house would be a disgrace to the cause of the Fraternity."

As might be expected, the introduction did not please him. "I am not aware that we need the interference of any outsiders, sir."

"That is the word—interference," agreed the sister.

"It is nothing of the sort, Katinka," declared Ladislas bruskly. "I have brought my friend here to help in getting your mother and Volna into some place of safety until the troubles here are over. He knows all about the Bremenhof entanglement and all about—er—Volna and myself. He acts entirely at my suggestion and on my behalf as my friend in this matter. You know that if any violence breaks out, the city will be no safe place for Volna or her mother—or any woman."

"I am not going to run away," said Katinka, with placid malice. "But, of course, Volna will jump at such a chance. Until this last deplorable affair, she was accustomed to listen to *our* advice."

"I see no necessity for it, Ladislas," was Paul's verdict.

"We are of *no* account, Paul. It is not what *we* think, of course."

"Where is your mother?" asked Ladislas.

The question was answered by the entrance of one of the sweetest old ladies I have ever seen—just Volna, thirty-five or forty years older; but

Volna without the spirit and capacity and plucky resource I had seen her show.

"You are Mr. Anstruther, I am sure," she said, as she gave me her hand, with a sweet, gracious smile. "I know you by my Volna's description; and thank you from my heart for all you did."

The brother and sister exchanged looks and shrugs.

"I did no more, madame, than any one would have done in a similar case."

"You saved my dearest child, sir; and a mother's heart knows how to be grateful."

"He wishes to do more now, Madame Drakona—to take you and Volna away from the city until these troubles have blown over," said Ladislas.

An expression of perplexity clouded her face, and she glanced doubtfully and nervously toward the other two. "I don't think I understand," she said weakly. "I should like to go, but——" she stopped, and it struck me she was looking for Katinka's sanction.

"These things are to be settled without regard to what we Drakonas think," said Katinka. "Of course I regard it as indecorous, impracticable, unnecessary, and cowardly. But my opinion is not even asked," and she folded her hands and tapped her foot and assumed the air of an injured martyr.

"It is not my suggestion, madame, but that of my friend Ladislas, here," I said to the old lady.

"I am sure I don't know what to do. I wish Volna were here. Could we go?" she said; and then a long and at times bitter discussion followed, in which I took no part.

The dear old soul was swayed first one way by Ladislas and then another by Katinka. Paul's part was chiefly that of echo to his sister, who, I noticed, first settled things for herself and then put the responsibility upon him, and held up his opinion as final and decisive.

How long the discussion would have lasted, and how many bitter insinuations Katinka would have thrown out about me, it is impossible to say; but the end came in a fashion that was both dramatic and startling.

Paul was called away to the telephone, and when he returned to the room he was ashen pale and intensely agitated.

"There has been a massacre at Petersburg. The troops have fired on the people, and thousands have been killed."

A dead silence fell on us all, broken only by a groan of anguish from Ladislas. We looked at one another in silent horror as the realization of what it might mean to all in Warsaw began to force itself upon us.

Even Katinka was awe-stricken and aghast.

We were still under the spell of this strained silence when a maid servant, scared and white of face, rushed in.

"The police are here, madame, and ask for you," she cried.

An officer followed the girl, and out in the hallway I saw a file of men drawn up.

"Madame Drakona?" he asked.

"I am Madame Drakona. What do you want with me?" asked the old lady, rising.

I noticed that Paul, instead of stepping forward to the mother's side, remained by his sister.

"I have to ask you to accompany me to the offices of the department, madame," said the officer.

"To ask *me?* I don't understand," she replied feebly. "Katinka, Paul, what can this mean? When do you wish me to go, sir?"

"My instructions are that you accompany me immediately."

"But there must be a mistake. I am sure there must be. I cannot go until I have seen my daughter. She is out. Can I not wait until she returns?"

"Are you sure there is no mistake?" asked Paul, as Katinka crossed to Madame Drakona.

"My instructions are too precise to admit of that."

"By whose instructions do you act?" I asked.

"I cannot answer that," was the reply.

"Do you mean that any charge is preferred against this lady?"

"I have only to do my duty, sir."

I turned to Paul. "Could you not telephone to Colonel Bremenhof?"

Katinka took this to herself. "You hear your orders, Paul," she snapped. Even in that moment her spite predominated.

"I do not need your advice, sir," he said; and this perfectly obvious step was not taken, for no reason apparently except that I had suggested it.

"Can I wait for my daughter to return, sir?" asked Madame Drakona.

"Volna can do nothing," declared Katinka.

"I regret, madame, that I have no power to permit that."

"Can you tell us nothing about the reasons for this?" asked Paul.

"Nothing whatever. I know no more than yourself. I wish, indeed, that the unpleasant duty had been given to some one else to perform."

"I do not blame you, sir," said Madame Drakona very graciously, despite her agitation. "I will get ready."

"I must ask you not to be longer than five minutes."

He held the door open for her to leave. Katinka went with her, and at a sign from the leader, one of the men followed them up the stairs and remained at the door of the room into which they went. The leader stayed with the rest in the hall.

"What can this mean?" asked Ladislas, aghast.

"A good thing that no one else is on the list," said Paul.

"You must find that a great consolation!" I could not help saying. Paul turned on me angrily, and Ladislas held up his hand.

"It will do no good to quarrel," he said. "What is to be done? Do let us try to be practical."

"The man who can tell you what it means is Bremenhof."

"Of course you'll go with your mother, Paul?" said Ladislas.

"I see no object to be gained."

"Better ask Miss Drakona," I suggested dryly.

"Your tone is very singular, sir," declared Paul angrily.

"Far less singular than your unreasoning hostility to me, in which you appear to echo your sister's prejudice."

"Robert!" protested Ladislas.

"You are not here by our wish," cried Paul.

Madame Drakona came in then, and I saw that Katinka had made no preparations to go with the mother.

"Ladislas, you and Mr. Anstruther will stay to see Volna, won't you?" asked the old lady, who was much less distressed than I had anticipated. "She will be so troubled; and she thinks so much of your advice, Mr. Anstruther. You will stay?"

"Certainly, at your wish," I agreed.

"I don't see that this gentleman can do any good," murmured the sister.

"We will *both* stay, if possible—but one of us certainly," said Ladislas.

"Tell her you don't think this is a serious thing; it can't be really; and I dare say I shall be back again almost before she is home."

"I will tell her," replied my friend.

She kissed Paul and Katinka—both of whom were as unmoved as though she had been going for an afternoon drive—and then shook hands with us. "Volna will rely on you, I know, Mr. Anstruther. Now, sir, I am ready. Be sure and make Volna understand I am not in the least frightened, Ladislas."

That was her last word, spoken with a brave smile, as she drove away.

As soon as we reentered the house, Katinka opened fire at me. "I think we can do what has to be done alone, Paul."

"Madame Drakona asked us to remain, Katinka," said Ladislas.

"I wish you could believe, madam, that I have no desire except for the good of you all," I put in.

She fixed her eyes upon me, and replied slowly: "I wish I could, sir, but you have influenced my sister so much against us that I find it impossible."

"How can you think of such pettiness, Katinka, in face of that awful news from Petersburg?" cried Ladislas.

"Are you going, sir?" asked Paul.

"No, I am not. I promised Madame Drakona to remain until her daughter returned, and I shall do so."

"Of course," agreed Ladislas.

His excitement mounted fast, and his fears of coming trouble in the city, caused by the ill news from St. Petersburg and brought close home by the arrest of Madame Drakona, oppressed him till the burden became almost unbearable.

An hour and more passed in this way. Now and again he would break into fitful heated discussion with Paul and his sister.

Two or three times the telephone-bell summoned Paul; and each time he returned the three would hold whispered counsel together—to end in the same way: by Ladislas resuming his anxious pacing of the room from end to end.

At last some message more disturbing than the rest came.

"Paul and I must go. I dare not stay," he declared. "You will do what must be done here, Robert. They are waiting for us, and God knows what may happen if we do not go." And, paying no heed to my protests, scarcely hearing them, indeed, he and Paul hurried away.

Katinka and I sat on in grim silence. I had caught some of the infection of Ladislas' alarm at coming trouble; and my one concern now was for Volna's safety. Even the embarrassment at the thought of meeting her again was dominated by my fear for her; and I waited, a prey to very gloomy doubt.

She came in, not knowing that I was there. She saw only Katinka as she entered, with the question: "Where is mother?"

Then she saw me, and started back in sheer astonishment. Her eyes lighted; she paled slightly. Then the color rushed to her face, and with both hands outstretched she came to me as she had done a week before at the priest's house in Kervatje. "Is it really you?"

I took her hands. "It is really I."

Then Katinka got up and coughed. "Of course I am not surprised; but it is none the less scandalous, sir, considering Volna's mother has just been taken to prison."

The piteous look of pain and alarm on Volna's face as her hands fell from mine made me wish for the moment Katinka had been a man—I could then have told her plainly some of the things I thought about her.

TO BE CONTINUED.

THE SEASON OF GOOD-WILL

THE wretched-looking man shivered in the grasp of the stout and angry restaurant-keeper, who was loudly calling for the police, when a kind-looking old gentleman pushed his way to the front of the crowd.

"What has the poor fellow done?" he asked mildly.

"Done! Why, he's done me," was the angry retort. "He's had a good dinner, and ain't got the money to pay for it."

"And you mean to say that you are going to give a starving man into custody for a thing like that at this holiday season?" said the old gentleman.

"All very well for you to talk," said the restaurateur. "The money doesn't come out of your pocket. Go on—get away! Police!"

"But it shall come out of my pocket," said the old man quietly. "Here is a five-dollar bill; take the cost of the poor man's dinner out of it, and learn a little lesson in Christmas charity."

The crowd cheered lustily, the wretched man burst into tears, and the restaurant-keeper was a very sheepish-looking individual indeed when he handed over the change. And later on, when he discovered a counterfeit five-dollar bill in his cash-register, it never occurred to him to connect the two circumstances. But Sly Sam—the benevolent one—and "Twister Jones"—the wretched one—regard this as one of their most artistic schemes.

Object, Matrimony

Being a Further Chapter in the Annals of "The Hall of Mirth," as Related by Bud Preston, Cowboy

By B. M. Bower

Author of "The Hall of Mirth," "The Curious Mr. Canfield," Etc.

WOMEN are all right—if yuh keep far enough away from them. It's when yuh take down your rope and commence to widen your loop for one that trouble generally begins; or else when yuh get one, she runs on the rope and keeps yuh guessing other ways.

The time I was working for old Shooting-star Wilson, I sure got an object-lesson that I won't forget in a week or two. We was living happy and content, and meaning harm to nobody that winter. It was the winter after Shooting-star had got his wad—ten thousand dollars—from the old country, and had blowed it all in on a house to give a Washington's Birthday ball in. He sure done himself proud; and spent every blame cent on the house and dance. So the next day he told Ellis and me to roll our beds and move into the mansion—which same domicile we called the Hall of Mirth, for various reasons that would uh stood in court, all right.

It sure was a woozy proposition, for a real house. We got kinda accustomed to the red, white, and blue diamonds painted on the floors, and to the stars and stripes on the ceilings, and the red and green and blue chairs; but they sure got on our nerves at first.

Folks used to come miles to see that house, which I will say was worth the trip, all right. But, seeing it was built for a dance, it never did get so it fit us, like some shacks do. We'd pull the biggest plush chairs in the house up to the big fireplace in the back parlor, and shut all the sliding-doors, and roll us a cigarette apiece, and stick out our legs as far as nature'd allow, toward the fire. And even then we felt like we'd been shut into a razzle-dazzle hall somewheres, and the crowd had all gone off and left us; they were unmerciful big rooms.

Ellis and me used to make a sneak down to the old bunk-house once in awhile, and make a fire in the old stove, and snatch a little comfort. But it always hurt Shooting-star's feelings; and besides, he was such an economical old cuss—in some ways. He said it ground him to have all that good money into a house, and then not get any good out of it. So we had to stick to the Hall of Mirth, whether we wanted to or not. But honest, them rooms was so big they echoed like thunder; and the walls and floors and ceilings was that gaudy we came near having to put on brown goggles. Even the books was all red and blue and green bindings. Shooting-star sure liked to have things match.

That winter all the kids in the country got to mixing things with measles and whooping-cough, and the like, so there wasn't any dances or anything. Everybody stayed at home so they wouldn't catch nothing, and then wondered where the dickens they'd caught it at. So times was dull, and there wasn't nothing doing in the shape of amusement. One of us would ride into Bent Willow, once in a week or so, and glom all the papers and magazines we

could. We'd just about finished the red and blue and green books—what hadn't just about finished us, that is.

So one day I rode in and brought out a bundle uh magazines—the kind that's thirty cents a year, or only twenty if yuh get up a club uh four. Yuh know the brand all right, I guess. They have stories told in shifts, and every shift saws off short just when you're plumb wild with desire to know how he rescued the beautiful Lady Floribel from the up-stairs of the burning manor-house, with the staircase just commencing to crackle up good; or some such a lay as that. And there's pages in it that tells yuh how to be beautiful, and others that hands out wisdom on the momentous question of what it's polite for a girl to say to the gazabo she's been dancing with, after he's tromped on her toes and took a chunk out of her dress; should she say, "Don't mention it," or shall she bawl him out before the crowd the way she'd like to?

Ellis and I was playing pitch that night, and old Shooting-star had the bunch uh magazines, going through them methodical and serious. Shooting-star swallows everything he sees in print, like them writer sharps didn't know enough to lie. And once in awhile he'd read a piece out to us. He went through the cooking page, licking his chops over the salads and truck, and wishing we wasn't such a bone-headed bunch, so we could frame up some uh the things.

"A woman could sure do it," he says, kinda thoughtful. "But it's no use either uh you tackling this here coffee frappy; but I'll gamble it's out uh sight. There's times," he says, "when a woman is about the best investment a man can make."

"If he don't go and invest in 'em too heavy," puts in Ellis.

Shooting-star didn't say no more then. But pretty soon he read out a little short piece that they stuck in between the advertisements. It said:

A loveless life is a life barren of all joy, all contentment, all hope. Marriage broadens the life as nothing else can do; it rounds out character, makes for generosity and true sympathy. The man who is blessed with a true, loving helpmate need never fear the barren years of a lonely old age.

Or if them ain't just the words, they're mighty near it.

Shooting-star looks at us over his glasses. "Boys," he says, "blamed if I don't believe that's about so! An old bach like me sure does live a kinda barren existence; and there ain't enough joy in the life I'm leading to talk about. I believe the men that's broke to work double has got all the best uh the deal. Anyway," he says, pointed, "they can git something to eat besides sour-dough bread and fried bacon and stewed apricots. They git cake once in awhile; cake that's fit to eat."

Ellis kinda brustled up at that. He'd been doing the cooking that week, and he'd tackled a cake—a fruit-cake, with prunes in it for the fruit—and he'd been short uh lard, and had used bacon grease for short'ning, which give it a taste that didn't harmonize none too well with the prunes. It was sure hot stuff; we fed some of it to an old pinto of Shooting-star's that was a biscuit fiend; and the pinto turned his lip up till he couldn't hardly see over it, and went around all day looking at us reproachful; it was giving him the double-cross, all right, to hand out such a mess for him to swallow. So Ellis took Shooting-star's remark personal.

"Why don't yuh get married, then?" he says. "Why don't yuh cast your loop over that widow in Bent Willow? The chances is she savvies building a cake out uh nothing but bad flour and hope."

That was a come-back at Shooting-star, who wasn't a bit too liberal in buying stuff to cook with.

"I wouldn't take her as a gift," says Shooting-star. And he goes back to his magazine.

We played for awhile, and kinda forgot the subject, when the Old Man breaks out in a new spot.

"Boys," he says, "listen to this once:

"A bright, loving, sensible young lady, with some means, would like to correspond with affectionate, honorable gentleman; one with some country property preferred. Must

be sober, honest, and willing to make a good and loving husband. No trifler need answer this, or widower. Object, matrimony.
"L. A."

He looked at us expectant, and waited for somebody to say something.

"Three," said Ellis, looking at me.

"Pitch it," said I; and he played the deuce uh spades.

Shooting-star grunted. "Anyway, I ain't no trifler, and I ain't a widower," he said, like we'd been arguing the point with him, and had raised doubts of his being able to qualify.

"Which it's a cinch you'll wish yuh was," remarked Ellis, without looking up.

"And I'm there with the goods when it comes to country property," said Shooting-star, looking at us both kinda anxious. I seen him out uh the tail uh my eye.

"And you're shore affectionate and honorable," put in Ellis, sarcastic. Ellis hadn't forgot the slur on his cake. "And you're some sober—by spells."

Shooting-star rose up and looked fighty. "There's times, young feller, when punching would do yuh good," he snarls, malignant.

"Yes, sir, punching would do yuh good; and if yuh don't calm down and have some manners about yuh, it's apt to happen. If you can lay your finger on a time when I was too full to walk straight, I'd sure admire to have yuh. She says *sober*, which means walking straight and being able to find the door. She don't say I've got to be a darned pro'bitionist, does she? Hey? And I guess I could be some affectionate—if I had any call to be. And I ain't no trifler. If I answered her ad I'd mean business. And I ain't a widower. She's bright, and lovin', and sensible—and them brands sure look good to me. I'd sure love to have somebody in the house with sense!"

"Well," grins Ellis, "go after it, old-timer. But while Bud and me mayn't have much sense, yuh want to bear in mind that we're sure bright and loving."

"Loving!" snorts Shooting-star, and went to spelling out the ad again in a whisper.

Next morning Shooting-star saddled up and rode off to Bent Willow mysterious. He wasn't gone long, and he didn't bring nothing back—not even a jag; so Ellis and me frames it up between us that he's up and wrote to that bright, loving, sensible young lady that's hankering for a loving husband. Still, we don't know nothing for sure, because Shooting-star gets plumb silent on the subject, and all the hints we throw out don't bring results of any kind.

Ellis and me kinda worried over it, only we wouldn't let on. But one thing looked bad, and that was, Shooting-star would set by the hour humped up in front uh the fireplace, reading over that advertisement, and kinda dreaming and letting his pipe go cold. And then he'd come alive and cast his eyes around that big razzle-dazzle room, and at the ten-by-twelve foot picture uh George Washington—only it looked like a Cree squaw with her hair braided down her back—on the wall, and he'd rub his knees and nod his head, like somebody had just passed out a bunch uh hot air about his good taste in fixing up a house. It all looked plumb dubious to Ellis and me.

