



"MY OWN CODE GAVE ME
this raise"



"A LITTLE over a year ago I adopted a code covering my spare time. I decided to systematically devote a portion of it to improving my training, in the thought up-to-date knowledge is an ace in the hole. My hunch was right! That International Correspondence Schools course is directly responsible for this raise. And the way the boss talked, another one is not so far away."

There is no reason why you shouldn't turn your own spare time into real money. The man who makes real money has *real* training. I. C. S. can give you *real* training! The coupon will bring you valuable information—*free*.

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

"The Universal University"

BOX 4912-B, SCRANTON, PENNA.

★ Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, "Who Wins and Why," and full particulars about the subject *before* which I have marked X: ★

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

- | | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architect | <input type="checkbox"/> Telegraph Engineer | <input type="checkbox"/> Plumbing | <input type="checkbox"/> Steam Fitting | <input type="checkbox"/> Air Brakes | <input type="checkbox"/> R. R. Signalman |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architectural Draftsman | <input type="checkbox"/> Telephone Work | <input type="checkbox"/> Heating | <input type="checkbox"/> Ventilation | <input type="checkbox"/> Highway Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Highway Engineering |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Building Estimating | <input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical Engineer | <input type="checkbox"/> Sheet Metal Worker | <input type="checkbox"/> Steam Engineer | <input type="checkbox"/> Chemistry | <input type="checkbox"/> Pharmacy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wood Millworking | <input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical Draftsman | <input type="checkbox"/> Steam Electric Engineer | <input type="checkbox"/> Civil Engineer | <input type="checkbox"/> Coal Mining Engineer | <input type="checkbox"/> Navigation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Contractor and Builder | <input type="checkbox"/> Machinist | <input type="checkbox"/> Surveying and Mapping | <input type="checkbox"/> Refrigeration | <input type="checkbox"/> Textile Overseer or Supt. | <input type="checkbox"/> Air Conditioning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Structural Draftsman | <input type="checkbox"/> Patternmaker | <input type="checkbox"/> R. R. Locomotives | <input type="checkbox"/> R. R. Section Foreman | <input type="checkbox"/> Cotton Manufacturing | <input type="checkbox"/> Boilermaker |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Structural Engineer | <input type="checkbox"/> Heat Treatment of Metal | <input type="checkbox"/> R. R. Bridge and Building Foreman | | <input type="checkbox"/> Woolen Manufacturing | <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Inventing and Patenting | <input type="checkbox"/> Bridge Engineer | | | <input type="checkbox"/> Fruit Growing | <input type="checkbox"/> Poultry Farming |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Electrical Engineer | <input type="checkbox"/> Bridge and Building Foreman | | | <input type="checkbox"/> Marine Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Radio |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Electric Lighting | <input type="checkbox"/> Gas Engines | <input type="checkbox"/> Diesel Engines | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Welding, Electric and Gas | <input type="checkbox"/> Aviation Engines | <input type="checkbox"/> Automobile Mechanic | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reading Shop Blueprints | | | | | |

BUSINESS TRAINING COURSES

- | | | | |
|--|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business Management | <input type="checkbox"/> C. P. Accountant | <input type="checkbox"/> Service Station Salesmanship | <input type="checkbox"/> Railway Mail Clerk |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Office Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Bookkeeping | <input type="checkbox"/> First Year College | <input type="checkbox"/> Grade School Subjects |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Secretarial Work | <input type="checkbox"/> Business Correspondence | <input type="checkbox"/> High School Subjects |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Personnel Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Spanish | <input type="checkbox"/> Lettering Show Cards | <input type="checkbox"/> College Preparatory |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Traffic Management | <input type="checkbox"/> French | <input type="checkbox"/> Stenography and Typing | <input type="checkbox"/> Illustrating |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accountancy | <input type="checkbox"/> Salesmanship | <input type="checkbox"/> Civil Service | <input type="checkbox"/> Cartooning |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Advertising | <input type="checkbox"/> Mail Carrier | |

Name.....Age.....Address.....

City.....State.....Occupation.....

If you reside in Canada, send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada

STREET & SMITH'S

WESTERN STORY

MAGAZINE

Title Registered U. S. Patent Office.

EVERY WEEK

Yearly Subscription, \$6.00

Six Months, \$3.00

Single Copies, 15 Cents

The entire contents of this magazine are protected by copyright, and must not be reprinted without the publishers' permission.

Vol. CXXIX

Contents for April 14, 1934

No. 4

A COMPLETE NOVEL

A Four-eyed Maverick *Robert Ormond Case* 9

A SERIAL

Gun Gift *Max Brand* 101
Part Four

SHORT STORIES

Crazy Cow Thief *Guthrie Brown* 47
The Stickin'est Friends *John Briggs* 57
Hep's Long-lost Uncle *Glenn H. Wichman* 67
Sheriff Ghost *Joseph F. Hook* 75
The Scared Ranger *W. D. Hoffman* 84

TWO ARTICLES

Saddles *Walt King* 95
Cowboy Lingo *Ramon F. Adams* 129
(Continued from Last Week's Issue)

MISCELLANEOUS

He's Going To Dig Gold 94 To Honor Four Indians 128
Bays Calf For Lonesome Cow 128

DEPARTMENTS

The Round-up *The Editor* 131
Mines And Mining *J. A. Thompson* 133
The Hollow Tree *Helen Rivers* 135
Missing 137
Where To Go And How To Get There *John North* 138
Guns And Gunners *Lieut. Charles E. Chapel* 141

Publication issued every week by Street & Smith Publications, Inc., 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y. George C. Smith, Jr., President; Ormond V. Gould, Vice President and Treasurer; Artemas Holmes, Vice President and Secretary. Copyright, 1934, by Street & Smith Publications, Inc., New York. Copyright, 1934, by Street & Smith Publications, Inc., Great Britain. Entered as Second-class Matter, September 4, 1917, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Subscriptions to Cuba, Dom. Republic, Haiti, Spain, Central and South American Countries except The Guianas and British Honduras, \$7.00 per year. To all other Foreign Countries, including The Guianas and British Honduras, \$9.00 per year.

We do not accept responsibility for the return of unsolicited manuscripts.

To facilitate handling, the author should inclose a self-addressed envelope with the requisite postage attached.

STREET & SMITH PUBLICATIONS, INC., 79 7th AVE., NEW YORK, N. Y.





and 55 OTHER Grand Cash Prizes

SEND ONLY THE COUPON BELOW

and we will tell you how YOU can qualify to—

Win \$2,250.00

or Buick Sedan and \$1,250.00 Cash!

HERE'S a lot of cash for some one. Would you like to have it? I am going to give it away. We want to advertise our business quickly and get wide distribution for our products. Someone, maybe you, will receive new Buick Sedan and \$1,250.00 cash extra for promptness or if you win 1st prize and prefer all cash you get \$2,250.00. Duplicate prizes paid in case of ties.

Surely you would like to have this magnificent prize. Then fill in the coupon below and you can easily qualify for the opportunity to win as much as \$2,250.00.