Next deal Ellis brought out a letter for Shooting-star, and showed me where it was postmarked "Plumville, Illinois," and was in a woman's handwriting. "It's from her, all right," he says. "L. A.—Lonesome Ann. Shall I ditch it, for the good of old Shooting-star's soul, Bud?—or shall I hand it over and let 'er slide?"

Honest, I come blame near telling him to ditch it, and say nothing. But when yuh come to think uh the way they come down on yuh with both feet if yuh go monkeying with the mails, even the good of the Old Man wouldn't hardly be worth playing the game out. So I told Ellis he better give up the letter, and not butt into no romance—if romance it was to be. Ellis took the letter in and handed it over to Shooting-star, and Shooting-star kinda breathed long and easy, and turned it

over and over in his hands, like it assayed pure gold.

I nudged Ellis, and we went out into the kitchen and shut the door.

"So help me, Ellis!" I says, "if she does him up, or plays crooked, or ain't straight goods, you watch me be righteous vengeance. He's going to take the whole blame business serious."

Ellis didn't hardly agree. He said we could keep cases, and if the game didn't look all straight, why, we could buy in and coax Shooting-star out. He said we had slathers of influence, if we was a mind to use it right. So we kinda laid low and kept our eyes peeled.

That night Shooting-star commenced to knock the cooking—without cause, too. It was my week in the kitchen, and I don't back down from no man on boiling coffee or making sour-dough biscuits. Besides them, I had beefsteak you could cut with a paper knife, it was that tender; and stewed prunes with the pits all oozing out; and fresh syrup made by burning a little white sugar in the pan first for flavor, and beans. And if that ain't good enough for any white man to fill up on, I'll hand over the dish towel and resign prompt and willing.

All that evening Shooting-star set out in the kitchen and wrote. It sure seemed hard labor, because in the morning the stove was half-full uh burnt paper—where he'd backed up for a fresh start, I took it. Once in awhile he'd holler in to Ellis and me for our idea of the spelling of a word; and by keeping tab on them same words, we got an idea uh what the letter was like. I know we spelled "heartfelt" and "barren," "generous" and "constant" and "prayer." Ellis and me studied for an hour over how he figured on ringing in that last word; but Ellis has sure got a swell imagination, and when he thought about, "May the angels watch over you is my prayer," we savvied right off that we were on the right trail. Say, I'd give a lot to uh seen that letter; I bet she was sure hot stuff.

Shooting-star rode in and mailed it himself, which sure looked to us like he lacked confidence in Ellis and me. Then he dubbed around in a daze till he got the answer, which wasn't long getting here, either. They sure seemed to go after that corresponding business enthusiastic, and as if they meant business. This here letter had her picture in it, and Ellis and me like to perjured our souls and twisted our necks plumb off trying to get a look at it. But Shooting-star wouldn't let us see anything but the back; and he packed it around in his inside coat pocket between times, and we never could catch him with his coat off. It was plumb aggravating.

Along about then he got extreme fastidious over what he eat, and bellyached over the cooking till Ellis and me was fair desperate. Ellis got on the peck, one night, and commenced throwing it into Shooting-star about Lonesome Ann—which is what we called her.

"It looks like you'd hurry up the nooptials, then, before yuh starve plumb to death," he growls. "And have yuh got a affidavy that Lonesome Ann can frame up any better meals than what Bud and me can? The chances is she can't. Some uh the darndest messes I ever insulted my insides with was throwed together by the gentle hands uh woman. Yuh don't want to go into this thing with your hands tied behind yuh, Shooting-star."

Shooting-star quit shoveling sugar into his coffee. "I ain't," he retorts, kinda lofty. "She can make coffee frappy and Charlotte Rush, and floatin' island and plum pudding and mince pie. I asked her in my first letter. She can make everything in the Christmas meenu on the Housekeeper's Page uh that *Family Cricket Magazine*. I asked her. And in about three weeks you imitation chuck-slingers can git out the kitchen, and let somebody in that can *cook*."

Ellis kinda gulped, but he didn't say nothing then. Afterwards, we went down to the old bunk-house and started a fire, and talked it over without results. Anyway we looked at it we didn't see no chance to butt in. We both took the same stand—that a woman that had to advertise for a man or

go without, must sure be a hard proposition. And we didn't take no stock in her cooking, neither; that kind of a female would likely lie promiscous when she was after a husband. We shook our heads sorrowful, and wisht we'd held up that first letter. Now things had gone so far we couldn't do nothing but look on and be sorry.

In about two weeks Shooting-star told us to turn loose and clean up the Hall of Mirth. He said it was plumb scandalous the way we'd let the dirt pile up a foot thick on the floor; and he wanted George Washington gone over with a damp cloth—which was quite a contract, considering the size of him—and the cobwebs swept off'n the stars and stripes on the ceiling. He said it was a disgrace the way we'd let that beautiful place go to rack and ruin. And when he come back, he said (he was going to Butte to meet Lonesome Ann, and they was to be hooked up there), he wanted the house good and warm, and we was to have the table all set in the dining-room, and all the folding-doors wide open, so Mrs. Shooting-star could get a good view uh the beauty and richness of her new home at one glance.

"And for the Lord's sake," he winds up, "don't throw matches and cigarette-stubs on the floor; try and have some style about yuh. And," he says, "I want yuh to fix up that dance sign, and light it just before we git here. Ellis can drive in after us, and Bud, yuh sure want to remember that sign, and have it ready; and have all the lamps lit, so these rooms'll show up good. I want her to see, right off, that there ain't nothing small about Montana."

The sign, if yuh remember, was the one we had up over the front door on the night he gave the great dance he'd built the house for. It was one uh these cloth boxes, with lamps inside, and it read: "Welcome to the Hall of Mirth" in letters you could read clear down to the first bend in the trail. It was sure gaudy and impressive, and it looked like a dance-hall sign—only Shooting-star never seemed to realize it. And as to the rooms, when the lamps was lit and all the big archways opened up, you could stand in the front door and look right down about seventy-five feet of insanity; through the big front parlor, and the back parlor, and the dining-room. And the farther yuh looked the crazier it got. Shooting-star sure had an eye for bright colors.

Ellis and me didn't hardly take time to feed the stock and eat our meals; and by the time the bride and groom was due, things was sure shining. When we lit the lamps and stood by the front door, just to see how she stacked up, we got so dizzy we had to grab hold uh the casing. Mister! it would throw a crimp into a blind man.

Well, sir, she come. Ellis and me didn't hardly believe she would, but she did, all right. Ellis drove up to the front door with 'em just after it got good and dark, and the sign was casting yellow light on the snow, and all the big bay windows oozing brightness around the edges—for I'd pulled the blinds, so she couldn't see inside till she got in. Shooting-star helped her out like she was made uh glass, and led her up the steps, and said: "Welcome to the Hall uh Mirth, Mrs. Wilson." And Ellis and me hunched each other, and waited.

Shooting-star throwed the door wide open, and pulled her in. And she give one look, and then yelled like we'd stuck a pin in her. And then she fell backward, and Ellis and me caught her—and she was plumb dead to the world.

We packed her in and laid her on a sky-blue couch, and Ellis brought a bucket uh water and a dipper, while I undone her wraps. Old Shooting-star never done a blame thing but stand around in the way with his jaw hanging slack. Ellis and me sloshed water on her generous, and she come to enough to open her eyes and look around; but when she seen them walls, with that great, ungodly picture uh George Washington, she give another squawk, and come near going off again. Then she commenced to cry—and I want to tell yuh right now, that she had me going when she done that. She

wasn't no beauty, but she wasn't as big a freak as we'd looked for her to be; and she was plumb scared at that house—and nobody blaming her but Shooting-star. He come up and took the slack out uh his jaw long enough to ask what ailed her; and when she just flinched away from him, like some horses do when yuh throw a saddle on their backs unexpected, Shooting-star looked plumb mad.

"It's this darn, crazy shack yuh brought her to," snaps Ellis. "Yuh should 'a' told her, and kinda prepared her for the worst, yuh two-faced old skate."

"There ain't nothing the matter with the house," says Shooting-star. "It cost ten thousand dollars—and it suits *me.*"

But it sure didn't suit the missus. She cried for a plumb hour, and begged pitiful for us to take her away from that dreadful place. She said she'd sure go crazy if she had to stop there overnight.

Ellis and me wanted to warm up the old bunk-house, and take her down there, but old Shooting-star wouldn't stand for it. He said this was his home, and consequently *her* home, and here's where she belonged, and had got to stay, so long as she lived with *him.* Shooting-star's easy, if yuh don't get him roused up; but once he bows his neck, he can't be neither coaxed nor drove.

So then she got fighty, and said she never would live in such a crazy-looking place, and he must uh been crazy to build it. And they got to passing remarks back and forth, and pretty soon Ellis and me took a sneak. We didn't feel that we ought to be present at no such domestic crisis. We went out and set in the kitchen, with our feet in the oven, and waited for the returns; but we didn't say much. Only once I says: "Shooting-star sure needs killing, anyway, for bringing a white woman into such a house and trying to make her gentle down and stay here."

By and by she hollers for us, and we hot-footed into the parlor again. She was still on the couch, setting squeezed into a corner with her face covered up with her hands.

"If you are *gentlemen,*" she says, kinda teary and trembly, "you'll help me get back to that little town, and away from this dreadful, insane *person,* and this dreadful, insane place. And I hope the Lord will forgive me for doing such a foolish thing as to marry him."

Ellis and me looked grave, and told her the team was still hooked up, and we'd take her, if she insisted.

Shooting-star laughed savage. "Yes, and yuh can't take her a darned bit too quick to suit me," he grunts. "Anybody that can't see the beauty and comfort of this domicile, there's sure something wrong with that person's head, and they can't pull their freight too soon," he says, and walks, dignified, out into the kitchen. So Ellis and me drove her back to Bent Willow; and seeing she didn't have much money—as we found out by questioning her artful—we borrowed fifty dollars, and made her take it.

That was sure a brief honeymoon—for she never come back. Her year uh residence was up a couple uh months ago, and soon as it was, she sued him for a divorce and fifty a month alimony, and *got it.* The court come out and looked at the Hall uh Mirth, and went back and wrote out the decree immediate. So now she's back in Plumville, Illinois, living comfortable off that fifty a month.

And Shooting-star's praying for good years and top prices for beef, and cursing female women promiscous. And I notice he don't make no kick about the cooking.

The Adventures of Felix Boyd

By Scott Campbell

Author of "Below the Dead Line," Etc.

XII.—THE CRIME AND THE CLUE

(*A Complete Story*)

MR. FELIX BOYD placed a chair for his distinguished visitor.

The boy who had admitted him to Boyd's private office after presenting his exquisitely engraved card lingered briefly to gaze with more than cursory interest at the imposing stranger before vanishing into the outer room.

Even the Central Office man, while he arose to withdraw, stared a little rudely, and deftly concealed his hot brier pipe in the palm of his hand, so irresistible was the atmosphere of refinement and elegance brought in by the stranger.

He was a tall man of about forty years, with a strong, strikingly handsome face, a pointed beard, an intellectual brow, and a pair of penetrating, steel-blue eyes, the like of which one rarely encounters. His shoulders were broad and square, his waist extremely slender. His graceful figure was exquisitely clad; and his high-heeled shoes were most carefully polished. He wore a boutonnière of violets, and his gloved hand toyed with a monocle dangling at the end of a slender silk thread.

On the card which Boyd still retained between his thumb and finger was engraved:

EMIL VICTOR DEVERGE.
COUNT DE MORNEY.

In the lower left-hand corner of it there was inscribed with a pen the name of one of the largest and most fashionable hotels in New York.

"Don't go, Jimmie," said Boyd, with a quick glance at the Central Office man. "The Count de Morney has, I am sure, nothing to impart privately. I infer that his business relates to the many mysterious robberies recently committed in the hotel in which he is staying, or more particularly to that one in which his niece, Mademoiselle Millairde, was concerned. How about it, count? Am I right?" added Boyd, with an air of agreeable familiarity that no title could rob him of.

De Morney bowed and smiled, revealing a double row of even, white teeth through his dark beard, and extended his hand.

"Yes, you are right, Mr. Boyd—pardon my glove, sir," he affably rejoined, in agreeably sonorous tones. "You are perfectly right, and your insight convinces me that I do not err in seeking your aid. I marvel that you so quickly anticipated my mission."

"You forget our American newspapers," Boyd reminded him, smiling. "I read only yesterday that another hotel robbery had been added to a list already too long, and that your distinguished niece was the victim. My inference, then, was only a very simple and natural one."

"Yes, yes, I see, sir," bowed De Morney. "To tell the truth, Mr. Boyd, I have begun to feel that your American detectives do not compare at all favorably with the French police agents. For more than a month, during which

they have been investigating the mysterious thefts at my hotel, the poor showing made by the men from your Central Office convinces me that they not only are much inferior to——"

Boyd checked him with an amused little gesture.

"Excuse me, count," said he, laughing. "My friend here is a Central Office man. If you——"

"Is it possible? Really, sir, I——"

"Detective Coleman, count."

"Pardon—a thousand pardons, my dear sir! I would not have spoken so for the world had I but known that——"

"That you were up against one of the Mulberry Street second-raters, eh?" Coleman interrupted, with a hearty laugh. "Well, well, don't let that disturb you, sir. You've not hurt my feelings, I give you my word; for I'm well aware, since it's up to me to admit it, that some of your French detectives are the best in the world."

"Ah, but I did not know—I did not know!" protested De Morney, still in accents of profound regret. "I knew only that Mr. Boyd is not of the regular service; a private detective—that is what you term him, eh? And my very dear friend and banker, Mr. Morgan, has advised me to appeal to you, Mr. Boyd. He stated that you would readily recall him."

Despite his obvious embarrassment, the count's English was very nearly perfect, his address exceedingly gracious; his bearing replete with dainty indications of his inherent gentility and superior breeding. It required no strain of the imagination to see why he had made a profound impression in certain exclusive circles of New York society; why he had become a figure in New York's most fashionable hotel, where for three months he had been quartered with his accomplished niece and her foster-father, the elderly General Leggett; or why his name and that of Mademoiselle Millairde appeared so frequently in the columns of society notes. No reader of current events, least of all Mr. Felix Boyd, would have been surprised at the air and aspect of this man who followed his card into Boyd's private office that February morning.

Boyd again waved his visitor to a chair, replying with a smile:

"I know Mr. Morgan very well. He was one of my secret clients during a long period in which I was employed in the banking district. Resume your seat, Jimmie. As Count de Morney states, these thefts at the hotel are said to be quite mysterious."

"Most mysterious—most mysterious, my dear Mr. Boyd," supplemented the Frenchman, deliberately removing his gloves.

"Humph! I'm well aware of it," Coleman grimly growled. "Max Hecker, the hotel manager, has had half a score of the Mulberry Street push at work on the case for more than a month, and all the while has been dinging into their willing ears an offer of a thousand dollars to any man who will land the light-fingered rascal guilty of turning these exceedingly clever tricks. But they might as well have been at home and abed, for all they've accomplished."

"Nothing doing, eh?" queried Boyd.

"Absolutely nothing. The thieves thus far have completely baffled the hotel managers and some of our shrewdest detectives."

"That so, Jimmie? What do the thieves get away with?"

"Money, jewelry, rare laces—in fact, Felix, anything of value. Rooms have been entered with a quietude and despatch baffling detection. Day or night appears to make very little difference, for the thefts occur at all hours."

"That does seem rather strange, Jimmie, I will admit," Boyd indifferently remarked.

"Last Friday morning the suite of Mrs. Archibald Hooker Van Horn, one of the oldest guests of the house, was entered while she was absent and robbed of a filigree casket containing most of her jewelry. Her maid, a very careful and trustworthy girl, was out of the room only five minutes during the absence of her mistress, yet the thief got in his rascally work."

"Which is quite significant, Jimmie."

"Of what?"

"That he already was informed of the probable movements of both the mistress and maid; also that he knew just where the jewel-casket was to be found. Otherwise, under the existing circumstances, he hardly would have ventured into the rooms."

"That may be," admitted Coleman; "yet it provides no clue to the rascal's identity."

"Apparently not, Jimmie."

"At all events, Felix, he got away with the goods."

"Yes, I imagine so."

The Count de Morney, who had been a polite and attentive listener to their remarks, glancing with gracious interest from one to the other, now shrugged his broad shoulders, and observed, with a deprecatory smile:

"Alas, yes! Dear Madame Van Horn—I have the great pleasure of her acquaintance, Mr. Boyd; a most charming lady—her loss is large, and she is inconsolable. I wish so much that her lovely jewels might be recovered, but, as your good friend here asserts, there really is no clue to the perpetrators of these deplorable crimes."

"My good friend is wrong, Count de Morney," said Boyd quite bluntly.

"Wrong, sir?"

The Frenchman's heavy brows were lifted inquiringly.

"Wrong—yes!" declared Boyd, with a nod, by the way of emphasis. "Crime and clue are inseparable, Count de Morney; as inseparable as cause and effect. Given the one, you may always bank on the existence of the other, whether you can discover it or not. There never was a criminal sufficiently astute to anticipate all contingencies, nor so exceedingly clever as to completely cover his tracks. No, no, gentlemen, never doubt that the crime and the clue go hand in hand."

"Humph!" grunted the Central Office man. "In that case, Felix, you'd better dig in and earn the reward which Hecker offers. None of our push appears able to do it. A thousand samoleons makes a wad not to be sneered at."

"Right!" exclaimed De Morney impulsively. "And I will add a thousand to it, my dear Mr. Boyd, if you will discover the thief and restore to my niece, my adorable Thérèse, the cherished heirloom which——"

"Stop a moment, count, if you please," interrupted Boyd. "Any reward that might be offered, as an incentive to special efforts on my part, would be a decidedly poor second in a race with my own pride in accomplishing what I undertake. But now to work. Describe the jewel stolen from your niece, and tell me when and where the theft was committed."

Boyd spoke now with a bruskness that rather startled the suave and punctilious Frenchman. Yet De Morney was much too polite to resent it, and he hastened to reply:

"Mademoiselle Millairde, my darling Thérèse, was robbed of a rare lace shawl and a valuable diamond and ruby brooch. The latter is the more cherished, my dear Mr. Boyd, because of its having been an heirloom in our family for nearly two centuries."

"When was the brooch stolen?"

"When Thérèse and I were at dinner last Monday evening in the hotel dining-room."

"Where did Mademoiselle Millairde wear the brooch?"

"Fastened amid the laces at her throat, Mr. Boyd. She had also thrown around her shoulders a white lace shawl, which she removed after taking her seat at the table and placed in the next chair."

"In the next chair?"

"It is one which her foster-father, General Leggett, has been in the habit of occupying. He left our party last Tuesday to seek an old friend in Canada before returning to France. The dear, eccentric old gentleman has wearied of your charming yet deplorably noisy city, and he insisted upon returning to the quietude of our château near Nancy, rather than——"

"Than await the departure of yourself and niece—I understand," interrupted Boyd. "Keep to the point,

count, if you please. When was the loss of the articles discovered?"

"When we arose from the table," De Morney replied, with a suavity which no impatience on the part of his questioner could disturb. "Mademoiselle reached for her shawl, and found that it was gone. In her surprise and consternation she clasped both hands to her breast, and then discovered that her brooch, her most cherished jewel, was also missing."

"Ah! I see."

"We at once questioned the waiter, searched the table and floor, implored the aid of our friends at the nearer tables, and hastened to notify the manager, Mr. Hecker. All of our efforts——"

"Proved futile, I understand," nodded Boyd. "Neither the shawl nor the brooch could be found. Now tell me, was your table near any open window through which a thief could have reached the chair in which the shawl was lying?"

"No, no; impossible—utterly impossible!"

"Or the guests at the next table?"

"They were our very dear friends."

"How about the waiter who served you?" demanded Boyd. "Was he the one you usually have had?"

"Yes, yes; the same, my dear Mr. Boyd. There has been no change of waiter during the three months we have been at this hotel."

"How many are in your party now, count?"

"Four—Mademoiselle Millairde and myself, with her maid and my valet. Up till Tuesday General Leggett was with us, and occupied a room in our suite."

"I think that is all I want to ask," said Boyd. "I shall do what I can to help you, though at present I can give you no great encouragement as to my ultimate success. I will question Mademoiselle Millairde and your two servants a little later; also the waiter who served you at dinner. Unless I notify you to the contrary, count, I will call on you this evening. I shall be sure of finding the waiter, also, at that time. No, no, I want no word of thanks, my dear count, until I have earned it. On my word, I now can see no great prospect of that."

"That you have consented to serve me at all in this matter, my dear Mr. Boyd, fills me with gratitude," replied De Morney, bowing low while he drew on his gloves preparatory to making his departure.

"Well, well, what do you think of that, Felix?" asked Coleman, promptly producing his pipe and proceeding to light it the moment the door had closed upon the visitor. "Isn't he the pink of politeness? Wasn't he made up from a fashion-plate? He makes a chap of my cloth look like a scrawny weed in a bed of violets. I've heard that he is cutting a wide swath among the swell set here; both he and his niece. She has literary aspirations, it's said, and is staying here to study American life, both high and low. Wouldn't that jar your underpinning? What do you think of this case?"

Mr. Felix Boyd laughed and shook his head.

"To tell the truth, Jimmie, I've not thought much about it," said he, returning to his desk.

"Are you going to look into it?"

"Very possibly."

"Got any theory or suspicions as to who stole the——"

"No, Jimmie, none at all," interrupted Boyd, taking up a letter from the desk. "I at present am as much in the dark as yourself. I want a word with that waiter before I can form any opinion of the case, or determine what—well, well, I shall question him later. I got rid of De Morney quite unceremoniously, for I have here a letter from Doctor Lackaye, the chief of the Emergency Hospital staff, with whom I am very friendly. He asks me to come there and look into the case of some man who was found dead last Tuesday night in——"

"I know about it," growled Coleman, interrupting. "A young fellow was found dead in Thirty-third Street. The police are unable to establish his identity."

"That so?" queried Boyd, glancing up from the letter. "Got anything on for this morning, Jimmie?"

"No, nothing special."

"Come with me, then. We'll go over to the hospital and hear what Lackaye has to say about the case."

II.

"A stretcher case—yes, decidedly!" smiled Doctor Lackaye, in response to a rather grim observation from Mr. Felix Boyd.

The latter stood gazing at the numerous articles displayed on a bare deal table in a room in the Emergency Hospital. They were the garments and the personal property taken from the pockets of the man who had been found dead in Thirty-third Street at two o'clock the previous Tuesday night.

"As a matter of fact, Felix, the body should not have been brought here," added the physician. "The ambulance surgeon was not absolutely sure that the man was dead, however, and the body was received here in order that an immediate examination might be made. I now am glad that it was, for the circumstances point to a mystery that may not be easily solved."

"Why so, Lackaye?" Boyd gravely inquired. "Were there any indications of foul play?"

"None whatever. An autopsy made yesterday morning proved conclusively that the man's death was due to heart-disease. There were no signs of violence, and it appears obvious that he suddenly dropped dead while crossing the street. The body was discovered about two o'clock last Wednesday morning by two men who were on their way to the Waldorf, and who notified the police. It was lying in the middle of the street, not very far from Sixth Avenue, and as quickly as possible it was removed in the ambulance. Upon its arrival here immediate efforts were made to identify the man, but without success."

"Where is the body now?"

"At the morgue."

"Humph! Still awaiting identification?"

"Yes."

Boyd's eyes reverted to the garments lying on the table, evidently those of a fashionable young man of means. The dark overcoat was but slightly worn. The evening suit of black was nearly new. The linen was immaculate; and the undergarments and hosiery were of a superior grade. The crush hat, the enameled leather shoes, the two pairs of gloves—all told the same story.

"The man had been to a theater, or some social event," observed Boyd. "He was in evening dress, and presumably had no premonition of his sudden death."

"I think he cannot have had any warning of it," replied Doctor Lackaye.

"Did you make the post-mortem examination?"

"I did."

"Then you probably have good grounds for your opinion. I see that none of the garments bear the name of the tailor, which is unusual. There must have been some object for the omission."

"Yes, yes; no doubt of it," nodded Coleman.

"That's not a circumstance, however, to the curious inconsistencies discovered in these other articles," said Doctor Lackaye.

Boyd began to examine them more carefully, but he did not ask the physician to explain.

There was a pocketbook containing nearly thirty dollars. There were a few silver coins, three nickels, an empty cigarette-box made of silver, a pearl-handled knife, and one ordinary key, evidently the key of a trunk. A neck-scarf of silk, a handkerchief of fine linen, a leather card-case containing several cards, each bearing the name of Archie Decker and a New York address; two open letters, and three coupons for reserved chairs at the Casino, dated one week before—these comprised the remaining articles found in the dead man's pockets.

Boyd examined them one after another, studying the handkerchief quite

carefully, and finally sniffing it and remarking, with a glance at Coleman:

"Attar of roses, Jimmie, or a perfume made from that very fragrant and expensive oil. Plainly enough, the tastes of this young man were of a very superior—by the way, Lackaye, what was his age?"

"I should say about thirty," replied the physician, a little startled by the curtness with which Boyd had spoken.

"A slender fellow, I take it, of about medium height?"

"That's right."

"Thin features?"

"Yes, quite thin, Felix."

"He wore no jewelry, eh?"

"No, none, unless he was robbed of it."

"That is not probable, or his money would have been taken. Where were these theater coupons found?"

"In his fob pocket."

"He went to the Casino Theater a week ago with two friends."

"So I infer."

"Presumably with two women, since he held the coupons," Boyd quickly reasoned. "He thrust these into his fob pocket, and forgot to throw them away. His two friends should by this time have read the facts published, if they still are in the city; and they should have come forward with some information about him, providing that these cards bear his true name."

"They do not bear it, Felix, I'm convinced of that."

"Have the police inquired at the address mentioned?"

"Yes. The house is occupied by a prominent Wall Street banker and his family, who never heard of Archie Decker."

"Humph!" grunted Coleman. "That gives the case a mighty fishy look."

"You're right, Jimmie," nodded Felix Boyd. "Have the police made any inquiries at the Casino Theater, doctor?"

"Yes, indeed. It cannot be learned who purchased the three tickets, however; nor who occupied the adjoining seats at the performance for which these coupons were good. If the persons who had the next chairs to this man and his two friends could be located, some information about one of the three might be obtained."

"Very true," assented Boyd. "Yet here are two letters which——"

"Which seem to be equally unprofitable," interposed Doctor Lackaye. "Both are addressed to Archie Decker; one signed by a man, the other by a woman; but neither contains anything that might help to establish his identity."

"Have attempts been made to locate the writers?"

"Yes, vain attempts. The woman's letter is dated from Chicago ten days ago, and is signed only 'Martha.' Inquiries have been made of the Chicago police, but the woman has not been located, nor can anything be learned of Archie Decker. The name does not appear in the Chicago directory."

"What about the other?" inquired Coleman.

"That written by the man is dated a week ago from the city of Boston. It is signed 'Joseph Gudgeon.' Inquiries of the Boston police, however, have elicited no information. Joseph Gudgeon is unknown there."

Though he had heard what the physician had said, the attention of Felix Boyd was directed chiefly to the two letters, which he was carefully reading. Presently he turned them over and briefly studied the back of each, then folded them, and examined the creased edges. He looked up when Doctor Lackaye ceased speaking, and abruptly inquired:

"Where are the envelopes in which these letters were mailed?"

"Give it up, Felix. They were found in his pocket, just as you see them."

"Humph! Evidently somebody found it more easy to write two letters than to forge the postmarks for their covers. Both were written with a pen and on blank paper, you observe."

"True; yet of a different kind."

"So I see—so I see," repeated Boyd, tossing the letters upon the table. "That signifies nothing, however. There are as many kinds of paper to be bought as there are crimes in the calendar. I

think, Doctor Lackaye, I will go to the morgue and have a look at Mr. Archie Decker's remains. I will see you later if I make any discoveries worthy of mention. Come with me, Jimmie."

The morgue! That last grim and gruesome stopping-place of the unknown and unclaimed dead; the halfway house between some scene of death and an open grave.

Few men were better known to the officials stationed there than was Mr. Felix Boyd; and a request from him was an open-sesame for admission through the glass partition protecting the form stretched upon the stone bier.

"I wish to make a close inspection of the man found dead in Thirty-third Street last Tuesday night."

It was an hour when strangers were present, yet the room was quickly cleared, and the body exposed in compliance with Boyd's request. He did not long remain bending above it, observed only by Coleman and the officer in charge.

First he examined the thumb and fingers of each hand. Next he briefly studied the dead man's brow, inspecting the hueless skin through a powerful lens. Finally he carefully wiped with a handkerchief the interior edge of either nostril; then examined the linen with his lens.

"That's all, officer," said he, after a moment.

The Central Office man looked puzzled.

The glass partition was replaced, the door was opened again; the waiting strangers, mute and awe-eyed, were admitted to the room. Among the visitors was one who had arrived only a moment before—a woman in a long cloak and rich furs, of imposing figure and dignified carriage; a woman whose face was nearly concealed by a black veil.

Felix Boyd turned aside to let her pass, a courtesy to which she appeared oblivious; for she had drawn her handkerchief from her rich muff, and was trying, with one gloved hand, to pass it under the folds of her veil.

Boyd started slightly, glanced again at her fine, dignified figure, and then drew quietly away, moving behind her, until he could mingle with the group near-by.

The Central Office man stared at her while she gazed long and steadily through the glass at the lifeless form.

"Do you recognize this man, madam?" he finally asked, wondering at her steadfast stare and the rigidity of her superb figure.

She started slightly, and relaxed, turning her head to look at her questioner; and a sharp gleam came through the meshes of her veil.

"No, I do not," she presently answered, with voice subdued.

"Are you seeking some friend?"

"My husband has been missing some weeks."

The very simplicity of her reply, icily made, silenced the detective. He bowed, then drew away to look for his companion, only to presently express his surprise with a semi-subdued snarl.

Mr. Felix Boyd had disappeared.

III.

It was eight o'clock when Mr. Felix Boyd paused briefly at the door of Mr. Hecker's private office, and addressed the hotel manager without crossing the threshold. The height of his lithe, supple figure was accentuated by evening dress. He carried his hat in his hand and his overcoat on his arm.

"Good evening, Hecker," said he, with curiously cold quietude and deliberation. "I think you know that the Count de Morney, one of your guests, has employed me to investigate the recent robbery of his niece, Mademoiselle Millairde."

Before Boyd had fairly begun to speak, Manager Hecker hurriedly rose and came to join him; a portly, dignified man approaching fifty.

"Why, good evening, Boyd!" he exclaimed. "Come in. Come in and——"

"No, I'll not stop, thank you."

"Yes, I know that De Morney has employed you. He told me this morn-

ing. I hope you may accomplish more than the detectives I have had at work."

"Where is his suite, Hecker?" Boyd asked, still with a curious quietude and gravity at times characteristic of him.

"On the third floor, front. Do you wish to go up there?"

"Presently."

"I will send up your card."

"Don't hurry me, Mr. Hecker," said Boyd, with the shadow of a smile. "Do De Morney's servants have rooms in his suite?"

"Yes. He occupies one of the best in the house, and employs only a valet and a maid."

"Yes, I now recall that he said so," replied Boyd. "I understood that there was another in his party, some elderly——"

"Oh, that was General Leggett, foster-father of Mademoiselle Millairde. He went away last Tuesday, I believe. He was an eccentric, reserved old fellow, as nervous as a witch, and thoroughly averse to society and stir of any sort. He kept his room most of the time while here, or trotted alone through the parlors and halls in his nervous fashion by way of exercise."

"Was his room in the De Morney suite?"

"It was."

"And I presume that he is a user of snuff, as some few French gentlemen of the old school still are?"

"Why, yes!" exclaimed Hecker, with a start. "How the deuce did you discover that, unless you have seen him or——"

"Pardon me, Hecker," murmured Boyd. "You now may send up my card."

At the door of the sumptuously furnished suite he was received by the Count de Morney himself, who hastened to relieve him of his coat and hat, at the same time explaining that his valet had been sent out on an errand, and making profuse apologies that he had not come down to escort him up to his apartments.

"Yet I am delighted to see you, my dear Mr. Boyd; very delighted," he effusively added. "And Mademoiselle Millairde, my adorable Thérèse, will be charmed, more than charmed, to meet you. We have been expecting you, and she places much faith—ah, so very much faith, my dear Mr. Boyd!—in your endeavor to recover her cherished jewel. This way to the parlor, my dear Mr. Boyd."

Mademoiselle Millairde was upon the point of giving some trivial command to her maid; and she turned and received her visitor with a gracious courtesy, a few words of cordial greeting, and with a glow mounting to her cheeks. They were very lovely cheeks; and her luminous, dark eyes were impressively bright and beautiful. She was richly gowned, in an evening dress accentuating the graceful lines of her superb figure, and revealing through a veil of dark lace the creamy whiteness of her perfect neck and shoulders. A woman still under thirty, apparently, with a strong, intellectual face, of almost classical beauty.

"You are very kind, Mademoiselle Millairde, and I am obliged to you," Boyd rejoined, in reply to her greeting.

"Yet I feel sure, Mr. Boyd, that all obligations will ultimately be mine," she quickly replied, with a captivating smile and a significant shrug of her shoulders.

"Ah! what did I tell you?" cried De Morney, laughing. "I assure you, my dear Mr. Boyd, that she has absolute faith in you."

"Let us hope, then, that her house may not be built upon sand," smiled Boyd, as he bowed and took the chair placed for him.

Thérèse took one nearly opposite, and De Morney another a little to one side. Boyd glanced with apparent indifference about the room—at the splendid furnishings; at the desk in the corner, laden with manuscripts, presumably the literary work of Mademoiselle Millairde; at the portières masking the several doors leading from the parlor; but he gave particular attention to a mantel mirror that reflected a curtained doorway directly back of the chair in which he was seated.

"Of course," added Thérèse, smiling,

"I shall not lose any of my faith in you, even if you do not succeed. But after what Mr. Morgan has stated about you, I fully believe that you finally will detect the person guilty of all of these robberies."

"Thank you, mademoiselle," said Boyd. "Aside from the theft of your own property, you are entirely justified in that belief."

"Indeed!"

"As a matter of fact, Mademoiselle Millairde, I already am on the track of the persons who committed the other robberies."

De Morney started. "Do you mean that?" he asked quickly.

"Yes, count, I mean it."

"But——"

"I will explain, Count de Morney, if you would like to have me," Boyd quietly interposed, drawing up his chair.

"Indeed, yes! I shall be charmed—delighted."

"It is really very simple," Boyd protested. "As you can very easily imagine, the clue by which a criminal might be traced is sometimes so remote from the crime itself that it is forever overlooked by the ordinary detective, despite that it invariably exists in one form or another."

"Yes, yes, I can appreciate that," said De Morney, impatiently drumming with his fingers on the arm of his chair. "But in what way does that apply to these hotel thefts?"

"I will make it perfectly clear to you, count," replied Boyd suavely.

"If you please, my dear Mr. Boyd."

"The very character of these repeated thefts plainly indicates that they were committed not by outsiders, but by some guests of this house who enjoy friendly relations with their victims, and who thus become informed of their habits, their contemplated movements, and very likely where their jewelry and valuables are usually kept. Just who these treacherous guests may be I am not yet prepared to say; but I already have discovered clues that will speedily enable me to identify and arrest them. By this time to-morrow, Count de Morney, if not even sooner, I shall have them all in custody."

Boyd's bland voice underwent no change while making these startling assertions. His ingenuous smile robbed his statements of any threatening personalities. He appeared entirely oblivious of the fact that the red had died from the lovely cheeks of Mademoiselle Millairde, leaving them as gray as ashes, and that De Morney's lips were nervously twitching.

"You amaze me, my dear Mr. Boyd!" cried the count. "On what do you base such a belief? To me it appears preposterous, absurd. To what clues do you refer?"

Boyd laughed lightly, gazing at the richly frescoed ceiling for a moment.

"I will tell you confidentially, count," said he. "The facts must not be given publicity until I am prepared to act, lest the thieves anticipate my suspicions and seek safety in flight."