This is our unique way of advertising. We want people everywhere to know us and to share in this great distribution

of money. Besides the first grand prize, \$2,250.00 including promptness, there are 59 other big cash prizes. The second grand prize is \$750.00 cash, third grand prize is \$300.00 cash and many others. Thousands of dollars more in Special Cash Rewards which we will tell you all about when we get your answer. This is your opportunity. Answer today—qualify for your share of this money that must be given away. No subscriptions to buy or sell. No more puzzles to solve. There is nothing hard to do to qualify to win the Buick Sedan, but you must act quick to make the most of this opportunity. Just mail the coupon if you find 5 of the hidden faces. **Do it NOW!**

Can You Find 5 Faces?

It is fun to look for the hidden faces in the trees, clouds, etc., in the picture at the right. Are your eyes sharp enough to find them? Some look straight at you, some are upside down—others are sideways. It is not as easy as some people may think, but don't give up—keep looking and you may find them. When you do, mark them and send your answer right away. **Quick!**

Many people have received big cash prizes from companies with whom I have been associated. Some have received several thousand dollars. Names gladly furnished on request. Answer today and see for yourself if you can win the first prize. Oh Boy! what you could do with \$2,250.00 all in cash at one time. I will be glad to pay it to you if you are adjudged the winner.

Hurry—mark the 5 faces you find, send your answer quick. You may be the one to receive the \$2,250.00 prize.



Send No Money, Just Mail Coupon

FOR Promptness \$1,250.00 EXTRA
or a total of \$2,250 if you are prompt and win 1st prize.

Remember, send not one penny with this coupon—all you do now is to find 5 faces, if you can, and mail the coupon. We will answer you right away and tell you how you stand.

The money to pay every prize is on deposit in a big strong Des Moines bank. Get your share of \$4,305.00 in cash prizes, besides thousands of dollars in Special Cash Rewards. Sixty grand prizes in all. All prizes will be paid promptly. Hurry! Just mark the faces you find and send with coupon right away. Some one wins—maybe you. Send your answer and see for yourself if you win first prize. **DON'T DELAY! ... Mail your answer today.**

G. F. STAYTON, President Dept. 50
1912 Grand Avenue,
Des Moines, Iowa.

I have found 5 faces in the enclosed picture and I want to win. Tell me how I stand.

My name.....

Address.....

City..... State.....

NEW LOW PRICES

2⁵ GOOD YEAR
Firestone Goodrich
 U.S. AND OTHERS

29x4.40-21

THESE TIRES SURE DO LOOK GOOD

YES AND THE YORK GUARANTY BOND PROTECTS YOU

LOWEST PRICES ON EARTH

TIRE USERS by thousands all over the U.S.A. vouch for LONG, HARD SERVICE, under severest road conditions of our standard brand Tires reconstructed by the ORIGINAL SECRET YORK PROCESS. OUR 13 YEARS in business makes it possible to offer tires at LOWEST PRICES in history with 12 month guarantee.—Don't Delay—Order Today

BALLOON TIRES

Size	Rim	Tires	Tubes	Size	Rim	Tires	Tubes
29x4.40-21	\$2.15	\$0.85	30x5.25-20	\$2.35	1.15		
29x4.50-20	2.35	0.85	31x5.25-21	3.25	1.15		
30x4.50-21	2.40	0.85	28x5.50-19	3.35	1.15		
28x4.75-19	2.45	0.95	29x5.50-19	3.35	1.15		
28x4.75-20	2.50	0.95	30x6.00-18	3.40	1.15		
29x5.00-19	2.85	1.05	31x6.00-19	3.45	1.25		
30x5.00-20	2.85	1.05	32x6.00-20	3.65	1.25		
28x5.25-18	2.90	1.15	33x6.00-21	3.75	1.35		
29x5.25-19	2.95	1.15					

REGULAR CORD TIRES

Size	Tires	Tubes	Size	Tires	Tubes
30x3	\$2.25	\$0.65	32x4 1/2	\$3.35	1.15
30x3 3/4	2.35	0.75	33x4 1/2	3.45	1.15
31x4	2.95	0.85	34x4 1/2	3.45	1.15
32x4	2.95	0.85	30x5	3.65	1.35
33x4	2.95	0.85	33x5	3.75	1.45
34x4	3.25	0.85	35x5	3.95	1.55

HEAVY DUTY TRUCK TIRES

Size	Tires	Tubes
30x5 Truck	\$4.25	\$1.95
34x5 Truck	4.25	2.00
32x6 8 ply. Truck	6.95	2.75
32x6 10 ply. Truck	7.95	2.75
34x6 Truck	9.95	3.95
34x7 Truck	9.95	4.25
36x8 Truck	11.45	3.95
40x8 Truck	13.25	4.15

FREE! TIRE GAUGE

WITH EACH ORDER FOR 2 TIRES TAKE TIRE PRESSURE THRU SIDE WALL TIRE NO PUSSE - NO HURT

DEALERS WANTED NRA

YORKTIRE & RUBBER CO.

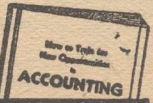
3955-59 Cottage Grove Ave. Dept. 1742 Chicago

LEARN ACCOUNTING

at home at a fraction of the usual cost

New developments in business are creating many new fields and tremendously broadened opportunities for men who know accounting. Train yourself now in spare time for these attractive new openings. Learn by proved method, with identical lecture notes, practice sets, problems and solutions developed by Northwestern University and used in 100 colleges. Graded lessons for Home Study; elementary to advanced accounting, including costs, audits. Thousands have learned this practical, low-cost way; splendid C. P. A. preparation.

Send for this **FREE BOOKLET**, "How to Train for New Opportunities in Accounting," with full details of this great course and easy payment. Write now to **The Ronald Press Company**, Dept. M784, 15 E. 26th St., New York, N.Y.



Got Immediate Relief!

Seventeen Years Later—"Still Enjoying Splendid Health"

December 8, 1916.—"I had asthma for 17 years. I coughed most of the time and couldn't rest, day or night. I tried everything, but grew so weak I could hardly walk across the room. After taking one bottle of Nacor, I could do most of my housework. That was 8 years ago. I am still feeling fine, with no sign of asthma." —Mrs. Mary Bean, R. 3, Nashua, Iowa. July 31, 1933—"I continue in good health and am still praising Nacor. I have no signs of asthma." —Mrs. Mary Bean.

FREE—No need to suffer asthma torture when blessed relief can be yours. For years Nacor has helped thousands. Their letters and booklet of vital information sent FREE. Write to **NACOR MEDICINE CO.**, 638 State Life Bldg., Indianapolis, Ind.

BALD NO LONGER

Mr. A. S. R. of New York City writes: "I had 3 bald spots the size of a half-dollar. I used Japanese Oil for 3 months and now my bald spots are entirely covered with hair."

JAPANESE OIL, the antiseptic counter-irritant, is used by thousands for baldness, falling hair, loose dandruff and scalp itch. Price 50c. Economy size \$1. All druggists.

National Remedy Co., 56 W. 45th St., Dept. SS, N.Y.



WHAT CAUSES EPILEPSY? IS THERE A CURE?

A booklet containing the opinions of famous doctors on this interesting subject will be sent FREE, while they last, to any reader writing to the Educational Division, Dept. SS-1, 545 Fifth Ave., New York, N. Y.