"Surely not!" agreed De Morney promptly. "You may trust to my discretion, my dear Mr. Boyd."

"To mine, also," said Thérèse, in tones grown strangely husky.

"I hardly need your assurances," smiled Boyd, with a bow to each. "The clues to which I refer, Count de Morney, are these: Last Tuesday night a man was found dead in the street not far from this hotel, and his body was taken to a hospital, and subsequently to the morgue, where it now awaits identification. Do you follow me, count?"

"Yes, yes."

"The man's death was due to heart-disease, and was at first supposed to have occurred while he was crossing the street. By means of his garments and the contents of his pockets, however, I have discovered that a deliberate attempt has been made to mislead and perplex the police, and to prevent, if possible, the man's identification. The attempt will prove abortive, Count de Morney."

Still the same bland smile, the same quietly effective voice; and yet the eyes of Mademoiselle Millairde were dilated with ever-increasing alarm, and De

Morney could not prevent a tremor in his voice as he remarked: "I do not fully comprehend you, my dear Mr. Boyd."

"No, count?"

"How is the dead man to be identified?" persisted Count de Morney.

"Very easily," was Boyd's response. "The body, as I have stated, was taken to the morgue. On a handkerchief belonging to the deceased I detected the odor of attar of roses; and among his belongings I found a silver cigarette-case."

"But I fail to see—well, well, what of them, my dear Mr. Boyd?"

"Much," said Boyd, with dry terseness. "I visited the morgue this morning to view the body, and to learn whether the man had been addicted to the use of cigarettes, the nicotin from which frequently stains the smoker's fingers, and also his nostrils if he inhales the smoke. I carefully examined both, Count de Morney, and easily discovered that the man had been a user, not of cigarettes, but of—snuff!"

Mademoiselle Millairde's hands were clasped so tightly that the skin over the knuckles seemed as if it would burst.

De Morney, still striving to be calm, asked: "What does that signify, my dear Mr. Boyd?"

"I will presently inform you, count." Felix Boyd was perfectly cool as he went on: "As I was about to leave the morgue, I observed a woman viewing the body, yet who was so heavily veiled that I could not see her face. She had occasion to draw her handkerchief from her muff, however, and I again detected—a most significant circumstance, Count de Morney—the odor of attar of roses!"

"Yes, yes, very significant, I confess," assented De Morney, his fingers working convulsively. "But just how, my dear Mr. Boyd, does it apply to these robberies?"

"In this way, count," Boyd blandly explained. "I shadowed the woman to this hotel, it being plain to me that some relations had existed between her and the dead man. I now suspect, not that he died upon the street, but that he died in this house, and was secretly removed a little later."

"Then if that was the case——"

"If that was the case, Count de Morney, it is much more than probable that the two were engaged with others in these robberies; the man in a disguise which was removed after his death, and the removal of which, in conjunction with fictitious letters and sundry articles placed in his pockets, it was believed would prevent his identification as a guest of this hotel. If, however, I presently can discover that a recent guest here was a user of snuff, and with what persons he was closely associated, Count de Morney, I then shall have the case so well in hand that——"

"That you can arrest them! I see the point!" De Morney's cheeks had grown livid. "To whom, my dear Mr. Boyd, have you disclosed these most remarkable discoveries?"

"Why, count, only to you as yet, and to Mademoiselle Mil——"

The sentence was not completed. Reflected in the mirror over the mantel Boyd saw the portière directly behind his chair swept suddenly aside, and a man darted quickly toward him.

Boyd sprang to his feet, swung sharply around, then ducked from a blow aimed at his head with the butt of a revolver. Then he felt the arms of De Morney close around him, his hands gripping his throat to prevent a cry, while the voice of the man, a hiss as venomous as that of a snake, fiercely commanded:

"Don't strike—don't kill him, Jean! We don't want to risk the electric chair. Help me to gag and bind him. We must get out of here without delay."

Mr. Felix Boyd feigned to struggle—but it was only a very lame kind of struggle. In a very few moments he was securely bound, a towel tied over his mouth, and his lithe figure stretched on the parlor floor.

The crafty moves that he had made and was making, however, were made only with a design to discover where these knaves had concealed their plunder, the bulk of which he had reason

to believe they had not removed from the house nor attempted to pawn.

The scene that followed in the room can be very briefly described. There no longer was any dissembling. The maid and valet, who had been in hiding instead of out of the house, had appeared in the room; and four more alarmed and desperate crooks scarce could be imagined. That there was no true tie of master and servant between them was plainly apparent, as well as the fact that all deemed a hasty departure from the house now imperative.

While the two women hastened to prepare to leave, De Morney moved aside the desk, aided by his alleged valet, and then both quickly removed the tacks and raised a portion of the heavy Wilton carpet. A hiding-place under the flooring had been cleverly constructed; and from this De Morney drew a large leather bag, at the same time remarking with vicious asperity:

"We'll get away with this stuff, Jean, at all events. The coast should be clear for the present, since Boyd had not quite fixed upon his quarry, and by morning we can have crossed the Canada line."

Mr. Felix Boyd waited no longer. Still lying on the floor, he raised his feet to the edge of the large center-table and quickly overturned it, sending it with all that was upon it crashing to the floor.

It was a signal for the violent opening of a door, for the hurried rush of many heavy feet, and through the hall and into the parlor, with Jimmie Coleman at their head, came pouring half a dozen men from the Central Office, and two policemen.

"Inseparable, Jimmie, that's what they are," repeated Mr. Felix Boyd, with a sagacious nod. "Given the crime, as I have said before, you may always bank upon the existence of a clue of one kind or another, despite that we sometimes seek vainly to find it."

"Vainly, eh?" queried Coleman, with an expressive grin. "That sounds well, Felix, coming from you. I'm blessed if I wouldn't like just once to see you engaged in a vain search, and to see how you'd look after it! That would be a new experience."

Mr. Felix Boyd laughed lightly and winked at Mr. Hecker, in whose private office the three men were seated, close upon midnight.

"I think, Hecker," said he, "Jimmie's remarks were tinctured with a bit of jealousy, weren't they?"

"Jealousy be hanged!" growled Coleman sharply. "I quit feeling jealous of you long ago. But tell us, did you suspect De Morney during his call at your office this morning?"

"No, Jimmie," said Boyd. "I did not suspect De Morney this morning. It is true that I was somewhat struck with the improbable features of the theft he described, which we now know was entirely fictitious—a fabrication invented with a design to avert suspicion from himself; yet, as I said before, I did not then distrust him. It is no new scheme, however, for a crook with such an object in view to engage the services of a detective, but the possibility that that was his game did not then occur to me."

"Nor to me," said Coleman. "He appeared too spick, span, and clean for me to distrust him. When were you first led to suspect him, Felix?"

"Well, I began to sit up and take notice, Jimmie, while I was examining the property of dead Archie Decker, so-called," replied Boyd. "Owing to the difficulty in establishing his identity, I suspected that an attempt had been made to blind the police. Then I very soon discovered that the two letters, found without envelopes, had been more recently written than their dates indicated," continued Boyd. "The reverse side of each, and the edges of their folds, were much too clean to have been carried in one's pocket during the period indicated. I quickly saw that they had been written quite recently."

"Humph! Very clever, Felix."

"I was assured by Doctor Lackaye, however, that the man had died a natural death," Boyd presently went on.

"Despite that he had not been murdered or robbed, then the circumstances certainly pointed to some sort of a crime, or at least to an attempt to conceal one. That deduction, together with the fact that the body was found within a short distance of the hotel in which so many robberies have been committed, led me to connect the man with those crimes."

"Very naturally, Felix, though it did not occur to me," nodded Coleman.

"Almost immediately, Jimmie, I recalled De Morney's remarks about General Leggett, and the statement that he had left the hotel last Tuesday, the very day of the man's death. This startling coincidence, together with De Morney's entirely needless references to the said Leggett and his eccentric character, convinced me that I was striking the right trail. I quickly reasoned that if Decker had been one of a gang of crooks at work in the hotel, and if he had been personating an old man and suddenly had died there, his confederates would have been obliged to get his body secretly out of the house, since a report of his death and the necessary examination by a physician would, of course, reveal his disguise and duplicity, and expose the other rascals to immediate suspicion."

"Certainly."

"It now appears that they did not wish to end the knavish game they were so successfully playing, so they did just what I was led to suspect—clad the body in a suit belonging to the valet, put the fictitious letters and other articles in the pockets, and succeeded in secretly removing the body from the house at two in the morning, and dropped it undetected in Thirty-third Street."

"Well, well, I wouldn't have believed it could be done," declared Hecker amazedly.

"It was done, for all that," laughed Felix Boyd. "You already know, gentlemen, how I detected the odor of roses, both on the dead man and the woman at the morgue; as well as how I ascertained from you, Hecker, that Leggett was a user of snuff. In visiting the morgue I merely aimed to learn whether the dead man's head and brow would indicate that he recently had worn a wig, and was indeed a user of cigarettes. Under the lens, however, the handkerchief with which I wiped the edges of his nostrils revealed, not the signs of nicotin for which I was looking, but numerous tiny particles of snuff. That again suggested General Leggett."

"There still is one thing that I don't quite fathom," growled Coleman.

"What is that, Jimmie?"

"What sent Mademoiselle Millairde to the morgue?"

"She has explained that to me, Jimmie," said Boyd. "She was out of town the night Decker died, and only learned of his death the following day. She was Decker's wife, as a matter of fact, Jimmie. De Morney was passionately in love with her, however, and she did not believe that Decker had died during her absence, nor that the body had been disposed of in the manner of which she was told."

"Humph! I don't wonder."

"Upon reading the newspaper stories of the case this morning, therefore, which stated that the body was at the morgue, she went there to view it for herself. If she had not done so, thus enabling me to associate her with the man and track her to this hotel—ah, well, why dwell on that? Will you look after this bag of plunder, Jimmie? The hour is late; long after my bedtime."

"You bet I'll look after it, Felix," the Central Office man grimly rejoined. "As for that reward, Hecker——"

Manager Hecker raised his hand and silenced him, saying quickly:

"Don't speak of that, Coleman. I shall send Mr. Boyd a check in the morning mail."

Mr. Felix Boyd already had buttoned his overcoat about his tall, lithe figure, and was passing out through the open door.

The Man of Secrets

By William Le Queux

Author of "Secrets of the Foreign Office," "The Tickencote Treasure," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

Burton Blair, an Englishman, dies worth several millions, and carries with him to the grave the secret of how he amassed his great wealth. He bequeaths the bulk of his fortune to his daughter Mabel. A small bag of wash-leather which Blair always carried with him and which was supposed to contain the secret of his wealth is bequeathed to Gilbert Greenwood, a man who had befriended Blair and his daughter in former days. The bag is missing, however, and this arouses suspicions of foul play. Attempts to get Scotland Yard to act in the matter are useless. An Italian named Melandrini, who is unknown to Mabel, is appointed by the testator as the girl's secretary. Greenwood and his chum, Reginald Seton, set themselves to solve the three problems: Was Burton Blair murdered? By whom was the bag containing the dead man's secret stolen? Why was the Italian appointed Mabel's secretary? Greenwood goes to Italy, where he meets Fra Antonio, a Capuchin lay brother and a friend of Blair's, who promises his aid in the quest for the lost sachet. Fra Antonio warns him against a one-eyed Englishman, Dick Dawson—known in Italy as the Ceco—and a girl, Dolly. A padrone, Babbo Carlini, discovers that Melandrini and Dick Dawson are one and the same. Returning to England, Greenwood acquaints Mabel with Babbo's discovery. Exclaiming "Save me from him!" Mabel faints. Later she finds the lost sachet, but it only contains a pack of small cards, each lettered curiously. At her suggestion, Greenwood accompanies her to Mayvill, an old homestead her father had purchased, where they make a search for hidden documents.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN WHICH TWO CURIOUS FACTS ARE ESTABLISHED.

THE dead man's writing-table was a ponderous, old-fashioned one of carved oak, and, as she unlocked the first drawer and turned out its contents, I drew up a couple of chairs and we proceeded to make a methodical and thorough examination. The papers, we found, were mostly letters from friends, and correspondence from solicitors and brokers regarding his investments in various quarters. From some of these I gathered what enormous profits he had made over various deals in stocks, while in certain other correspondence were allusions to matters which, to me, were very puzzling.

Mabel's eager attitude was that of one in search of some document which she believed to be there. She scarcely troubled to read any of the letters, merely scanning them swiftly and casting them aside. Thus we examined the contents of one drawer after another, until I saw beneath her hand a blue foolscap envelope sealed with black wax, and bearing the superscription in her father's handwriting:

To be opened by Mabel after my death.
BURTON BLAIR.

"Ah!" she gasped, in breathless haste. "I wonder what this contains!" And she eagerly broke the seals, and drew forth a sheet of foolscap closely written, to which some other papers were attached by means of a brass fastener.

From the envelope, too, something fell, and I picked it up, finding to my surprise that it was a snap-shot photograph much worn and tattered, but preserved by being mounted upon a piece of linen. It was a half-faded view of a country crossroads in a flat and rather dismal country, with a small, lonely house, probably once an old toll-house, with high chimneys, standing on the

This story began in the October issue. The back numbers can be obtained through any newsdealer.

edge of the highway, a small strip of flower-garden railed off at the side. Before the door was a rustic porch covered by climbing roses, and out on the roadside an old armchair that had apparently just been vacated.

While I was examining the view beneath the lamplight, the dead man's daughter was reading swiftly through those close lines her father had penned.

Suddenly she uttered a loud cry, as though horrified by some discovery, and, startled, I turned to glance at her. Her countenance had changed; she was blanched to the lips.

"No!" she gasped hoarsely. "I—I can't believe it—I won't!"

Again she glanced at the paper to reread those fateful lines.

"What is it?" I inquired anxiously. "May I not know?" And I crossed to where she stood.

"No," she answered firmly, placing the paper behind her. "No. Not even you may know this." And with a sudden movement she tore the paper to pieces in her hands, and ere I could rescue it, she had cast the fragments into the fire.

The flames leaped up, and next instant the dead man's confession—if such it was—was consumed and lost forever, while his daughter stood, haggard, rigid, and white as death.

Mabel's sudden action both annoyed and surprised me, for I had believed that our friendship was of such a close and intimate character that she would at least have allowed me sight of what her father had written.

Yet when, next second, I reflected that the envelope had been specially addressed to her, I saw that whatever was contained therein had been intended for her eye alone.

"You have discovered something which has upset you?" I said, looking straight into her white, hard-drawn face. "I hope it is really nothing very disconcerting?"

She held her breath for a moment, her hand instinctively upon her breast, as though to still the wild beating of her heart.

"Ah! unfortunately it is," was her answer. "I know the truth now—the awful, terrible truth." And without a word of warning, she covered her face with her hands and burst into a torrent of tears.

At her side in an instant, I was striving to console her, but I quickly realized what a deep impression of dismay and horror those written words of her dead father had produced upon her. She was filled with grief, and utterly inconsolable.

The quiet of that long, old-fashioned room was unbroken save for her bitter sobs and the solemn *tick-tock* of the antique clock at the farther end of the apartment. My hand was placed tenderly upon the poor girl's shoulder, but it was a long time ere I could induce her to dry her tears.

Finally, walking back to the writing-table, she took up the envelope and reread the superscription which Blair had written upon it, and then for the first time her eyes fell upon the photograph of that lonely house by the crossways.

"Why!" she cried, startled, "where did you find this?"

I explained that it had dropped from the envelope, whereupon she took it up and gazed for a long time upon it. Then, turning it over, she discovered what I had not noticed; namely, written faintly in pencil and half-effaced, were the words:

Owston crossroads, nine miles beyond Doncaster on the Selby Road. B. B.

"Do you know what this is?"

"No, I haven't the least idea," I answered. "It must be something of which your father was very careful. It seems to be well worn, too, as though carried in somebody's pocket."

"Well," she said, "I will tell you. I had no idea that he still preserved it, but I suppose he kept it as a souvenir of those weary journeys of long ago. This photograph," she added, holding it still in her hand, "is the picture of the spot for which he searched every turnpike in England. He had the photograph, but nothing else, to guide him to the spot, and we were therefore com-

pelled to tramp all the main roads up and down the country in an attempt to identify it. Not until nearly a year after you and Mr. Seton had so kindly placed me at school at Bournemouth did my father, still on his lonely tramp, succeed in discovering it after a search lasting over three years. He identified it one summer evening as the crossways at Owston, and he found living in that house the person of whom he had been all those weary months in search."

"Curious," I said. "Tell me more about it."

"There is nothing else to tell, except that, by identifying the house, he obtained the key to the secret—at least, that is what I always understood from him," she said. "Ah, I recollect all those long, wearying walks when I was a girl, how we trudged on over those long, white, endless roads, in sunshine and in rain, envying people in carriages and carts, and men and women on bicycles, and yet my courage always supported by my father's declaration that great fortune must be ours some day. He carried this photograph with him always, and almost at each cross-road he would take it out, examine the landscape and compare it, not knowing, of course, but that the old toll-house might have been pulled down since the taking of the picture."

"Did he never tell you the reason why he wished to visit that house?"

"He used to say that the man who lived there—the man who used to sit on summer evenings in that chair outside, was his friend—his good friend; only they had been parted for a long time, and he did not know that my father was still alive. They had been friends abroad, I fancy, in the days when my father was at sea."

"And the identification of this spot was the reason of your father's constant wanderings?" I exclaimed, pleased that I had at last cleared up one point which, for five years or so, had been a mystery.

"Yes. A month after he had made the discovery he came to Bournemouth, and told me in confidence that his dream of great wealth was about to be realized. He had solved the problem, and within a week or two would be in possession of ample funds. He disappeared, you will remember, almost immediately, and was away for a month. Then he returned a rich man—so rich that you and Mr. Seton were utterly dumfounded. Don't you recollect that night at Helpstone, after I had come from school to spend a week with my father on his return? We were sitting together after dinner, and he recalled the last occasion when we had all assembled there—the occasion when I was taken ill outside," she added. "And don't you recollect Mr. Seton appearing to doubt my father's statement that he was already worth fifty thousand pounds?"