Prostate Sufferers



DR. W. D. SMITH
INVENTOR

An enlarged, inflamed or faulty Prostate Gland very often causes Lamback, Frequent Night Rising, Leg Pains, Pelvic Pains, Lost Vigor, Insomnia, etc. Many physicians endorse massage as a safe effective treatment. (See Reference Book of the Medical Sciences, Vol. VII, 3rd edition.) Use "PROSAGER," a new invention which enables any man to massage his Prostate Gland in the privacy of his home. It often brings relief with the first treatment and must help or it costs you nothing. No Drugs or Electricity.

FREE BOOKLET

EXPLAINS TRIAL OFFER. ADDRESS **MIDWEST PRODUCTS CO.**, B-300, KALAMAZOO, MICH.

NEW DEAL GOVT. JOBS

SALARY TO START \$105 to \$175 MONTHLY

- () Ry. Mail Clerk
- () P. O. Laborer
- () R. F. D. Carrier
- () Special Agent
- () Customs Inspector
- () City Mail Carrier
- () P. O. Clerk
- () Matron
- () Immig't Inspector
- () Typist
- () POSTMASTER
- () Seamstress
- () Auditor
- () Stenographer
- () U.S. Border Patrol
- () Telephone Opr.
- () Watchman
- () Skilled Laborer
- () Statistical Clerk
- () File Clerk

MEN WOMEN
Age Range 18 to 50

INSTRUCTION BUREAU, Dept. 785, St. Louis, Mo. Send me FREE particulars "How to Qualify for Government Positions", marked "Salaries, locations, opportunities, etc. ALL SENT FREE."

Name.....
Address.....

FOOD DISTRIBUTORS

WANTED!

No Experience Needed
—I'll Give You What
Little Training Neces-
sary—No Red Tape—
Earnings Start at Once.



**NEW FORDS
FURNISHED PRODUCERS**

MAKE UP TO \$60.00 A WEEK

I AM now ready to start you in a big-paying route business of your own and back you up to the limit with my proven plans. Full-time Distributors make up to \$60.00 a week—even spare-time workers make up to \$5.00 a day. The business is pleasant and permanent, and produces steady, year 'round earnings. If you are willing to do a fair day's work for a fair day's profit, rush me your name today—get all of the startling details and proven facts *absolutely free*.

Steady Cash Income

Think how wonderful it is to have a good weekly income just from calling upon and supplying people with daily necessities. Have money to pay your nagging bills—buy clothing—help pay off the mortgage or buy yourself a home—put money in the bank—or whatever your heart desires.

Experience or Training Unnecessary

I am not nearly as much interested in your past experience as I am in your willingness to follow a few plain instructions that will tell you the inside workings of this profitable business. I will explain just how you go about distributing Coffee, Tea, Spices, Extracts and many other household necessities to

customers on your route. There is no stock to carry—you fill your orders from my big factory stock. You have entire charge of everything. You work just as many hours as you please, either full or spare time.

Your Own Food Products At Wholesale Prices

When I send you instructions for making money with my new Neighborhood Tea and Coffee Route plan, I also give you rock-bottom wholesale prices on your own groceries and household necessities. This is in addition to your regular daily earnings. So you make big money in cash and save big money on the things you use in your home.

Food Routes Pay Best

Everybody knows there is nothing like a good weekly route for a fine, steady income. These routes pay far better than most because you supply the things people must use in order to live. You simply take care of customers' orders on the route in your locality. Routes established belong to you. You collect all the cash and keep a big share of it just for delivering the goods and taking care of the business. I'll furnish you with hundreds of wonderful premiums to give with Tea, Coffee and other products. Hundreds are waiting to be served in many localities. Earnings mount steadily where you call on established trade. Brand new Ford Sedan given to producers as a bonus.

I'm Not After Your Money

Don't send me a cent. I don't want your money—I need your help. First I want an opportunity to tell you the truth about how you can make up to \$60.00 a week in a pleasant, congenial business. I'll lay all the facts before you, then you be the judge if you like the plan. I'll take all the chances—I don't want you to take any money risk. You may be just the person I am seeking. I am not going to ask you a lot of embarrassing questions or pry into your personal affairs when you join me. You and I can get together on this business deal without all of that. If you are working part time or for poor pay this may be just the chance you are waiting for.

Don't Send Money—Just Your Name

Don't confuse this with anything you have ever read before—I don't need your money—I need people to operate good-paying routes. Send me your name so I can lay the facts before you, then you can decide if the earning possibilities are satisfactory. Don't expect me to wait indefinitely to hear from you. If you act promptly it will indicate you are the right person for the Route. Send name on coupon or penny postcard for free facts. Do it today.



Have Permanent Route With Big Weekly Cash Income

Percy Armstrong, Ohio, formerly assistant chain store manager, wrote: "I've weeks ago today I cut your ad from a magazine and mailed it to you. Today I find myself with a list of 300 regular customers and a delightful and profitable route business of my own. I have made on an average of \$10.00 a day." L. P. Boyne, La., was an engineer in an ice plant at \$35.00 a week. He wrote: "I made \$35.00 in two days." W. J. War, Kans., reported:

"One month more will make nine years that I have been handling your products. Here's an order for \$62.53." Hans Coordes, Nebr., said he often made \$15.00 to \$20.00 a day. D. R. Machade, Tex., reported that he averaged \$70.00 a week. Mrs. Andrew Johnson, N. Y., made \$68.00 in a week. These exceptional earnings show the amazing possibilities of my offer. I am now making you an even better offer than I made these people. Why not send your name at once?

FOOD ROUTE COUPON

ALBERT MILLS, President
5041 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio

Without cost or obligation, send me all the facts showing how I can get started at once making up to \$60.00 a week.

Name.....

Address.....

(Please Print or Write Plainly)

NEW LOW PRICES ON
GOODRICH Firestone
GOOD YEAR \$2.15
U.S. FISK and OTHERS

SAVE ON YOUR TIRES

And we defy anyone to exceed our quality. Every standard brand tire reconstructed by our superior, modern method is positively guaranteed to give full 12 months' service under severest road conditions. This guarantee is backed by the entire financial resources of an old reliable company. Order Now at Today's Lowest Prices.

BALLOON TIRES		Reg. CORD TIRES	
Size	Rim	Size	Rim
20x4	40-21	\$2.15	30-85
20x4	50-20	2.35	30x3 1/2
20x4	50-21	2.40	32x4
20x4	75-18	2.45	32x4
20x4	75-20	2.50	32x4
20x5	00-19	2.65	32x4 1/2
20x5	00-20	2.65	32x4 1/2
20x5	25-18	2.90	1.15
20x5	25-19	2.95	1.15
20x5	25-20	2.95	1.15
20x5	25-21	3.05	1.15
20x5	50-18	3.25	1.15
20x5	50-19	3.25	1.15
20x6	00-18	3.40	1.15
21x6	00-19	3.40	1.15
22x6	00-20	3.45	1.25
32x6	00-21	3.65	1.25
32x6	00-20	3.75	1.35

ALL TUBES GUARANTEED Brand NEW


SEND ONLY \$3 DEPOSIT on each tire ordered. We ship balance C. O. D. 3 per cent discount for full cash with order. Any tire failing to give 12 months' service replaced at half price.

GOODWIN TIRE & RUBBER CO. 327-1840 S. MICHIGAN AVE. CHICAGO, ILL.

FREE "RAY-O-VAC" LANTERN With Order for 2 Tires Ready for instant use—No complicated wires to attach—No danger of burnt out fuses and lights. Cannot be replaced as a household and automobile necessity—a Nationally Advertised Product.

12 MONTHS WRITTEN BOND GIVEN WITH EVERY TIRE

DOCTOR MILLER CAN HELP YOU IF YOU SUFFER FROM



Acid Stomach, Gas Pains, Rheumatic Pains, High Blood Pressure, Pains after Eating, Belching, Indigestion, Kidney and Bladder troubles, Piles, Obesity caused by that curse of mankind—BOWEL STAGNATION.

Send for free information about these ailments and free sample of Dr. Miller's INTRACLEAN—a remarkable regulator that quickly makes these ailments vanish. Large package containing 90 day treatment costs but \$1. If no improvement is noticed in 3 days, return package and back comes your money.

THE MILLER CO., INC., 52 JONES ST., DEPT. C, NEWARK, N. J.

AGED-IN-WOOD WHISKEY FLAVOR

DOES THE WORK OF YEARS IN A FEW DAYS.

One jar OAKROMA, one gallon tax-paid grain alcohol, one gallon distilled water makes two gallon 95 proof Bourbon for less than 50c a pint. OAKROMA is Bourbon flavor, made from real White Mountain Oak chips, scientifically blended with natural flavoring, giving aged-in-wood mellowness and clear natural color 50,000 satisfied users. Everybody wants OAKROMA. Salesmen clean up selling stores and offices.

FREE—Write for Free Circular—HOME MFG. CO., Dept. B2063, and No-Risk Trial Offer. 18 E. Kinzie, Chicago

Offered for sale only in compliance with all State and Federal Laws.

A Checker System that works!

Let an expert tell you how to get around **CHECKER TRAPS** and how to set them for your opponents ~

REMINGTON ONLY 10¢ A DAY PORTABLE



A new Remington Portable. Carrying case free. Use 10 days without cost. If you keep it, pay only 10c a day. Write. Say: How can I get a Remington Portable on 10-day free trial offer for only 10c a day. Remington Rand Inc., Dept. BS-4, Buffalo, N. Y.

I Am Making UP TO \$150 WEEKLY



Giving Away FREE AUTOMOBILE and HOME SETS RADIOS

THE most sensational moneymaking opportunity ever offered. With our new, Unique "Push Sales Card" plan, the only one of its kind, you actually give away FREE fine automobile radios and beautiful ultra modern home sets; at the same time, make up to \$150 cash each week for yourself. Every car owner, store, office, factory, lodge, club or individual will jump at this opportunity of marvelous new FREE radios.

Write for full information to secure either or both of these 2 startling plans.

DE LUXE MFG. CO. 173 W. Madison St., Dept. 48, Chicago, Ill.

How to Win at Checkers

is a practical guide to more scientific play. **10c** the Copy

ORDER BY MAIL

Chelsea House 79 Seventh Ave. New York City

ENJOY THE THRILL of SEX and LOVE!

FORBIDDEN SEX SECRETS NOW REVEALED!

The time has come to banish fear and ignorance. Every adult person is entitled to the joy and freedom of a perfect love life. Science has discovered many startling facts about love and passion that are openly and frankly discussed in an amazing new book, written by two famous doctors.

No one has a right to be without this priceless knowledge. In flaming, unashamed words the authors have DARED to tell the TRUTH about SEX—information previously found only in restricted medical books. Everything you want to know about sex, love and marriage is disclosed in simple understandable words.

WHAT EVERY MAN AND WOMAN SHOULD KNOW!

- * The Sexual Embrace.
- * Sexual Slavery and Starvation.
- * How to Gain Greater Delight.
- * Secrets of the Honeymoon.
- * Love Making and its Dangers.
- * The Crime of Abortion.
- * The Truth About Masturbation.
- * What to Allow a Lover to Do.
- * Birth Control.
- * Venereal Diseases.
- * Sexual Weakness.
- * Is Marriage a Necessity?

DON'T TAKE UNNECESSARY CHANCES!

LEARN how to hold and attract the opposite sex—how to avoid mistakes—how to enjoy the thrilling ecstasy of physical love—the tragedies of sex ignorance! Stop making tragic blunders! Knowledge can bring happiness and true pleasure.

**ABSOLUTE
MONEY
BACK
GUARANTEE**



These books will not
BE SOLD TO MINORS



**FREE!
2 BOOKS**

Certain important information has been put into these two BRAND NEW books that you should know about. They are printed separately but sent ABSOLUTELY FREE to everyone who orders "Sex Relations and The New Eugenic." This information is for adults only.

CIRCLE PUBLISHING CO.
1123 Broadway, Dept. 50, N. Y. C.



formerly \$5.95
**Now Only
\$2.98**



**BANISH
FEAR!**

**PREVENT
DISEASE!**

**STOP
WORRYING**

**CONQUOR
IGNORANCE!**

Learn
How to
Attract the
Opposite Sex

YOU WILL FIND PRICELESS INFORMATION in this sensational book. Some people, ashamed of their own bodies, will say it should be suppressed. To those who seek the plain, unvarnished facts, it will prove a blessing.

**OVER 600 DARING
PAGES ... MANY
VIVID PICTURES**

Beautifully bound, and illustrated, printed on fine paper. Absolutely guaranteed to be the finest book of its kind—your money back if you are not completely satisfied.

Send No Money

Mail Coupon NOW!

CIRCLE PUBLISHING COMPANY, Dept. 50
1123 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Please rush "Sex Relations and New Eugenic" together with 2 FREE books, "Love Technique" and "Sex Control," in plain wrapper. I agree to pay postman \$2.98 plus postage.

Name Age.....

Address

Town State.....

Canadian and Foreign Orders—send \$3.45 with order.

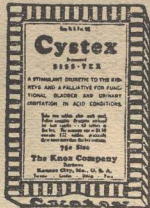
Kidneys Cause Much Trouble Says Doctor

Use Successful Prescription to Clean out Acids and Purify Blood—Beware Drastic Drugs

Your blood circulates 4 times a minute through 9 million tiny, delicate tubes in your kidneys, which may be endangered by drastic drugs, modern foods and drinks, worry and exposure. Be careful. Dr. Walter R. George, many years Health Commissioner of Indianapolis, Ind., says: "Insufficient Kidney excretions are the cause of much needless suffering with aching back, frequent night risings, itching, smarting, burning, painful joints, rheumatic pains, headaches and a generally rundown exhausted body. I am of the opinion that the prescription Cystex corrects a frequent cause of such conditions (Kidney or Bladder dysfunctions). It aids in flushing poisons from the urinary tract and in freeing the blood of retained toxins." If you suffer from functional Kidney and Bladder disorders don't waste a minute. Get the doctor's prescription Cystex (pronounced Siss-tex). Formula in every package. Starts work in 15 minutes. Gently soothes and cleans raw, irritated membranes. It is helping millions of sufferers and is guaranteed to fix you up or money back on return of empty package. Cystex costs only 8c a dose. At all drug stores.