"I remember," I answered, as her clear eyes met mine. "I remember how your father struck us utterly dumb by going up-stairs and fetching his banker's pass-book, which showed a balance of fifty-four thousand odd pounds. After that he became more than ever a mystery to us. But tell me," I added, in a low, earnest voice, "what have you discovered to-night that has so upset you?"

"I have nearly found proof of a fact that I have dreaded for years—a fact that affects not only my poor father's memory, but also myself. I am in peril—personal danger."

"How?" I asked quickly, failing to understand her meaning. "Recollect that I promised your father to act as your protector."

"I know, I know. It is awfully good of you," she said, looking at me gratefully with those wonderful eyes that had always held me fascinated beneath the spell of her beauty. "But," she added, shaking her head sorrowfully, "I fear that in this you will be powerless. If the blow falls, as it must sooner or later, then I shall be crushed and helpless. No power, not even your devoted friendship, can then save me."

"You certainly speak very strangely, Mabel. I don't follow you at all."

"I expect not," was her mechanical answer. "You do not know all. If you did, you would understand the peril of

my position and of the great danger now threatening me."

And she stood motionless as a statue, her hand upon the corner of the writing-table, her eyes fixed straight into the blazing fire.

"If the danger is a real one, I consider I ought to be aware of it. To be forewarned is to be forearmed!" I remarked decisively.

"It is a real one, but as my father has confessed the truth to me alone, I am unable to reveal it to you. His secret is mine."

"Certainly," I answered, accepting her decision, which, of course, was but natural in the circumstances. She could not betray her dead father's confidence.

Later, when Mabel grew slightly calmer, we concluded our work of investigation, but discovered little else of interest save several letters in Italian, undated and unsigned, but evidently written by Dick Dawson, the millionaire's mysterious friend—or enemy. It was, to all appearances, the correspondence of an intimate acquaintance who was sharing Blair's fortune and secretly assisting him in the acquisition of his wealth. There was much mention of "the secret," and repeated cautions against revealing anything to Seton or to myself.

In one letter I found the sentences in Italian:

> My girl is growing into quite a fine lady. I expect she will become a countess, or perhaps a duchess, one day. I hear from your side that Mabel is becoming a very pretty woman. You ought, with your position and reputation, to make a good match for her. But I know what old-fashioned ideas you hold that a woman must marry only for love.

On reading this, one fact was vividly impressed upon me; namely, that if this man Dawson shared secretly in Blair's wealth, he surely had no necessity to obtain the secret by foul means, when he already knew it.

The clock chimed midnight before Mabel rang for Mrs. Gibbons, and the latter's husband followed, bringing me a nightcap of whisky and some hot water.

My little companion merrily pressed my hand, wishing me good night, and then retired, accompanied by the housekeeper, while Gibbons himself remained to mix my drink.

"Sad thing, sir, about our poor master," hazarded the well-trained servant, who had been all his life in the service of the previous owners. "I fear the poor young mistress feels it very much."

"Very much indeed, Gibbons," I answered, taking a cigarette and standing with my back to the fire. "She was such a devoted daughter."

"She is now mistress of everything, Mr. Ford told us when he was down three days ago."

"Yes," I said, "everything. And I hope that you and your wife will serve her as well and as faithfully as you have done her father."

"We'll try, sir," was the grave, gray-haired man's response. "Everybody's very fond of the young mistress. She's so very good to all the servants." Then, as I remained silent, he placed my candle in readiness on the table, and, bowing, wished me good night.

He closed the door, and I was alone in that great, silent old room where the darting flames cast weird lights across into the dark recesses, and the Chippendale clock ticked on solemnly as it had done for a century past.

Having swallowed my hot drink, I returned again to my dead friend's writing-table, carefully examining it to see whether it contained any secret drawers. A methodical investigation of every portion failed to reveal any spring or unsuspected cavity; therefore, after glancing at that photograph which had taken Blair those many months of weary tramping to identify, I extinguished the lamps, and, passing through the great old hall with the stands of armor which conjured up visions of ghostly cavaliers, ascended to my room.

The bright fire gave the antique place with those rather funereal hangings a warm and cozy appearance in contrast to the hard frost outside, and, feeling no inclination to sleep just then,

I flung myself into an armchair and sat with arms folded, pondering deeply.

Again the stable clock chimed—the half-hour—and then I think I must have dozed, for I was awakened suddenly by a light, stealthy footstep on the polished oaken floor outside my door. I listened, and distinctly heard some one creeping lightly down the staircase, which creaked slightly somewhere below.

The weird ghostliness of the old place and its many historic traditions caused me, I suppose, some misgivings, for I found myself thinking of burglars and of midnight visitants. Again I strained my ears. Perhaps, after all, it was only a servant! Yet, when I glanced at my watch, and found it to be a quarter to two, the suggestion that the servants had not retired was at once negatived.

Suddenly, in the room below me, I distinctly heard a slow, harsh, grating noise. Then all was still again.

About three minutes later, however, I fancied I heard low whispering, and, having quickly extinguished my light, I drew aside one of the heavy curtains, and, peering forth, saw, to my surprise, two figures crossing the lawn toward the shrubbery.

The moon was somewhat overcast, yet by the gray, clouded light I distinguished that the pair were a man and a woman. From the man's back I could not recognize him, but his companion's gait was familiar to me as she hurried on toward the dark belt of bare, black trees.

It was Mabel Blair. The secret was out. Her sudden desire to visit Mayvill was in order to keep a midnight tryst.

CHAPTER XVII.

MERELY CONCERNS A STRANGER.

Without a moment's hesitation, I struggled into an overcoat, slipped on a golf cap, and sped down-stairs to the room below my own, where I found one of the long windows open, and through it stepped quickly out upon the gravel.

I intended to discover the motive of this meeting and the identity of her companion—evidently some secret lover whose existence she had concealed from us all. Yet to follow her straight across the lawn in the open light was to at once court detection. Therefore I was compelled to take a circuitous course, hugging the shadows always, until I at length reached the shrubbery, where I halted, listening eagerly.

There was no sound beyond the low creaking of the branches and the dismal sighing of the wind. A distant train was passing through the valley, and somewhere away down in the village a collie was barking. I could not, however, distinguish any human voices. Slowly I made my way through the fallen leaves until I had skirted the whole of the shrubbery, and then I came to the conclusion that they must have passed through it by some bypath and gone out into the park.

My task was rendered more difficult because the moon was not sufficiently overcast to conceal my movements, and I feared that by emerging into the open I might betray my presence.

But Mabel's action in coming there to meet this man, whoever he was, puzzled me greatly. Why had she not met him in London, I wondered? Could he be such an unpresentable lover that a journey to London was impossible? It is not an uncommon thing for a well-born girl to fall in love with a laborer's son any more than it is for a gentleman to love a peasant girl. Many a pretty girl in London to-day has a secret admiration for some young workman or good-looking groom on her father's estate, the seriousness of the unspoken love lying in the utter impossibility of its realization.

With ears and eyes open, I went on, taking advantage of all the shadow I could, but it seemed as though, having nearly five minutes' start of me, they had taken a different direction to that which I believed.

At last I gained the comparative gloom of the old beech avenue which led straight down to the lodge on the Dilwyn road, and continued along it for nearly half a mile, when suddenly my heart leaped for joy, for I distin-

guished before me the two figures walking together and engaged in earnest conversation.

My jealous anger was in an instant aroused. Fearing that they might hear my footsteps on the frozen road, I slipped outside the trees upon the grass of the park, and, treading noiselessly, was soon able to approach almost level with them without attracting attention.

Presently, on the old stone bridge across the river which formed the outlet of the lake, they halted, when, concealing myself behind a tree, I was enabled, by the light of the moon which had fortunately now grown brighter, to clearly see the features of Mabel's mysterious companion. I judged him to be about twenty-eight, an ill-bred, snub-nosed, yellow-haired, common-looking fellow, whose hulking form, as he leaned against the low parapet, was undoubtedly that of an agriculturist.

His face was hard-featured and prematurely weather-beaten, while the cut of his clothes was distinctly that of the "ready-made" emporium of the country town. His hard felt hat was cocked a little rakishly.

As far as I could observe, he seemed to be treating Mabel with extraordinary disdain and familiarity, addressing her as "Mab" and lighting a cheap cigarette in her presence, while on her part she seemed rather ill at ease, as though she were there under compulsion rather than by choice.

She had dressed herself warmly, in a thick frieze driving-cape and a close-fitting peaked cap, which, drawn over her eyes, half-concealed her features.

"I really can't see your object, Herbert," I heard her distinctly argue. "How could such an action possibly benefit you?"

"A lot," the fellow answered, adding in a rough, uncouth voice: "What I say I mean. You know that, don't yer?"

"Of course," she answered. "But why do you treat me in this manner? Think of the risks I run in meeting you here to-night! What would people think if it were known?"

"What do I care what people think?" he exclaimed carelessly. "Of course, you've got to keep up appearances—fortunately, I ain't."

"But you surely won't do what you threaten!" she exclaimed, in a voice of blank dismay. "Remember that our secrets have been mutual. I have never betrayed you—never in any single thing."

"No, because you knew what would be the result if you did," he laughed sneeringly. "I never trust a woman's word—I don't. You're rich, now the old man's dead, and I want money," he said decisively.

"But I haven't any yet," she replied.

"When will you have some?"

"I don't know. There are all sorts of law formalities to go through first, so Mr. Greenwood says."

"Oh, a curse on Greenwood!" the fellow burst forth. "He's always with you up in London, they say. Ask him to get you some money from the lawyers. Tell him you're hard up—got to pay bills, or something. Any lie will do for him."

"Impossible, Herbert," she answered, trying to remain calm. "You must really be patient."

"Oh, yes, I know!" he cried. "Call me 'good dog,' and all that. But that kind of game don't suit me—you hear? I've got no money, and I must have some at once—to-night."

"I haven't any," she declared.

"But you've got lots of jewelry and plate and stuff. Give me some of that, and I can sell it easily in Hereford to-morrow. Where's that diamond bracelet the old man gave you for a present last birthday—the one you showed me?"

"Here," she replied, and raised her wrist, showing him the beautiful diamond and sapphire ornament her father had given her.

"Give me that," he said. "It'll last me a day or two until you get me some cash."

She hesitated, evidently indisposed to accede to such a request and more especially as the bracelet was the last present her father had made her. Yet, when he repeated his demands in a

more threatening tone, it became plain that the fellow's influence was supreme, and that she was as helpless as a child in his unscrupulous hands.

The situation came upon me as an absolute revelation. I could only surmise that a harmless flirtation, in the years before her affluence, had developed into this man presuming upon her good nature; and, finding her generous and sympathetic, he had now assumed an attitude of mastery over her actions.

The working of the rustic mind is most difficult to follow. To-day in rural England there is so very little real gratitude shown by the poor toward the rich that, in the country districts, charity is almost entirely unappreciated, while the wealthy are becoming weary of attempting to please or improve the people. Your British rustic of to-day, while perfectly honest in his dealings with his own class, cannot resist dishonesty when selling his produce or his labor to the rich man. It seems part of his religion to get, by fair means or by foul, as much as he can out of the lord of the manor, and then abuse him in the village ale-house and dub him a fool for allowing himself to be thus cheated.

Much as I regret to allege it, nevertheless, it is plain and bitter truth that swindling and immorality are the two most notable features of English village life at the present moment.

I stood listening to that strange conversation between the millionaire's daughter and her secret lover, immovable and astounded.

The arrogance of the fellow caused my blood to boil. A dozen times as he sneered at her insultingly, now cajoling, now threatening, and now making a disgusting pretense of affection, I felt impelled to rush out and give him a thrashing. I refrained only because I recognized that in this affair, so serious was it, I could best assist Mabel by remaining concealed and using my knowledge of it to her advantage later on.

Without doubt, she had, in her girlish inexperience, once believed herself in love with the fellow, but now the hideousness of the present situation was presented to her in all its vivid reality, and she saw herself hopelessly involved. Probably it was with a vain hope of extricating herself that she had kept the appointment; but, in any case, the man whom she called Herbert was quick to detect that he held all the honors in the game.

"Now, come," he said at last, in his broad brogue, "if you really ain't got no money on you, hand over that bracelet, and ha' done with it. We don't want to wait 'ere all night, for I've got to be in Hereford first thing in the morning. So the least said the better."

I saw that, white to the lips, she was trembling in fear of him, for she shrank from his touch, crying: "Ah, Herbert, it is too cruel of you—too cruel—after all I've done to help you. Have you no pity, no compassion?"

"None," he growled. "I want money, and must have it. In a week you've got to pay me a thousand pounds—you hear that, don't you?"

"But how can I? Wait, and I'll give it to you later—indeed, I promise."

"I tell you I ain't going to be fooled," he cried angrily. "I mean to have the money, or else I'll blow the whole thing. Then where'll you be—eh?" And he laughed a hard, triumphant laugh, while she shrank back pale, breathless, and dismayed.

I clenched my fists, and to this moment I do not know how I restrained myself from springing from my hiding-place and knocking the fellow down. At that moment I could have killed him where he stood.

"Ah!" she cried, her hands clasped in a gesture of supplication, "you surely don't mean what you say! You can't mean that, you surely can't! You'll spare me, won't you? Promise me!"

"No, I won't spare you," was his brutal reply, "unless you pay me well."

"I will, I will," she assured him, in a low, hoarse voice, which was eminently that of a desperate woman, terrified lest some terrible secret of hers should be exposed.

"You know," he sneered, with curling lip, "you treated me with contempt once, because you were a fine lady; but I'm yet to have my revenge, as you will see. You're now mistress of a big fortune, and I tell you straight to your face that I intend you to share it with me. Act just as you like, but recollect what refusal will mean to you—exposure!"

"Ah!" she cried desperately, "to-night you have revealed yourself in your true light. You brute, you would, without the slightest compunction, ruin me!"

"Because, old girl, you ain't playing straight," was his cool, arrogant reply. "You thought that you'd got rid of me forever, eh, my charmer? But here I am, you see, back again, ready to—well, to be pensioned off, shall we call it? Don't think I intend to allow you to fool me this time, so just give me the bracelet as a first instalment, and say no more." And he snatched at her arm, while she, by a quick movement, avoided him.

"I refuse," she cried, with a fierce and sudden determination. "I know you now. You are brutal and inhuman, without a speck of either love or esteem—a man who would drive a woman to suicide in order to get money. Now you have been released from prison, you intend to live upon me—your letter, with that proposal, is sufficient proof. But I tell you here to-night that you will obtain not a penny more from me beyond the money that is now paid you every month."

"To keep my mouth closed," he interrupted. And I saw an evil, murderous glitter in his black eyes.

"You need not keep it closed any longer," she said, in open defiance. "Indeed, I shall tell the truth myself, and thus put an end to this brilliant blackmailing scheme of yours. So now, you understand," she added firmly, with a courage that was admirable.

A silence fell between them for a moment, broken only by the weird cry of an owl.

"Then that's your decision, eh?" he inquired, in a hard voice, while I noticed that his face was white with anger and chagrin as he recognized that, if she told the truth and faced the consequence of her own exposure, whatever it might be, his power over her would be dispelled.

"My mind is made up. I have no fear of any exposure you may make concerning me."

"At any rate, give me that bracelet," he demanded savagely, with set teeth, grasping her arm and trying by force to undo the clasp.

"Let me go!" she cried. "You brute! Let me go! Would you rob me, as well as insult me?"

"Rob you!" he muttered, his coarse, white face wearing a dangerous expression of unbridled hatred. "Rob you!" he hissed, with a foul oath, "I'll do more. I'll put you where your cursed tongue won't wag again, and where you won't be able to tell the truth!"

And before I was aware of his intentions he had seized her by the wrists, and, with a quick movement, forced her backward so violently against the low parapet of the bridge, that for a moment they stood locked in a deadly embrace.

Mabel screamed, on realizing his intentions, but next second, with a vile imprecation, he had forced her backward over the low wall, and, with a loud splash, she fell helplessly into the deep, dark waters.

In an instant, while the fellow took to his heels, I dashed forward to her rescue, but, alas! too late, for, as I peered eagerly down into the darkness, I saw to my dismay that the swirling, icy flood had closed over her, that she had disappeared.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE CROSSWAYS AT OWSTON.

The sound of the assassin's fast-receding footsteps, as he escaped down the dark avenue toward the road, awakened me to a keen sense of my responsibility, and in an instant I had divested myself of my overcoat and

coat, and stood peering anxiously into the darkness beneath the bridge.

Those seconds seemed hours, until I caught sight of a flash of white in midstream, and without a moment's hesitation I dived in after it.

The shock of the icy water was a severe one, but I am a strong swimmer, and neither the intense coldness nor the strength of the current interfered much with my progress as I struck out toward the unconscious girl. Having seized her, however, I had to battle severely to prevent being swept out around the bend where I knew that the river, joined by another stream, broadened out, and where any chances of effecting a rescue would be very small.

For some minutes I struggled with all my might to hold the unconscious girl's head above the surface, yet so strong was the swirling flood, with its lumps of floating ice, that all resistance seemed impossible, and we were both swept down for some distance until at last, summoning a final effort, I managed to strike out with my senseless burden and reach a shallow, where I was able, by dint of fierce struggling, to land and to drag the unfortunate girl up the frozen bank.

I had once, long ago, attended an ambulance-class, and now, acting upon the instructions I had there received, I set at once to work to produce artificial respiration. It was hard work, with my wet clothes freezing stiff upon me, but still I persevered, determined, if possible, to restore her to consciousness, and this I was able to do within half an hour.

At first she could utter no word, and I did not question her. Sufficient was it for me to know that she was still alive, for when first I had brought her to land I believed that she was beyond human aid, and that the dastardly attempt had been successful.

She shivered from head to foot, for the night wind cut like a knife, and presently, at my suggestion, she rose, and, leaning heavily upon my arm, tried to walk. The attempt was at first only a feeble one, but presently she quickened her pace slightly, and, without either of us mentioning what had occurred, I conducted her up the long avenue back to the house. Once within, she declared that it was unnecessary to call Mrs. Gibbons. In low whispers she implored me to remain silent regarding what had occurred. She took my hand in hers and held it.

"I want you, if you will, to forget all that has transpired," she said, deeply in earnest. "If you followed me and overheard what passed between us, I want you to consider that those words have never been uttered. I—I want you to——" she faltered, and then paused without concluding her sentence.

"What do you wish me to do?" I inquired, after a brief and painful silence.

"I want you still to regard me with some esteem, as you always have done," she said. "I don't like to think that I've fallen in your estimation. Remember, I am a woman—and may be forgiven a woman's impulses and follies."

"You have not fallen in my estimation at all, Mabel," I assured her. "My only regret is that the scoundrel made such an outrageous attempt upon you. But it was fortunate that I followed you, although I suppose I ought to apologize to you for acting the eavesdropper."

"You saved my life," was her whispered answer, as she clung to my hand. Then she crept swiftly and silently up the big staircase and was lost to view.

Next morning she appeared at the breakfast-table, looking apparently little the worse for her narrow escape, save, perhaps, that around her eyes were dark rings that told of sleeplessness and terrible anxiety. But she, nevertheless, chatted merrily, as though no care weighed upon her mind. While Gibbons was in the room serving us she could not speak confidentially, but as she looked across at me, her glance was full of meaning.

At last, when we had finished and had walked together across the great hall back to the library, I said to her:

"Shall you allow the regrettable incident of last night to pass unnoticed? If you do, I fear that man may make another attempt upon you. Therefore,

it will surely be better if he understands, once and for all, that I was a witness of his dastardly cowardice."

"No," she replied, in a low, pained voice. "Please don't let us discuss it. It must pass."

"Why?"

"Because if I were to seek to punish him he might bring forward something—something that I wish kept secret."

Surely it was all a strange and most remarkable enigma from beginning to end! From that winter night, when I had found her on the highway near Helpstone, until that very moment, mystery had piled upon mystery, and secret upon secret, until, with Burton Blair's decease, and with the pack of tiny cards he had so curiously bequeathed to me, the problem had assumed gigantic proportions.

"That man would have murdered you, Mabel," I said. "You are in fear of him?"

"I am," she answered simply, her gaze fixed across the lawn and park beyond, and she sighed.

"But ought you not to assume the defensive, now that the fellow has deliberately endeavored to take your life?" I argued. "His villainous action last night was purely criminal!"

"It was," she said, in a blank, hollow voice, turning her eyes upon me. "I had no idea of his intention. I confess that I came down here because he compelled me to meet him. He has heard of my father's death, and now realizes that he can obtain money from me; that I shall be forced to yield to his demands."

"You may surely tell me his name," I said.

"Herbert Hales," she replied, not, however, without some hesitation. Then she added: "But I wish, Mr. Greenwood, you would do me a favor and not mention the painful affair again. You do not know how it upsets me, or how much depends upon that man's silence."

I promised, although before doing so I tried to induce her to give me some clue to the nature of the secret held by the man. But she was still obdurate, and refused to tell me anything.

That the secret was something which affected herself or her own honor seemed quite plain, for, at every suggestion of mine to bring the fellow face to face with her, she shrank in fear of the startling revelation he could make.

I wondered whether that document, for her eyes only, which had been written by the man now dead, and which she had destroyed on the previous night, had any connection with the secret known to Herbert Hales. Indeed, whatever the nature of that fellow's knowledge, it was potent enough to compel her to travel down from London in order, I supposed, to arrange terms with him, if possible.

Fortunately, however, the household at Mayvill was unaware of the events of the previous night, and when at midday we left again to return to London, Gibbons and his wife stood at the door and wished us both a pleasant journey.

The house steward and his wife believed that the object of our flying visit was simply to search the dead man's effects; and, with the natural curiosity of servants, both were eager to know whether we had discovered anything of interest, although they did not question us directly. Inquisitiveness increases with a servant's trustworthiness, until the confidential servant usually knows as much of his master's or mistress' affairs as they do themselves. Burton Blair had been particularly fond of the Gibbonses, and it almost seemed as though the latter considered themselves slighted by not being informed of every disposition made by their dead master in his will.

As it was, we only told them of one, the legacy of two hundred pounds apiece, which Blair had left them, and this had, of course, caused them the most profound gratification.

Having left Mabel at Grosvenor Square, and taken lingering leave of her, I returned at once to Great Russell Street and found that Reggie had just returned from the warehouse in Cannon Street.

Acting upon my sweet little friend's appeal, I told him nothing of the exciting incident of the previous night.

All I explained was the searching of Blair's writing-table and what we had discovered there.

"Well, we ought, I think, to go and see that house by the crossways," he said, when he had seen the photograph. "Doncaster is a quick run from King's Cross. We could get there and back to-morrow. I'm interested to see the house to discover which poor Blair tramped all over England. This must have come into his possession," he added, handling the photograph, "without any name or any clue whatever to its situation."

I agreed that we ought to go and see for ourselves; and so, after spending a quiet evening at the Devonshire, we left by the early train next day for Yorkshire. On arrival at Doncaster we took a carriage and drove out upon the broad, snowy highroad through Bentley for about six miles or so, until, after skirting Owston Park, we came suddenly upon the crossroads where stood the lonely old house, just as shown in the photograph.

It was a quaint, old place, like one of those old toll-houses one sees in ancient prints, the old bar being, of course, missing. The gate-post, however, still remained, and snow having fallen in the night, the scene presented was truly wintry and picturesque.

The antique house, with its broad, smoking chimney at the end, had apparently been added to since the photograph had been taken, for at right angles was a new wing of red brick, converting it into quite a comfortable abode.

Yet, as we approached, the old place rising out of the white, snow-covered plain breathed mutely of those forgotten days when the York and London coaches passed it, when masked gentlemen-of-the-road lurked in those dark, fir plantations which stood out beyond the open common at Kirkhouse Green, and when the post-boys were never tired of singing the praises of those wonderful cheeses at the old "Bell" in Stilton.

Our driver passed the place, and about a quarter of a mile farther on we stopped him, alighted, and walked back together, ordering the man to await us.

On knocking at the door, an aged old woman in cap and ribbons opened it, whereupon Reggie, who assumed the position of spokesman, made excuse that we were passing, and, noticing by its exterior that the place was evidently an old toll-house, could not resist the inducement to call and request to be allowed to look within.

"I'm sure you're very welcome, gentlemen," answered the woman, in her broad, Yorkshire dialect. "It's an old place, and lots o' folk have been here and looked over it in my time."

Across the room were the black old beams of two centuries before; the old chimney-corner looked warm and cozy, with its oaken, well-polished settle, and the big pot simmering upon the fire. The furniture, too, was little changed since the old coaching days, while about the place was a general air of affluence and comfort.

"You've lived here a long time, I suppose?" Reggie inquired, when we had glanced around and noted the little lancet window in the chimney-corner whence the toll-keeper in the old days could obtain a view for miles along the highroad that ran away across the open moorlands.

"I've been here this three-and-twenty years come next Michaelmas."

"And your husband?"

"Oh, he's here," she laughed, then called: "Come here, Henry; where are you?" And then she added: "He's never left here once since he came home from sea eighteen years ago. We're both so very attached to the old place. A bit lonely, folks would call it, but Burghwallis is only a mile away."

At mention of her husband's return from sea, we both pricked up our ears. Here was evidently the man for whom Burton Blair had searched the length and breadth of England.

A door opened, and there came forward a tall, thin, wiry old man with white hair and a pointed gray beard. He had evidently retired on our arrival in order to change his coat, for he wore

a blue reefer-jacket which had seen but little wear, but the collar of it was twisted, showing that he had only that moment assumed it.

His face was deeply creased with long, straight furrows across the brows; the countenance of a man who for years had been exposed to rigors of wind and weather in varying climates.

Having welcomed us, he laughed lightly when we explained our admiration for old houses. We were Londoners, we explained, and toll-houses and their associations with the antiquated locomotion of the past always charmed us.

"Yes," he said, in a rather refined voice for such a rough exterior, "they were exciting days, those. Nowadays the motor-car has taken the place of the picturesque coach and team, and they rush past here backward and forward, blowing their horns at every hour of the day and night. Half the time we have a constable lying in wait in the back garden ready to time them on to Campsall, and take 'em to the Petty Sessions afterward!" he laughed. "And fancy this at the very spot where Claude Duval held up the Duke of Northumberland and afterward gallantly escorted Lady Mary Percy back to Selby."

TO BE CONTINUED.

THE HIGHLANDERS' NEW-YEAR

OF all the customs peculiar to British regiments, none is more picturesque than the manner in which the Seaforth Highlanders welcome the New-year. Like the villagers of Oberammergau, the soldiers become actors for the time being.

At half-past ten on Hogmanay the regiment assembles in the barrack square. A little later the oldest soldier in the battalion, dressed as a Druid, makes his appearance amid a flourish of trumpets, and ascending the improvised throne he calls on the ancient veterans to show their uniforms and achievements of bygone times. To the music of pipe and brass bands, veteran after veteran, arrayed in the uniforms worn by the regiments at different periods, marches past and salutes the Druid. The Druid then toasts "the Seaforth Highlanders."

After a display of Highland dancing, the alarm is sounded, and the next oldest soldier, arrayed as Father Time, approaches. The veterans now retreat, leaving their honors to be guarded by their successors, and Father Time expels the Druid.

At the last stroke of midnight a loud knock is heard at the gate, and out rings the sentry's challenge: "Halt! Who goes there?"

"The New-year!" comes back the answer.

"Advance, New-year, and give the countersign!"

"Cabar feidth gu brath!"—the clan cry of the Mackenzies, i. e., the Seaforths. "Pass, New year! All's well!"

The gate is then opened, and the youngest boy in the battalion enters, dressed as the high chief of ancient Ross, to represent the New-year. The colonel shakes hands with the boy, while the band strikes up "A Guid New-year to Ane and A'." After the colonel's greetings to the battalion, the national anthem is played, and the men fall out.

A Chat With You

IT is seldom that we venture, or indeed wish to, disagree with our readers. We generally live together like one great big family. We are all working to the same end, that of producing the biggest and best magazine on earth. We go after the writers, collect the stories, get out the big editions that go to press every month. Our readers help us with friendly criticism, with praise which we hope we deserve, with hearty good-will and good wishes that help us more than all beside. Before we start an argument with the reader whose letter we print below, we wish to compliment him on his literary style, on that brevity which is the soul of wit, and on that forcible directness which is the father of conviction.

Here is the letter:

J. W. McWane,
1021 First National Bank Bldg.,
Birmingham, Ala., Nov. 9, '06.

Gentlemen: When you said last month that The Popular would be improved, I didn't believe you could do it. I apologize. From B. M. Bower down there's nothing better to be read. Take it from me as a holy truth: you won't improve the mag. any more. If December isn't the limit, don't try for it. It's good enough. We're all satisfied.

Sincerely yours,
W. W. Woodbridge.

We accept the apologies, but we disagree with other statements in the letter. Mr. Woodbridge says we can't improve the magazine any further. We contradict him absolutely and without reservation. We *can* improve the magazine, and, what is more, we are going to do it.

* * *

WE must improve the magazine. We can't rest on our oars or point to past achievements. We owe it to you to do better. Your encouragement, your steady support, your outspoken approval of the work we have done so far places a moral responsibility upon us. We owe it to you to give you the very best collection of short stories possible each month. That best becomes a little better with every issue. Our organization for securing the first reading of the fiction of the world is more nearly perfect than it was a month ago. We can see farther in advance now; we have more authors under contract with us; we are working harder and more earnestly, with more enthusiasm and confidence than ever before. We have a number of arguments to offer Mr. Woodbridge. This month's issue is the first, next month's

is the second. Each of these numbers is better than the December number. There are still better to follow.

A NUMBER of readers have asked for more of the work of Mr. J. Kenilworth Egerton, whose series of "Mesmeric Mysteries" has attracted so much attention. We have just concluded a contract with Mr. Egerton which covers everything he writes for the next year. Every issue of THE POPULAR henceforth will contain a story of his. None of his stories will appear elsewhere. We have also made arrangements for future work with B. M. Bower; with W. B. M. Ferguson, the first of whose medical stories appears in this issue; with Charles Kroth Moser; and with many others of whom we will talk later.

AND now for a few words about the February number of THE POPULAR. The novel entitled "The Man Who Was Buried" is by Crittenden Marriott. It contains one of the best sustained and most puzzling mysteries ever conceived. We defy any of our readers to guess at its solution until the end of the story. The short story by C. T. Revere, "The Wrong Wagon," is a tale of the Northwest, full of grim significance and color, convincing from the fact that it is a photograph of real life. This story alone would make a name for any publication. "At the End of the Drag-Rope," by T. Jenkins Hains, is a story of the sea, of the same high literary quality, full of the same thrilling interest and conviction. "Swords Out for the Saxon," by George Bronson-Howard, is a complete novelette, the scenes laid in the Orient, with which the author is so familiar. "Brothers of the Blood," by C. K. Moser, is another of this author's tales of Chinatown, the best he has written yet. We know of at least four other magazines which have tried to secure the story, but we determined that our readers wanted it, and we got it for them. "At Ten-mile," by George Hyde, is a splendid example of the strength and virility of the American writer of the new school. "The Way of the Wanderer," by Louis Joseph Vance, is another of O'Rourke's adventures. B. M. Bower has contributed "The Reveler," one of the most original of Western tales; and, besides that, there are two of the best detective stories we have ever read. Don't tell us that we can't improve the magazine! We know better. We think you will indorse our statement when you see the later numbers. Write us in any case, and let us have your views on the matter.

OUR READERS SAY "BRAVO!"

Enthusiastic Over It.

YARDLEY, PA.

I have taken THE POPULAR since the second or third number, and am enthusiastic over it. I read it every month from cover to cover, and consider it by all odds the best magazine ever published. I have recommended it to many of my friends and patients, and they have all thanked me for doing so. You will lose few subscribers by raising the price. I could not do without THE POPULAR if it cost thirty-five cents.

ARTHUR WAREHAM, M. D.

"Nothing Better to be Read."

1021 FIRST NATIONAL BANK BUILDING,
BIRMINGHAM, ALA.

When you said last month that THE POPULAR would be improved, I didn't believe you could do it. I apologize. From B. M. Bower down, there's nothing better to be read. Take it from me as a holy truth: you won't improve the mag. any more. If December isn't the limit, don't try for it. It's good enough. We're all satisfied.

W. W. WOODBRIDGE.

"It Touches the Spot."

50 PLEASANT STREET,
MOUNT AIRY, PHILADELPHIA, PA.

It is with pleasure that I note the increased size of THE POPULAR. As for me, it is the one magazine of those which I read that "touches the spot." My best wishes for its continued success.

WM. FORD.

"The Price Should Be Fifty Cents!"

622 FOURTH AVENUE, CEDAR RAPIDS, IA.

I have been a reader of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE from the first number, and in my opinion it was worth fifteen cents before it was enlarged. As it is now, it is in a class by itself, and the price should be fifty cents. I would still read it if it cost even twice that.

R. E. WALKER.

"O. K."

BOX 343, FULTON, KY.

I have been reading THE POPULAR ever since its first issue, and have always found the stories very interesting. I gladly paid the extra nickel for the December issue, and thought it exceedingly cheap at this price. Your authors and their stories are all O. K., and it seems that you improve with every issue; and each story I read seems to be just a little better than the other one.

J. MARSHALL TYLER.

"The Best—Regardless of Price."

58 SHAWMUT STREET, LEWISTON, ME.

I read a great many magazines, and began reading THE POPULAR in 1904. In my opinion it is the best magazine published, regardless of price.

E. H. WALKER.

"The Only One."

Care FAIRCHILD & SHELTON CO.,
BRIDGEPORT, CONN.

I have had THE POPULAR for some time, and find it the only magazine I care for. I hope you will continue to publish J. Egerton's writings, author of "A Mesmeric Mystery," etc., in your later volumes.

WILLIAM W. JACKSON.

Ahead of All the Other Magazines.

179 NORMAL AVENUE, BUFFALO, N. Y.

I want to add my mite to the many congratulatory letters you have received regarding THE POPULAR. I have taken THE POPULAR ever since its first number, as well as all the other magazines on the market, and I want to say that there is not one of the others that can come anywhere near you in absorbing interest of the articles you publish. I have often wondered how you could sell such a magazine for ten cents, as I would willingly pay three or four times that amount for the pleasure I get from it every month.

JAS. L. CORNER.

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

THE UP-TO-DATE MAN

SO-CALLED formal dress has been stripped of much of its formality within recent years. Time was, and not so long ago, when the frock coat—"Prince Albert" it is often, if vulgarly, called—was deemed an inseparable accompaniment of afternoon dress. With the frock one wore a white shirt laundered to boardlike stiffness, a high collar that must have been polite martyrdom, and shoes of toothpick pointedness. "Dressing up" was then a function to be dreaded, for it meant acute bodily discomfort, and, to the untutored, some mental anguish, as well. All this has been changed. Comfort has become the supreme consideration in dress for every occasion.

It is a perfectly obvious principle that a man cannot look at ease unless he feels at ease. If the collar throttles, the shirt compresses, the shoes pinch, the gloves bind, and the coat and trousers fit tightly, one loses that poise which society accepts as the badge of true breeding. We dress rationally to-day, therefore we dress better. Instead of aiming for elaborateness, we aim for simplicity. Instead of following blindly a set of petty rules which tend to make men look like a lot of beads—all threaded on one string—we exercise our own taste and express our own individuality. To be sure, there are certain standards in dress which everybody who pretends to refinement accepts. Still, the personality of him who wears the clothes should be always, if delicately, accentuated.

The Proper Frock Coat.

The frock coat and its accessories are worn at church and house weddings, afternoon visits, matinées, promenade, church, and also indoor shows of a public character. The coat is made of black or gray vicuna, worsted, or cheviot. Care should be taken to choose a fabric with a soft, slightly rough surface,

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¶ SMITH'S contains departments for women conducted by Grace Margaret Gould and Mrs. Augusta Prescott. It has special articles written by Charles Cochrane, Charles Battell Loomis, C. H. Forbes-Lindsay. Channing Pollock contributes each month an article on dramatic topics.

¶ The fiction is the best work of such writers as Elmore Peake, Anne O'Hagan, Annie Hamilton Donnell, Edwin L. Sabin, Robert Barr, William Hamilton Osborne, W. B. M. Ferguson and Dane Coolidge.

¶ SMITH'S has acquired exclusive rights to all the future work of Charles Garvice, Mary J. Holmes and Mrs. Georgie Sheldon.