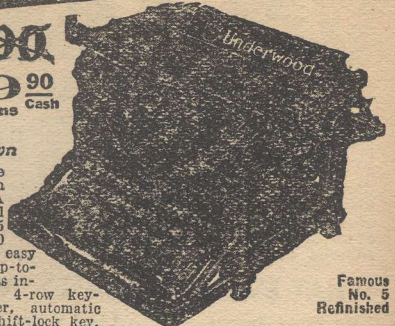


Dr. W. R. George



Send No Money GUARANTEED UNDERWOOD

Regular \$100 Model
Only \$39.90
or On Easy Terms Cash
10 Day Trial
No Money Down



Positively the greatest bargain ever offered. A genuine latemodel Underwood No. 5 for only \$39.90 (cash) or on easy terms. Has up-to-date improvements including standard 4-row keyboard, backspacer, automatic ribbon reverse, shift-lock key, 2-color ribbon, etc. The perfect all purpose typewriter. Completely refinished and FULLY GUARANTEED.

Famous No. 5 Refinished

Learn Touch Typewriting Complete (Home Study) Course of the Famous Van Sant Speed Typewriting System—fully illustrated, easily learned, given during this offer.

Money-Back Guarantee Send coupon for 10-day Trial—if you decide to keep it pay only \$3.00 a month until \$44.00 (term price) is paid. Limited offer—act at once.

INTERNATIONAL TYPEWRITER EXCHANGE,
231 West Monroe St., Chicago, Ill., Dept. 412

Send Underwood No. 5 (E. O. B., Chicago) at once for 10-days' trial. If I am not perfectly satisfied I can return it express collect. If I keep it I will pay \$3.00 a month until I have paid \$44.00 (term price) in full.

Name Age.....
Address
Town State.....

CRIME DETECTION SECRET SERVICE AND FINGER PRINTS

SECRET SERVICE BOOK FREE

For 30 Days Reading
No Money Down—Actual Crime Cases—
If You Act Quick!—We will send you this stirring book on Crime Detection, Secret Service and Identification Work for 30 days free reading. Send no money, if you decide to keep it then send only \$1.00. If not, return it. WRITE TODAY. Not sent to boys under 17 years of age.

T. G. Cooke, Book Dept. 27-74, 1926 Sunnyside Ave., Chicago

EARN \$40 a MONTH at HOME!

You can easily earn up to \$3 an hour at home re-stringing tennis rackets with amazingly simple invention. Learn how in a jiffy. Each job pays 100 per cent profit! Cuts your own tennis expense in HALF! Buy Factory-Fresh GUT direct-from-factory at low cost. Silk strings, too. WRITE today for FREE, proven money-making Plan and Catalog of tennis equipment. Special Offer—*if you hurry!*

H. E. WILLS CO., 1047 W. 47th St., Dept. 27-74 CHICAGO.

Cheaper Tennis for You!

PILES DON'T BE CUT
Until You Try This Wonderful Treatment

for pile suffering. If you have piles in any form write for a FREE sample of Page's Pile Tablets and you will bless the day that you read this. Write today. E. R. Page Co., 2315-C Page Bldg., Marshall, Mich.

LET'S GO PLACES AND DO THINGS

Feel young again—full of ambition and pep. Take Rico-Brasil Mate! It picks you right up. Makes you feel like going places and doing things. Keeps your system free from the poisons that slow you up. No need to act OLD or feel OLD if you use Rico-Brasil Mate! three times a day. Improvement noticed in 24 hours. Endorsed by Doctors and Scientists. Month's supply for \$1.00 by mail, postpaid. With "Folder of Facts." (Will Send C. O. D., if Preferred.)

Brasil Laboratories, 147 E. 47th St., N. Y. City. Dept. 13

U. S. GOVERNMENT JOBS!

START \$1260 to \$2100 Year

Steady Work Short Hours Many early examinations expected. Men-Women, 18 to 50 Mail Coupon today sure.

Franklin Institute, Dept. B 193, Rochester, N. Y.

Sirs: Rush to me without charge, (1) 32-page book with list of U. S. Government steady jobs. (2) Tell me immediately how to get one of these jobs.

COUPON Name Address

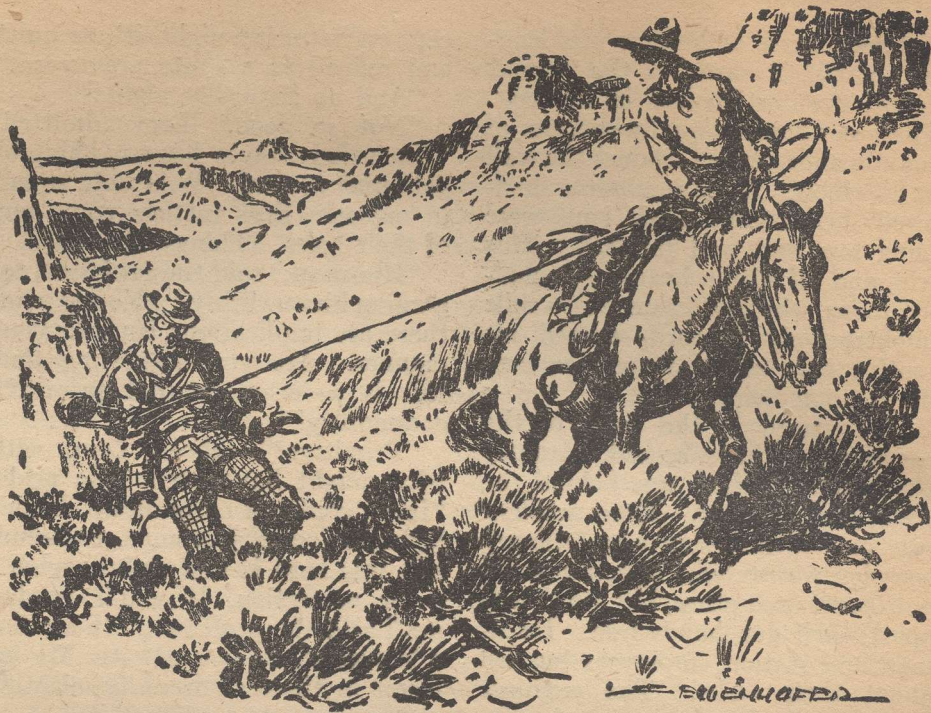
H A I R CAN NOW BE REGROWN

Send today for free information telling about explorers discovery of ancient "Bal-Dava", (meaning hair medicine) from Far East India where baldness is practically unknown. . . . Learn how in most cases you can regrow lost hair, correct itching scalp, dandruff and other troubles that cause loss of hair. No obligation. . . . all free upon your request in plain wrapper. . . . MAIL COUPON TODAY!

ALWIN, Dept. 804, 75 Varick St., New York

Please send advice on correcting hair troubles to

Name Address



A FOUR-EYED MAVERICK

By ROBERT ORMOND CASE

Author of "Savage Waters," etc.

CHAPTER I.

A STRANGER ARRIVES.