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as this adjusts itself more readily to the curves and peculiarities of the figure. The lapels are rolled and silk-faced to the buttonhole, while the waist-line is rather high and decidedly snug-fitting. Indeed, to look its best and convey an air of trim grace, the coat should be

Correct Afternoon Waistcoat.

very form-clinging, with skirts a trifle flaring or "belled."

With the frock coat, gray-striped trousers not too light in shade nor too conspicuous in pattern are worn. These should be comfortably loose around hip and knee, tapering gradually down to the instep. So-called "peg-top" trousers—that is, trousers which fit tightly over the ankle—have decidedly ungraceful lines and are not good form.

Black waistcoats now seldom accompany the frock coat, because the whole costume is so somber as to need a dash of sprightliness to enliven it. The white waistcoat, single or double-breasted, and made of soft linen or cotton, is preferred. The details of cut and finish are a matter of preference, not propriety. Generally speaking, though, the lapels should be broad and low-lying, that the large tie usually worn may have plenty of room for graceful knotting.

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used, and they do not go ill with the black frock coat. White, however, looks so invitingly fresh and spotless, and contrasts so agreeably with the black coat, that it is the waistcoat color most countenanced. Fancy colors and patterns are to be avoided, especially the beflowered and bedotted, the checked and the striped garments, dear to the dandy of a decade ago.

The correct collar for the frock suit is the poke, straight-stander, or lap-over. The wing is sometimes worn, but it looks much less distinguished than any of the other shapes. The tie is the capacious Ascot or Once-over, knotted so as to give a full and flowing, rather than a flat, effect. This is usually pearl-gray, or plain white. If gray be chosen, it is well to select a shade which matches the suède gloves. Black and fancy Ascots are rarely worn. If the occasion be not very ceremonious, a four-in-hand tie may be substituted for the more formal and dressy Ascot.

The shirt is plain white, not pleated, and the cuffs are always attached. Separable cuffs are in bad taste and breed the suspicion that one is averse to frequent changes of linen. The gloves are gray suède fastening with a single large pearl button. Metal clasps are usually the mark of the cheap, common glove.

Patent-leather shoes generally accompany the frock suit, and they are buttoned, not laced. On account of the excessive popularity of patent leather, varnished calfskin shoes, also buttoned, are much favored by men who like to avoid the too common in dress.

The proper hat is the silk "topper," with a broad cloth or silk ribbon and a gracefully curled brim. The flattish brims introduced this season are becoming to few men.

Spats or gaiters may be worn, if one chooses, and they should be of a color to match the waistcoat. Gray, fawn, buff, white, castor, and drab are the accepted shades.

Sticks are always carried with the frock coat. It is well to avoid the slim, switchy sticks, which seem foppish, and to choose a substantial one that looks as though it were an aid to walking, instead of a useless ornament.

BEAUNASH.

3,303

Salaries Raised

October, 1905	372
November, "	289
December, "	223
January, 1906	266
February, "	251
March, "	363
April, "	288
May, "	424
June, "	231
July, "	193
August, "	230
September, "	173
	3,303

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12 Electrical Engineer
13 Mechanical Draftsman
14 Telephone Engineer
15 Electric Lighting Supt.
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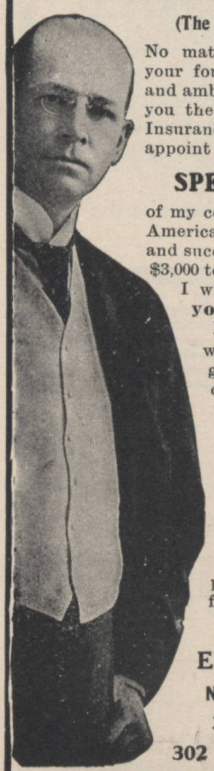

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AGENTS WANTED, male or female, greatest money making business in America; success guaranteed from start; $60 to $75 weekly, easily made, write to-day. Bates Optical Co., Dept. 7, Boston, Mass.

POSITIONS OPEN, $1000-$5000. Write us to-day for "The Right Man in the Right Place," telling ambitious men how to get out of the rut. Hapgoods, 305-307 Broadway, N. Y.

AGENTS WANTED to sell the best Kettles in the World for Cooking, Steaming, Straining Food of all kinds; no more burned or scalded hands, no more food wasted. Sample free. For particulars write American Specialty Stamping Company, Johnstown, Pa.

$25.00 WEEKLY (EITHER SEX). Big snap selling specialties to Catholic Families. No experience required. Globe Mfg. Co., P. O. Box 2103. New York.

BE—YOUR—OWN—BOSS! Many make $2,000 a year. You have the same chance. Start a mail-order business at home. We tell you how. Money coming in daily. Very good profits. Everything furnished. Write at once for our "Starter" and free particulars. Address M. L. Krueger Co., 155 Washington St., Chicago, Ill.

Agents and Help Wanted—Continued.

CLERKS and others with common school educations only, who wish to qualify for ready positions at $25 a week and over, to write for free copy of my new prospectus and endorsements from leading concerns everywhere. One graduate fills $8,000 place, another $5,000 and any number earn $1,500. The best clothing ad writer in New York owes his success within a few months to my teachings. Demand exceeds supply. George H. Powell, Advertising and Business Expert, 254 Metropolitan Annex, New York.

AGENTS EARN $75 to $250 a Month Selling "Novelty Knives." Your name, address, photo underneath handles; also emblems lodges, societies, etc. Finely tempered razor steel blades. Big Profits. Good commission paid. Send 2c. stamp for great special offer to agents. Novelty Cutlery Co., 14 Bar St., Canton, O.

WANTED GOOD LIVE AGENTS in every City, Town and State, in this and foreign countries where steam and electric power is used. Big money for hustlers. Something new and original. Write at once for free sample and terms before the good territory is all gone. Address Dept. B., Canfield Mfg. Co., Ltd., Howard & Lehigh Ave., Philadelphia, Pa.

SALESMEN can easily make $10 a day selling our Gold Window Letters, Novelty Signs, and Changeable Signs. Quick Cash Sales. Unlimited Quantities. Catalogue free. Sullivan Co., 404 W. Van Buren St., Chicago, Ill.

LEARN SCIENTIFIC BUSINESS LETTER-WRITING by mail from man who built up half-a-million-dollar business. Big demand for good correspondents. Prospectus Free. Page-Davis School of Business Letter-Writing, Dept. 171, Chicago, Ill.

WRITERS—Mss. revised and prepared for publication. Inclose 50 cents for cost of revision and our course in story writing. Michigan Press Syndicate, Shepherd, Mich.

WANTED MEN EVERYWHERE. Good pay to distribute Circulars, adv. matter tack signs, etc. No canvassing. 93 National Adv. Bureau, Chicago.

WANTED — UP-TO-DATE, CAPABLE AGENTS to handle high grade cutlery and "fine line guaranteed, low-priced silverware." Lightning sellers in homes, offices, stores, shops. Sample in pocket. Experience unnecessary. Proof given of wonderful sales. E. A. Thomas Mfg. Co., Blk. 154, Dayton, Ohio.

THE HEARWELL TELEPHONE ATTACHMENT makes you hear better and shuts off outside noises. An agency is open for you whether you have a store or are employed. Big opportunity. Hearwell Co., Room 14, 1309 Arch St., Philadelphia, Pa.

Office Supplies

CLEARANCE SALE — Remingtons, Densmores, Williams, $12.50. Franklins, Hammonds, $10. Underwoods, Olivers, $35. Caligraph, $5. Orders filled, or money back. Standard Typewriter Exch., Suite 30, 231 Broadway, N. Y.

OFFICE MANAGERS WANTED —We want men with money and ability—"go and vim"—to open offices in all of the large cities for the sale of our Rotopress and supplies. Write for particulars and specimen of copying. The Rotopress Mfg. Co., Marion, Ind.

SAVE YOUR TYPEWRITER, get better results. Try our Backing Sheets, a composition of linen gum and paper; gives easy touch, deadens sound, improves letters and carbons, saves type and roller, makes old roller like new, tells when near bottom of paper, saves time, etc. 10 cents for postage on sample. Bratton & Rice, Columbus, O.

TYPEWRITERS—our own manufacture, fully guaranteed, at special prices to those who will recommend the "American" to their friends. American Typewriter Co., Broadway below Chambers, New York.

DON'T WEAR OUT YOUR BRAIN adding figures. Get a "Locke Adder," and save your energy for better things. Capacity 999,999,999. Price only $5.00. Booklet free. C. E. Locke Mfg. Co., 375 C. St., Kensett, Iowa, U. S. A.

TYPEWRITERS — CALIGRAPH, $7.50; Hammond, $10.00; Remington, $12.00. All guaranteed. Send for list. Typewriter Co., Desk Y, 43 West 125th St., N. Y. C.

Lawyers & Patents

PATENTS, Trademarks, Labels, Prints and Copyrights. Send for my free book, "How To Get Them." Joshua R. H. Potts, The Patent Attorney, 80 Dearborn St., Chicago, Ill., or 306 Ninth St., N. W., Wash., D. C.

Musical Instruments and Music

GENUINE BARGAINS in high-grade upright pianos. Slightly used instruments; 12 Steinways from $350 up; 6 Webers from $250 up; 9 Krakauers from $250 up; 7 Knabes from $250 up; 3 Chickerings from $250 up; also ordinary second-hand Uprights, $75 up; also 10 very fine Parlor Grand pianos at about half. Write for full particulars. Cash or easy monthly payments. Lyon & Healy, 40 Adams St., Chicago. We ship everywhere on approval.

Jewelry-Novelties Post-Cards & Books

PORTRAIT POST CARDS. Your photo copied on 20 Post Cards for $1.00. Photo returned unharmed. C. G. Gates, Colebrook, N. H.

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN ADVERTISING? Send for handsome prospectus of the new book on the modern Art of Advertising—"The Principles of Practical Publicity." Covers the entire subject in all its manifold branches. For the manufacturer, the advertiser and the student of advertising. Truman A. De Weese, Publisher, Box 82, Buffalo, N. Y.

EVERY PERSON should have their Monogram Designed. We will Design and Beautifully Color 'Yours' on Bristol Board for $1.00. Write Initials Plain. C. E. Isacke & Co., 101 Quincy St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

FREE POST CARDS. Old Witch House, Hawthorne's Birthplace; or, House of Seven Gables, free for 2c. stamp (loose); also catalogue. Historic Salem set 10 for 25c., 5 for 15c., best quality. Salem Card Co., Box 38A, Salem, Mass.

VISITING CARDS—25, name only, 10c.; 50, name and address, 25c.; 18 Fun Cards, 15c.; latest styles, best work. MATTESON, 319 Sta. L, Brooklyn, N. Y.

ORIENTAL TALES AND ARABIAN NIGHTS. The complete, literally translated de luxe edition (very rare). Privately printed in London. Strictly limited to 1000 registered and numbered sets. Containing all the famous Laluze and also all the Letchford full page illustrations. Most gorgeous and beautiful buckram cloth, paper titles, gilt tops. Only 9 sets at just One-Third the regular price. Biggest Book Bargain yet offered. Write at once. Catalogue of other bargains on application. Harcourt Bindery, 425 Fifth Ave., N. Y. City.

BEAUTIFUL CELLULOID Geo. Washington Buttons. 1¼-in. 3c. ea. or 25c. doz. $10 per 1000-with adv. Henderson Novelties, 150 Nassau St., N. Y.

POST CARDS. Your name 1 month in P. C. Exchange List and 5 nice Post Cards, 10c., 3 mos. and 10 cards, 25c., 1 year and 20 cards, all different, 50c. You get cards from everywhere. 8 fine Holiday Postals, 25c. Matteson, 319 Sta. L, Brooklyn, N. Y.

AGENTS—30 sample souvenir postcards, 18c. postpaid; they sell at sight; most beautiful cards published; new subjects. Defiance Photo Studio, 65 West Broadway, N. Y.

CONEY ISLAND Post Cards. Very pretty series showing this famous pleasure resort. Money back if wanted. 10 for 10c. Perkasie Post Card Co., Perkasie, Penna.

SOUVENIR POST CARDS, all kinds of Fancy, View and Comic Cards, Leather Post Cards, 20 different samples 20 cents. Atlas Souvenir Co., 12 East 23d Street, New York, N. Y.

UNEEK FONETIC SPELLER approved by President Roosevelt, 8c. Comic Post Cards, doz 10c. O. K. Theobald, 1219 Vine St., Cincinnati, Ohio.

12 SOUVENIR POST CARDS of New England and Eastern States for 12c. in stamps, or 30 for 25c. All elegant views. The Post Card Exchange, Box 481, Ayer, Mass.

Jewelry, Etc.—Continued.

$1.00 Delivered anywhere in the U. S. A Beautiful Imported Miniature Swiss Clock. Walnut color, a most attractive ornament for office, parlor or den. The case is hand carved and hand finished, put together substantially. Each clock is adjusted and regulated before leaving factory; runs 30 hours with one winding and is a perfect Time Keeper. Height 7 in., width 4½ in. Fitted with new, patent celluloid dial. Order to-day. Supply limited. Satisfaction guaranteed or money refunded. L. M. Rouse, 2647 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

8 TINSEL VIEWS of New York City for 25c. This is a 5c. card. Beautiful Girls with genuine hair for 10c. Frank A. Holmes, Brewster, N. Y.

YOUR PHOTO ON POST CARD $1.00 per doz. Send photo, which will be returned uninjured. J. Sealby, Marine City, Mich.

Real Estate

PEACH FARMS IN ARKANSAS, 5 and 10 acres on monthly payments will net $700 to $1500 yearly. Not a speculation; investment secured. Send for our illustrated book. Fruit Belt Land Co., Oshkosh, Wisconsin.

CASH for your property wherever located. If you want to sell, send description and price. If you want to buy, send for our monthly. Northwestern Business Agency, 397 Bank of Commerce Bldg., Minneapolis, Minn.

TEXAS LAND, in the Panhandle Country. Finest Climate and Richest Soil. Lowest Price. Easy Terms. Thos. J. Pugh, Omaha, Neb.

WANTED—All kinds of Business Opportunities and Real Estate for cash buyers—If you want to sell (no matter where located) send me description and price—Confidential — Established 1881 — References. Frank P. Cleveland, Real Estate Expert, 1506 Adams Express Building, Chicago, Ill.

$500 BUYS a 25-acre, fruit, poultry, vegetable farm, 3-r cottage, Oakdale tract, nr Waverly, Va., midway Richmond & Norfolk. Other farms $10 acre upwards. LaBaume Land Agent, N. & W. Ry. (Dept. 513), Roanoke, Va.

VIRGINIA HISTORIC HOMES on the rivers and bay. Select country homes in the noted Piedmont region and Valley of Virginia. Choice hunting preserves. Free list. H. W. Hilleary & Co., Charlottesville, Va.

CALIFORNIA, GREAT LAND OPENING—Sacramento Valley. Big new irrigation Canal; garden soil; low prices to first purchasers. Easy payments. Address C. M. Wooster Co., 1666 O'Farrell St., San Francisco, to-day for illustrated Catalogue.

SOUTHERN FARMS A SPECIALTY. To buy, sell or exchange Realty, no matter where. Address B. F. Eborn, Birmingham, Ala.

Real Estate—Continued.

$250 TO $1,000 PER YEAR from an acre of Colorado fruit orchard. Why not buy a few acres of fruit land and hold for investment? It is safe, will double and quadruple in value. We offer one or two ten acre tracts, with water, at $50 per acre. Time payments. Write for particulars. Colorado Land Co., Aspen, Col.

Business Opportunities

INVESTORS. We offer Curb, Industrials, Mining and all unlisted securities at attractive prices. Send for price-list, and our monthly which is free. Correspondence solicited. M. T. Reed, Broker, 42 Broadway, New York.

START MAIL-ORDER BUSINESS. Sell goods by mail; cash orders, big profits. Conducted by anyone, anywhere. Our plan positively successful. Absolute satisfaction guaranteed. Write for Free Book. Central Supply Co., Kansas City, Mo.

"ADVERTISERS MAGAZINE"—THE WESTERN MONTHLY should be read by every advertiser and Mail-Order dealer. Best "Ad School" in existence. Trial Subscription 10c. Sample Copy Free. Address 810 Grand Ave., Kansas City, Mo.

START a mail order business; we furnish everything; only few dollars required; new plan, success certain; costs nothing to investigate. Write for particulars. Milburn-Hicks, 706 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago.

FORTUNES from Abalone pearls, jewelry, and marine food products; own cannery and fisheries; few shares $1. each. Abalone Packing Co., 132 Jordon Ave., San Francisco.

START IN A HIGH Class Mail Order Business. Spare time or evening at home. Big money in it. We print you either large or small catalogues with your name on them and supply good jewelry at wholesale. American National Jewelry Co., 311 Wabash Ave., Chicago, Ill.

"INVESTING FOR PROFIT" is worth $10 a copy to any man who intends to invest any money, however small, who has money invested unprofitably, or who can save $5 or more per month, but who hasn't learned the art of investing for profit. It demonstrates the real earning power of money, the knowledge financiers and bankers hide from the masses; it reveals the enormous profits bankers make and shows how to make the same profits; it explains how stupendous fortunes are made and why they are made; how $1,000 grows to $22,000; to introduce my magazine, write me now, and I'll send it six months free. Editor Gregory, 446,77 Jackson Boulevard, Chicago, Ill.

Animals & Pets

ST. ANDREASBERG ROLLER CANARIES and other cage birds, choice imported Goldfish, aquatic plants, aquaria, cages, seeds, etc. Best in the West. Hooey's Bird Store, 527-529 Grand Ave., Milwaukee, Wis., Dept. P.

ENGLISH BLOODHOUNDS, Irish Wolfhounds, Norwegian Bearhounds, Foxhounds. Illustrated Catalog, 4c. stamp. Rookwood Kennels, Lexington, Ky.

Household Goods

PEARL SPOON FREE. Teaspoon of genuine, purest pearl, handsomer than silver or gold, exquisitely blending all tints of the rainbow. Regular price, 25c. This month we offer two for the price of one. Two spoons postpaid, 25c. Satisfaction guaranteed. Pearl Novelty Mfg. Co., 1 Logan Bldg., Philadelphia.

VALUABLE COOK BOOK SENT FREE, 200 recipes, suggestions enabling housewives to save money yet supply the table better. Send to-day to Sargent's Gem Food Chopper, 1153 Leonard Street, New York.

RED CEDAR BOX COUCHES—Only sure protection against moths. Freights prepaid. Direct from factory to consumer. Write for Cat. B., Crane Furniture Co., High Point, N. C.

$3 CARPETS your floor. Reversible Rugs. Beautiful designs. Fast colors. Catalogue. Kensington Art Rug Co., Dept. 10, S. Orange, N. J.

LEARN HOW TO MAKE an Article used in every household on earth, for Five two-cent postage-stamps. Worth several dollars. You buy the article often and can save money making it. The Drymore System, St. Louis, Mo.

DUPONT TOILET BRUSHES—the best made in the world. We will send free to any lover of really good toilet brushes a very interesting booklet explaining how to select a good brush when buying, also how to properly clean and take care of brushes—information that every one should know. Write us and ask for "The Dupont Brush Book," advertised in THE POPULAR MAGAZINE. Give your name and dealer's name also. E. Dupont & Co., 26 and 28 Washington Place, New York City.

Womens Apparel and Toilet Articles

ORIENTAL CREAM removes wrinkles, tan, and freckles. Its use gives a youthful bloom. $1.00 per jar. Dr. Richmond, Ross, North Dakota.

NEW BEAUTY FOR WOMEN. Would you have a form second to none, all flat places made plump and beautiful in contour, and a figure as full, plump and firm as you could desire? The Nadine System of development makes plain women beautiful.

Instructions are also given thin people how to gain 15 to 30 lbs. in weight. Constant care given you by mail until you are entirely developed. Inclose stamp for free sealed package containing photos from life and full information how to develop yourself at home. Address Madame Hastings, R 52 Dearborn St., Chicago.

Schools

TELEGRAPHY taught at home in the shortest possible time. The Omnigraph Automatic Transmitter combined with Standard Key and Sounder. Sends you telegraph messages at any speed just as an expert operator would. 5 styles $2 up. Circular free. Omnigraph Mfg Co., 39N, Cortlandt St., N. Y.

SHORTHAND & TYPEWRITING can be learned by mail. Send for circular and sample lesson. Shorthand Institute, Box 982, Palo Alto, Calif.

Schools—Continued

$3,000 YEARLY. Our Correspondence Course in real estate qualifies you to earn that much or more. Free book. American School of Real Estate, Dept. J, Des Moines, Ia.

N. Y. SCHOOL of Voice Culture. One year's mail-graphaphone course, $27 to $54. Easy payments. Free: $20 Graphaphone, 27 lesson-records, songs, books. Write for booklets, testimonials, guarantee. R. C. Briggs, Prin., Binghamton, N. Y.

LEARN BOOKKEEPING, STENOGRAPHY, Telegraphy and Railway Accounting by mail at your own home, and qualify yourself to earn a larger salary. Prospectus free. Write now. Address Dept. "D," Railway Commercial Correspondence School, 305 American Trust Bldg., Cleveland, Ohio.

CLERKS and others with common school educations only, who wish to qualify for ready positions at $25 a week and over, to write for free copy of my new prospectus and endorsements from leading concerns everywhere. One graduate fills $8,000 place, another $5,000 and any number earn $1,500. The best clothing ad writer in New York owes his success within a few months to my teachings. Demand exceeds supply. George H. Powell, Advertising and Business Expert, 254 Metropolitan Annex, New York.

LEARN HOW TO BUY AND SELL REAL ESTATE. We teach by mail how to become a Real Estate Broker, a profitable business that requires no capital; our course is the highest standard of Real Estate Instruction under the direction of experts. Terms moderate. Write for free booklet "W." United States Real Estate Institute, 200 Broadway, New York.

Miscellaneous

RUBBER HEELS. Hunt's Composite Cushion are anti slip, anti jar, anti wear; thick, tough, light. High grade rubber. No holes, cavities or iron rings. Satisfaction guaranteed. Send 35c. and pattern of heel. F. W. Hunt, 393 Mass. Ave., Boston.

HEADACHE quickly cured by "Ez-it" formula on every package. Not a proprietary medicine, but a physician's prescription. 25c. Dr. Richmond, Ross, North Dakota.

SAVE the retailer's profit. 15c. linen collars any style or size, direct from manufacturer, $1.20 per doz., delivered. Write for catalogue. The Fitwell Collar Co., Box 784, Syracuse, N. Y.

SOCIAL HIT OF CENTURY. 53 playing cards. Illustrated. Two colors. Unkle Sam; Kolumbia; Kaptain Jak; Lawyer, Doctor; Big, Little chiefs; Soldyer; Sayler; Fisherman; Hunter; Cupid, Flag, Drum, Anchor; Eagle. 25 or 50 cents per pack. Ideal Pub. Co., Trevose, Pa.

FOR-URE-FEET. Positively relieves Tired, Chafed, Aching or Sweaty feet. Positive cure for Calloused feet. Mailed for 25 cents. Lino Remedy Co., Westfield, Mass. Send this ad. and 10 cents for trial package to-day.

THE "PNEU-WAY" of lighting gas! Lights Welsbach's without electricity from button on wall! Easily installed, everlasting. Ask your gas company or write Pneumatic Gas Lighting Co., 150 Nassau St., New York. Agency offered.

Miscellaneous—Continued.

MR. SMOKER, save half your tobacco money. Our booklet tells how. Write for it. Unique sample pkg., 10c. Wilda Tobacco Co., Chatham, Va

EASY RELIEF FOR ECZEMA and all other skin affections. By mail 25c., prepaid. C. T. Hawkins, Box 303, Brazil, Ind.

SKIDOO! SKIDOO! SKIDOO! 23 for you if you don't send 10c. for a package of 32 useful articles. E. Paul, Emporia, Kan.

NEW MONEY MAKING IDEA for Fairs. "Capt. Kidd's Treasure Chest" Outfit, (price $1.00) free with $5.00 order for Grab Bag Novelties at Wholesale prices of 25c., 50c., or $1.00 per Doz. Catalogue free. The Entertainment Shop, 99 4th Ave., N. Y.

PLAYS! Ask for catalogues of Howe Pub. Co., Ira, Summit Co., Ohio.

AVOID FATIGUE BY WEARING a Strenuous Suspensory. No straps to bind or chafe; fastens to underwear; it is new; price 75c. Send for circular which explains. Peerless Suspensory Co., Dept. H., Wash., D. C.

BOYS AND GIRLS, your party will be a success if you have my book of games and tricks. A fun-maker only 50c. R. V. Ish, Mayfield, Santa Clara Co., Cal.

STOP SUFFERING FROM RHEUMATISM, wear our famous Electric Insoles; built on the principles of Galvanic Electricity. A positive relief for Rheumatism, Sore or Perspiring Feet; keeps the feet warm and dry. One pair lasts a year. Price 50 cents per pr., 3 pr. $1.25 postpaid. State size of shoe. L. De Ville & Co., Pueblo, Colo.

CORNS, warts, foot sores removed forever painlessly 10 cts. Merritt Co., 38 Riverview, Springfield, Mass.

MOTION PICTURE MACHINES, Film Views, Magic Lanterns, Slides and similar Wonders For Sale. Catalogue Free. We also Buy Magic Picture Machines, Films, Slides, etc. S. Harbach, 809 Filbert Street, Philadelphia, Pa.

OUR VACUUM CAP when used a few minutes each day draws the blood to the scalp, causing free and normal circulation, which stimulates the hair to a new, healthy growth. Sent on trial under guarantee. Write for free particulars. The Modern Vacuum Cap Co., 574 Barclay Block, Denver, Colo.

$5.75 PAID FOR RARE 1853 QUARTERS. Keep all money coined before 1875 and send 10 cents at once for a set of 2 coin and stamp value books. It may mean a fortune to you. Address C. F. Clarke & Co., Room C., LeRoy, N. Y.

RIBBONS:—(40) Silk Cigar Ribbons Printed, assorted in colors especially adapted for fancy work make handsome holiday gifts. Postpaid for $1.00. Money refunded if not satisfactory. Unique Specialty Co., 17 East 101 St., New York.

OPPORTUNITIES describes over 500 positions for high-grade Salesmen, Executive, Clerical and Technical men at $1000-$5000. Sample copy free. Write us to-day stating experience. Hapgoods, 305-307 Broadway, N. Y.

TO THOSE HARD OF HEARING—An efficient Aid sent for trial; no expense, no risk, no contract, no money unless device be kept. Address A. J. Tiemann & Co., 107 Park Row, New York.

Will Start a BUSINESS for You

We have claimed that **THE POPULAR** classified advertising columns would pay a big dividend. We didn't claim anything else—we wanted to be conservative. Now read the following letter. The advertisement occupied eight lines and cost $4.

NEW YORK, November 16, 1906.

POPULAR MAGAZINE,

Gentlemen: As per above date, we wish to inform you that including to-day's mail, according to our key-note, we have received over three hundred (300) orders from our October advertisement, which really has founded a nice business for us. We therefore enclose another ad for your January issue.

Hoping that our interest will be mutual, we beg to remain,

Yours sincerely,

(Signed) UNIQUE SPECIALTY CO.

17 East 101st St. Importers of cigar bands and ribbons.

Think of an advertisement costing $4, bringing over 300 orders and "founding a nice business." What other publication will do likewise at ten or even twenty times the cost?

Read what another and more experienced advertiser says:

FRED B. RESAG & CO.
Manufacturers and Publishers

MEDALLION FRAMES, PICTURE FRAMES, MOLDINGS, ART PICTURES

370 WEST RANDOLPH STREET

CHICAGO, October 12, 1906.

POPULAR MAGAZINE, New York, N. Y.

Gentlemen: The Classified "Adv." which we ran in the September number of your magazine brought us more real business and a greater number of replies than any other medium we have ever used in our seven years' experience as advertisers.

We have used during this time the Classified columns of practically every class of Classified mediums in this country, and from our short acquaintance with your excellent magazine, would say that it is most appropriately named, as we have certainly found it to be very popular with the readers of Classified Advertising.

Enclosed please find our "Ad" for December issue, with our check covering cost of same.

Thanking you for your favors, we are, Very truly yours,

(Signed) FRED B. RESAG & CO.

We publish the above letters to show that **THE POPULAR** is good for the inexperienced, as well as for the experienced. They convince that **THE POPULAR** will *prove* the best for you. They prove that **THE POPULAR** is the *best* advertising proposition to-day, regardless of cost.

Now is the time for you to use **THE POPULAR.** The rate is 50 cents a line—no space less than four lines nor more than twenty lines.

The Classified Advertising forms for February will close on December 20th, for March on January 20th

POPULAR MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Ave., New York

HOW TO SEND ORDERS.—State under which classification you desire your advertisement inserted. Allow about five words to the line. Leave sufficient space for name and address. No display. Send cash with order. Remit by stamps, check or money order.

Spend your own money, your own way.

Does it not seem strange to you that a dealer who tries to substitute, when you ask for an advertised article, should assume that you are not capable of spending your own money? Show him that you are by insisting on getting what you asked for and refusing any substitute. Substitutes pay him a larger profit, otherwise he would give you what you asked for, without question. Manufacturers of advertised articles produce large quantities, being enabled thereby to manufacture cheaply and furnish the public with high grade goods at the price of inferior substitutes.

Substitutes are expensive at any price.

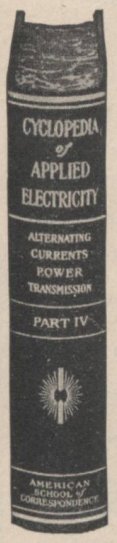
'EVER-READY' SAFETY RAZOR AND 12 Blades $1.00

The Only 12 Bladed Razor in the world selling for less than $5.00. Marvelous mechanism that reduces blade-making to a scientific exactness has made possible **this $5.00 razor for $1.00.** Exhorbitant profit-making will be a thing of the past just as soon as you and your friends have tried **"Ever-Ready"** shaving. **12 blades** as lasting as flint, as true and keen-edged as ever identified a "best" razor—together with safety frame and stropper handle—all in a compact little case for **$1.00.** No knack—no skill required—it's impossible to cut the face. Shaves any growth of beard with pleasurable ease.

Blades can be stropped, but we'll exchange **6** brand **new "Ever-Ready" blades** for 6 dull ones and **25 cents,** any time. We send prepaid **"Ever-Ready"** blades to fit "Gem," "Star" and "Yankee" frames, **6 for 50 cents**—or 12 for 75 cents.

"Ever-Ready" dollar razor sets are sold by **Hardware, Cutlery, Department stores, Jewelers** and **Druggists** throughout America and the world. Remember it's the **"Ever-Ready"** razor you want. Guaranteed to shave your beard or money back. **Mail orders prepaid upon receipt of $1.00.** *Canadian price, $1.25.*

American Safety Razor Co., 299 Broadway, N. Y.



FREE

for five days' examination

Cyclopedia of Applied Electricity

A practical guide for all persons interested in electricity. Five volumes, 2,500 pages—fully indexed—size of pages 8 x 10 inches, bound in ¾ Red Morocco. Over 2,000 full page plates, diagrams, sections, tables, formulæ, etc. Every section written by an acknowledged authority. Prepared especially for practical every day use. Combines the best features of a text book and a reference work.

$19 now—regularly $30

In order to bring to the attention of those interested in electricity the character of our instruction in Electricity, we will send the books on approval, express prepaid. Look them over for five days If satisfactory, send us $2.00 down and $2.00 per month thereafter until paid for; otherwise notify us and we will transfer the books absolutely free.

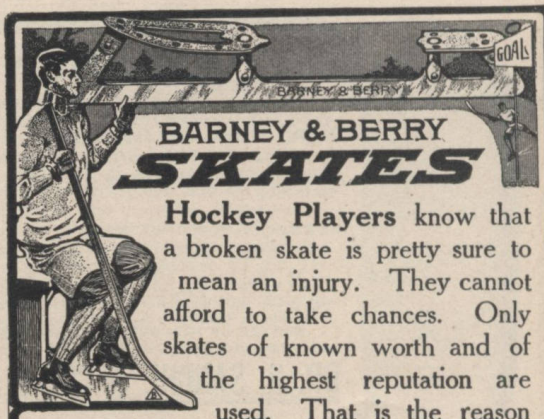
PARTIAL LIST OF CONTENTS.

Magnetism—Wiring, Telegraph. Direct Current Dynamos and Motors. Electric Lighting—Railways—Management of Dynamos and Motors. Alternating Current Machinery—Power Transmission. Telephony, including Common Battery System.

A 200-page handbook giving full information in regard to our courses, in Electrical, Mechanical, Steam and Civil Engineering, Architecture, Heating, Ventilation, Plumbing, etc., sent **FREE** on request.

AMERICAN SCHOOL OF CORRESPONDENCE,
3316-3325 Armour Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Mention Pop. Mag., Jan. '07



BARNEY & BERRY SKATES

Hockey Players know that a broken skate is pretty sure to mean an injury. They cannot afford to take chances. Only skates of known worth and of the highest reputation are used. That is the reason

Barney & Berry Skates

are always selected by the experienced skater. Expert designing, high grade material and careful construction place them high above all other makes.

Send for complete illustrated catalog containing Hockey Rules and directions for building an ice rink.

BARNEY & BERRY,
87 Broad Street, Springfield, Mass.

Our Roller Skate Catalog mailed to those interested.

I want DIFFICULT Eye Cases

I want every man, woman or child afflicted with diseases of the eye to write to me. I don't care who the person is, what their trouble is, or where they live, I wish to convince them that in my Absorption Method there is hope, and you would say so too, if you knew of the many, many cases that I have cured after others termed them hopeless.

America's Master Oculist

Here is one of the hundreds of cases successfully treated by the

MADISON ABSORPTION METHOD

after others termed it hopeless.

Mrs. F. L. Wintermute, 121 2d St., Jackson, Mich., under date of Oct. 18th, '06, writes: "After having been repeatedly told that there was no cure for my cataracts except an operation, today my eyes are perfect by means of your knifeless home treatment. I have regained my vision in six months."

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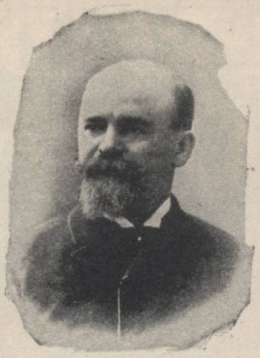

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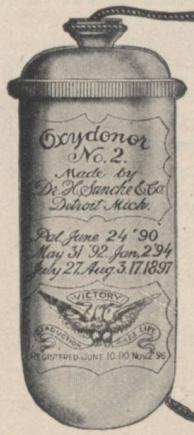

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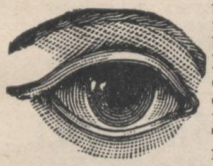

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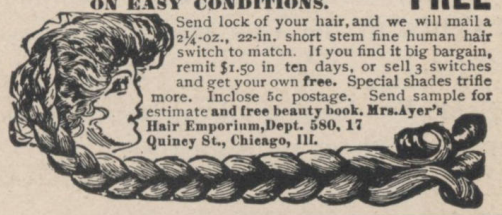

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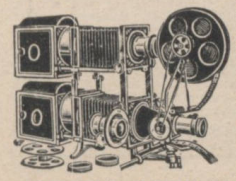

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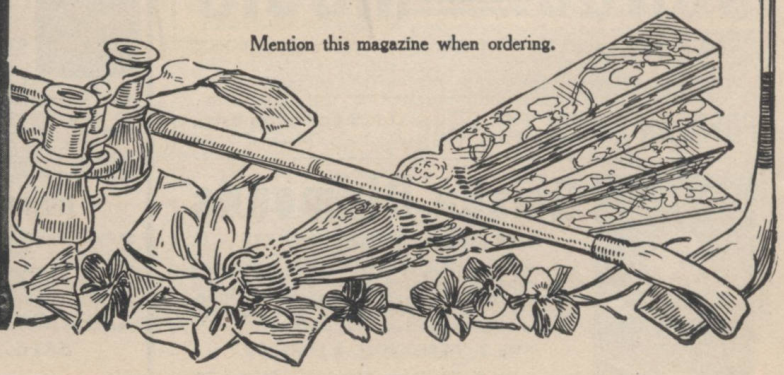

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