WHEN sedate Professor Billingsworth stepped down from the train, planted well-shod feet on the dusty platform, and looked about him with an appearance of bland interest, he seemed unaware that he was immediately as conspicuous, to the assembled citizens of Lodgepole, as a large white horse in a pantry.

He was a sedately dressed person,

with horn-rimmed glasses and long, gloomy features. His speech alone would have marked him as one alien to the cow country. By curious chance—recalled afterward as one of the many curious details associated forever with the professor's memory in the high desert—it was Lem Harper, assistant proprietor of the Lodgepole Livery & Feed Barn, whom he first engaged in conversation.

Lem, a hard-featured youth whose local reputation included, among other things, a blunt and somewhat

distorted sense of humor, was leaning against a corner of the ancient depot, thumbs hooked in his belt. Three cowhands, equally reckless of countenance, leaned against the wall at his elbow. Their sombreros shadowed their faces. Their guns were hung low and well forward. This trio, and all within hearing—including many who had hastened to sidle unobtrusively forward—craned attentive ears as the newcomer bore down upon Lem.

One versed in the ways of the range would have sensed instantly that mere curiosity was behind the scene and moment. More artillery was in evidence than any ordinary occasion warranted. Spectators did not crowd each other, but stood well apart, their gun hands free. Trainmen and station employees bustled about their tasks. The engineer leaned motionless from his cab window.

THE professor seemed oblivious of all this. His conversation with Lem—except that it revealed an astonishingly naïve point of view—was so ordinary as to border on the frivolous.

"Can you direct me to your leading hotel?" he inquired.

"Cinch," said Lem. "Hotel Lodgepole."

"I should have said," amended the professor, "your most respectable and—er—economical hotel. One that is quiet and refined rather than luxurious. Catering, let us say, to the upper middle classes."

"And I repeats," said Lem, rolling a jaundiced eye at the spectators, "that you're blazing a trail direct to the Lodgepole. I can't swear to its respectability and them upper middle classes. The tariff's a polite form of holdup, bein' two bits a day extra for the privilege of usin' a bath. Ex-

cept on Saturday night, it's as quiet and refined as a Piute graveyard."

"And on Saturday nights?"

"Not so good," Lem admitted. "Uncurried wolves have a habit of gatherin' around. Wild cats squall in unison. Boss rattlers come out of their holes. Things like that."

"Hm-m-m," said the professor, regarding him owlishly. "Young man, there are implications back of your manner. Are you suggesting that this is a—er—somewhat primitive community?"

"Primitive?" echoed Lem, with what might have been civic pride. "It's a cradle of cussedness. I ain't trying to scare you none, reverend, but this here is one sinful region."

"A correction, if you'll pardon me," said the professor. "I am not a 'reverend,' as you put it. My interest in these environs is scientific rather than—er—spiritual."

"Yeah?"

"Because I am aware of the interest with which all rural communities view a stranger in their midst," said the professor, "particularly—ah—the more sinful crossroads, I'll tell you what has brought me to Lodgepole. I am on the staff of the State university. My interest here is purely entomological."

"Lawsy!" breathed Lem. "Now there's a triple-gear'd word that would make the average uncurried citizen bust out in a nervous rash! Ondoubtedly you mean well, professor, but what you've done admitted is a total loss. Leave me whisper it around, without further explanation, and you'd have a troop of curious gorillas trompin' on your heels."

"There's nothing sensational or obscure about it," said the professor with dignity. "Entomology deals with the classification of insects. I am in search of a few rare specimens thought to be native to this locale."

Lem regarded him fixedly, a frosty twinkle kindling in his eye.

"A bug hunter, eh?"

"You might call it that."

"I've heard of 'em," Lem conceded. "It's shorely a pleasure to meet up with one on the hoof. And you couldn't have come to a better range for your big-game activities. I ain't vouching for the rare specimens you mentioned." He scratched his head. "When it comes to ticks, sand fleas, locusts, horned toads, and bluebottle flies, this is one populous community."

"Thank you," said the professor. "The hotel you mentioned is on the main street, I presume?"

"The brutal truth of it is," said Lem, "that the said Hotel Lodgepole is the only place in this backward village where travel is kept. Yeah, it's right on the main drag. The square-fronted skyscraper," he amplified, "with the balcony on it."

WITH an appreciative inclination of the head, the professor turned in that direction, then hesitated and lowered a bulging suitcase to the platform. To the outside of this suitcase was strapped an umbrella. Lem and the others had already taken note of this bizarre weapon of defense, designed as a protection against elements that were practically unknown in the high desert. It was the last touch, as it were, to a picture of unsophisticated dignity.

Lem eyed it anew, his hard-bitten features swollen with inner emotion.

"Watch this bag for a moment, if you don't mind, young man," said the professor. "I have another that was checked on my ticket. I'll be back in a moment."

"With pleasure," said Lem.

Silence followed the professor's de-

parture into the ancient depot. Men looked at each other askance, moving off in scattered groups. One of the cowhands leaning against the wall, a sinister-featured youth with an ancient knife scar angling across his outthrust jaw, spoke to Lem from the corner of his mouth.

"What's the idea wastin' time wisecracking with this dude? Don't you know La Fortune'll slaughter the four of us if there's any slip-up? This here's brass tacks, fella."

"Key down," admonished Lem with a guarded glance about him. "Don't get so chummy with me in public this a way, or my usefulness to you polecats is done."

"To blazes with the public! The time's past for pussyfooting and crawling around. Lem, that blasted sleuth's supposed to come in on this train. La Fortune told us plain and pointed not to let the sun set on him in Lodgepole. If he's slipped through our fingers, we're sunk. You're supposed to be the lad who spots him for us. Still you stand there an' chew the fat——"

"Listen, wise guy," interrupted Lem. "You think I ain't making hay? If you get down to cases, what do we know about this alleged bug hunter?"

"Bah!" said the other pityingly. "Anybody with the brains of a peanut would know that that four-eyed lollypop——"

"All right, then," said Lem. "Sink your teeth in this. I've checked off each and every citizen that come on the train. Who were they? First comes two drummers, hefty as fattened calves, smellin' of bay rum and cheap cigars. I know 'em both. They make this territory regular. One's hardware and the other's gents' furnishings. They hire a rig and head east to Hebo. Who else? Aunt Emmeline Perkins, fetchin' her

two nieces back from boardin' school. Three buckaroos from the Flyin' Pitchfork, coming home from a spree. A half dozen more pilgrims whom I've got all labeled. This long-faced professor was the last one off the train. He's the only one I don't know something about. What's the answer?"

"The answer is that there's something haywire with the dope Tawney sent us from below. Or else the said sleuth must have missed the train."

"No," said Lem. "The answer is I'm going to do some checking up. I aim to find out from the conductor if he lost any of his passengers on the way up from the Junction. An active gent could have eased off the train comin' up the canyon. Meanwhile I'm trailing this sanctimonious stranger. Maybe he ain't as harmless as he looks. How do we know he's interested in bugs instead of brands? Here he comes now! Vamose, citizens. I'll report on this critter's earmarks later."

HIS well-manicured hand grasping another bulging suitcase, the bug professor heaved into view. Since his sedate person was already burdened with a species of knapsack slung over his shoulders, plus a leather case that appeared to contain a pair of field glasses, Lem's action in laying hold on the bag at his feet obviously appeared a mere friendly gesture.

"I'm going up that a way, professor, so I'll be happy to help you tote yore outfit. Don't mention it a-tall. Nice day, ain't it?"

Though the other's scholarly, lugubrious features remained unsmiling, he beamed through his horn-rimmed glasses upon his new-found acquaintance. They proceeded up the street, a part of the apparently

lazy crowd drifting back from the depot.

"In my scientific research," the professor stated in conversational vein, "I have had occasion to make stops of varying lengths in numerous rural communities. This is the first time I've visited a typical cattle town. It's very interesting. This dusty street. Yonder weather-beaten buildings. The horses waiting at the hitch rails for their masters. Quaint, very. And so quiet. But you suggested, did you not"—he eyed his companion owlishly—"that to-morrow evening—Saturday—the village will no longer be so—ah—lethargic?"

"Correct. Mainly"—Lem studied the professor with the casualness of a seasoned poker player—"because a hard egg named La Fortune, plus a couple dozen of his wranglers who'd tangle with a buzzsaw, sight unseen, will hit town loaded for bear, an' no grizzlies in sight. If you're interested in world events, professor, you'll get an ungodly kick out of the ruin an' desolation that follers them jaspers when they start forth blazin' a trail. You'll prob'ly celebrate some yoreself, huh? Wade in a li'l mountain dew? Mingle with the hoy polloy?"

"I should say not," said the professor. "I am, to be sure, interested in people, particularly the more primitive types. But not while they are engaged in their depraved pastimes. Whatever orgies are connected with your night life here must carry on without me. I shall withdraw to the seclusion of my room, arrange my specimens and field notes, perhaps read a selection or two of classical verse, and retire early. The reading of good poetry is like a spiritual sedative, composing one for sleep. Haven't you found it so?"

"Yeah," said Lem, bestowing upon him a mystified, sidelong look. "Yes indeed."

CHAPTER II.

A WORD TO THE WISE.

THE lobby of the Hotel Lodgepole, deserted at train time, filled up rapidly. The huge, barnlike room, with its ancient, leather-upholstered chairs, battered cuspidors, and smoke-blackened walls, was soon crowded. The swing doors continued to creak as new arrivals eased in unobtrusively, to join groups here and there. Checker players resumed their interrupted games, with attendant galleries. Restful ones disposed themselves in uptilted chairs, pulling their sombreros low.

Into this casual scene the professor strode, with the courteous Lem at his heels. He set down his baggage, rubbed his hands briskly, and peered about him with beaming good-fellowship. His first act marked him anew as one unaccustomed to dealing with free-born citizens of the range.

He fumbled in his waistcoat pocket, produced a coin, and extended it to Lem. That genial rogue waved it away.

"But, my dear sir," protested the professor, "you have helped me with my baggage. Please accept this small token of my appreciation."

"Sall right," said Lem, grinning with embarrassment.

"At least, then," said the professor, "you will permit me to buy you the cigars."

"Don't mind if I do," agreed Lem.

These civilities concluded, the professor approached the register and signed his name with a flourish. The clerk, a wizened old-timer with a glittering eye, surveyed the signature gravely, cast an appraising

glance at the aristocratic baggage, and beckoned with upraised finger. A gangling youth approached, shifting a quid of tobacco to the other languid cheek. The clerk tossed him the key.

"We eat," he told the professor, "at six sharp."

"I'll be on time," the latter assured him. "This high-country atmosphere does wonders to one's appetites; what?"

"You bet," responded the clerk. "Be here long?"

"Just over the week-end," said the professor. "Perhaps a day or two more. Depending on what luck I have."

He peered at the clerk blandly, as though expecting further questions. But the clerk merely nodded.

The professor turned away, his roving glance seeking an elevator to carry him skyward. Finding none, he followed the elongated and baggage-festooned bell boy up the ancient stair.

He returned immediately, skipping down the stairs in a considerable flutter. His manner was apologetic but firm.

"It won't do," he informed the clerk. "It won't do at all. The room you've given me is out of the question."

"Sorry," said the clerk. "It's the best in the house. What's wrong with it?"

"I don't object to the room itself, but to its location. It's on the third floor. In case of fire——" He shuddered. "I have a horror of fire. In a frame building like this. Also, it's above the street. I understand that the village is quite noisy at night. I always retire early. I'm quite athletic, but my labors are so strenuous during the day that I must have ample time for sound sleep. Really, I must insist——"

"Sall right," soothed the clerk, with a twinkling glance at the attentive spectators. "We'll fix that. Put him in No. 210," he instructed the bell boy, who had trailed his apprehensive companion down from upper realm. "It's on the second floor back," he told the professor. "It'll be quiet enough at night. In the morning, though, it won't be so good. It's right above the kitchen that a way. When the lad fetches the milk around sunup, he makes an ungodly clatter."

"I won't object to that in the least," the professor assured him. "Early to bed and early to rise is my motto. I shall probably be up with the larks."

FOLLOWING his departure, the room buzzed with frank comment concerning his earmarks and mannerisms. Alleged humor greeted Lem's announcement of the professor's vocation, and his scientific interest in the adjacent range.

"Bugs, eh?" said a grizzled cattleman sardonically. "Now that's something. I can see where he gets his athletic ideas. Sure, he's plumb tuckered out by sundown, and has to have his sleep regular. He's got to keep in training all the while. Question is, when he flushes up butterflies, does he shoot 'em on the wing?"

"He runs 'em down," explained another. "He spots 'em way off yonder and goes after 'em, champing like a wolf. That's why he carries opery glasses. Otherwise he'd be bellering on the trail of a swarm of bees for half a day, only to find, after he'd overhauled 'em, that they was sand-hill cranes."

Other sage offerings followed, ranging farther and farther afield. Behind the facetious exchanges was

an unspoken question, the watchfulness of poker players preceding the draw. One downright veteran called the turn, scowling.

"He seems to be loco, but harmless," said he. "You got to give the gent credit, at that. His long suit is catching bugs, an' what of it? He don't make any bones about the business he's in. There's plenty other lads within a hundred miles of here—an' maybe right in this room—who couldn't be so frank and aboveboard about what they're contributing to the march of human affairs."

Lem, meanwhile, having lighted his choice gift cigar, had sauntered forth casually through the swing doors. Once on the street, he quickened his pace, his hard-bitten features knitted into a frown of deep thought. He scanned the pool halls in passing, and turned suddenly into the Pastime, at the end of the main street.

Here he found the train conductor, his brass-buttoned coat hanging on the near-by wall, engaged in a game of snooker. He drew the train man aside and spoke guardedly.

"Joe, who's this four-eyed egg you fetched up from the Junction?"

"One of those naturalist sharks from the university," returned the conductor. "Quite a character, that lad. Let's see. What's his name?" He scratched his head. "Billingsworth."

Lem nodded. "That's what he claims."

"Claims? That's who he is." He looked at Lem narrowly. "I know what you suspect, Harper, but you're barking up the wrong timber. I've got a girl at the university. She's mentioned this Billingsworth more than once in her letters. The students are all strong for him, it seems. A humorous, big-hearted

gent under all his educated whoopla."

"Yeah. But how do you know for sure that this is the Billingsworth your gal mentioned?" persisted Lem.

"Cinch," said the conductor shortly. "We discussed my daughter plenty on the way up. She's one of his star students."

"Hm-m-m," ruminated Lem, baffled. "That seems to let him out. But how in blazes did an innocent-eyed sharp like him happen to lope into the picture at this precise time? Yeah, on the very day. Listen"—he barred the way as the trainman would have returned to the pool table—"one more question, Joe. Did all your passengers get to Lodgepole to-day? Lose any on the way up the canyon?"

The conductor did not immediately reply. For a space he scowled thoughtfully at the floor.

"Harper," said he at length, "I'm not answering any more of your queries. The Short Line is in the exclusive business of hauling passengers and freight. We're taking no part in your local battles. The company's warned us to lay off. I don't give a hoot which side of the fence you're on. You'll have to do your sleuthing elsewhere."

"Thanks," said Lem with a slow grin. "That's all I wanted to know."

HE returned with all speed to the hotel, and eased into a chair in the front row, hard by the desk. He waited, chewing on his cigar, his watchful eyes on the stair.

The professor breezed down presently. He had changed his sedate traveling apparel for what was obviously intended as more serviceable clothing. This was a tweed outing suit, belted and with knickers that were buckled beneath his bony

knees. Heavy woolen stockings incased his nether limbs, and thick-soled brogans were upon his feet. A cloth hat was pulled low over his owlish glasses, imparting to his lugubrious, dignified features an even more professorial cast.

He leaned upon the desk and peered about the room, rubbing his hands with satisfaction.

"I feel more at ease, more human, when I put on what I call my working uniform," he told the clerk in confidential tones clearly audible to Lem's alert ears. "Dressed in the garb of the field, I feel closer to nature, more receptive to the moods and problems of my fellowmen."

"You ain't starting out on any bug-hunting expedition to-night?" inquired the clerk, glancing at the clock. "It ain't but a little better than an hour till supper time."

"Oh, no," said the professor. "No, indeed. Interesting as my vocation is, too close application to it would be unhealthy. I must have my moments of relaxation and pastime like anybody else. And here, sir"—he waved his hand—"is an excellent field in which to indulge my hobby."

"Yeah?" said the clerk, with a thoughtful eye on Lem. "You got a hobby, huh?"

"It's people," said the professor. "What makes them move and think and act. People are like insects, you know, in a more intricate way. They fall into types. Their lives unfold along similar grooves. Yet each is an individual unto himself."

"Sounds reasonable," admitted the clerk. "But leave me tell you something, professor, you bein' one of them well-meaning strangers that a way. Don't you horn in too enthusiastic into some of the business that draws a few of these lads together, or you'll be tossed off yore hobbyhorse in a hurry. They're like

strange bugs in more ways than one. Some of 'em bite. An' others are plumb poisonous."

"Tut, tut," said the professor tolerantly. "I know men and insects. I've handled poisonous specimens of both with impunity. In the interests of scientific research——"

"I'm telling you," insisted the clerk, looking hard at Lem. "Right at the minnit, in these parts, every gent that ain't known has got to walk softly and speak with guarded tongue. But it's yore funeral, of course." He shrugged his shoulders. "I don't aim to cramp your style."

"Do you mean," asked the professor, impressed, "that some unusual conditions obtains here in Lodgepole? Your manner suggests that there may be something sinister beneath the surface, hostile forces at war."

"Plenty hostile." The clerk lowered his voice. "Listen, brother. For your own protection I'll give you an earful on what's going on hereabouts. You never heard of a big toad in these parts named La Fortune, huh?"

"Hm-m-m," said the professor, frowning. "That name sounds familiar. Aha! I have it. There's an illustration of how quickly an observing person can come in touch with local affairs! La Fortune's name was mentioned after I arrived in town. By the gentleman who helped carry my baggage from the train." His roving glance lighted upon Lem, who obligingly reared up from his restful pose and came forward. "I've really forgotten in what connection the subject came up. I think it was that La Fortune and his crew were rowdy and boisterous persons when they came to town for a week-end spree, or something of the sort."

"They're worse than that," said

the clerk. "I was just about to tell the professor, Lem, about some of the grief that's clutterin' up the range these days. So his bug-huntin' enterprises won't lead him some-where that them angels fear to tread. I reckon it ain't tellin' no secrets to leave him have a glimpse or two of the La Fortune layout, huh?"

"It ain't any secret," Lem agreed. "Only thing is, most folks don't mention it above a whisper. On account of nobody knows as to who's for La Fortune an' who's against him."

"What I'm sayin' won't hurt nobody's feelings," said the clerk. "It's public property. And also, the information I'm about to divulge for the professor's protection is just between the three of us."

"Proceed with confidence," said the professor eagerly. "My word! This has a mysterious sound."

CHAPTER III.

THE PROFESSOR BLUNDERS.

THE clerk's bleached eyes scanned Lem and the professor in turn. Then, while his gnarled fingers drummed uncertainly on the desk, he looked out through the window at the far sweep of the sun-drenched range.

"On second thought," said he, "I'll just leave you struggle along, professor. You're only going to be here a couple days. 'Less you've got a positive gift for barging into trouble——"

"Don't hesitate, my dear chap," urged the professor. "I'm all atwitter. I *must* know. Proceed, if you please. You mentioned this La Fortune. Who is he?"

"I'll tell you this much," said the clerk unwillingly. "You asked for it, remember. Check me if I'm wrong, Lem." He chose his words with care. "This country's split

wide open, professor. We've got two outfits here. One of 'em is the XLX, which is owned by Colonel Hofer. The colonel pioneered this range, and is entitled to the gravy. He's got plenty friends."

"And La Fortune has, also," put in Lem.

"The other," continued the clerk, "is the Star Swastika, which is owned by La Fortune."

"Ha!" said the professor. "And this La Fortune is a crook, eh?"

The others stared at him stonily, then looked at each other. Each, it was plain, was waiting for the other to administer the rebuke plainly written on the faces of both.

"In this man's country, professor," said Lem at length, "it ain't what you'd call good etiquette to call a man a crook till it's been proved. It's plumb fortunate that you didn't announce them sentiments so more than us two could hear 'em, well meanin' an' pop-eyed as you are. La Fortune is a gent that owns a recorded brand, controls a couple hundred miles of range, an' pays his debts pronto. No gent has ever accused him of stealin' a cow or alterin' a brand—an' lived to repeat it."

"Excuse me," said the professor, abashed. "I meant no harm by my question, really. I spoke—ah—out of turn. I should have waited for my good host to continue with what he intended to say."

"All I aimed to say was," said the clerk, "that they's bad blood been built up between the XLX and the Star Swastika. Their ranges are side by side. The colonel hasn't called La Fortune a crook, but he has called attention, blunt an' earnest, to the fact that La Fortune has prospered plenty during the past few years, whilst the XLX herds has dwindled in a most sur-

prisin' manner. Is that correct, Lem?"

"Correct," said Lem. "But for the professor's benefit, you'd ought to call attention to several facts that put La Fortune in the clear. In the first place—callin' a spade a spade—the XLX brand can't be worked over into Star Swastika. An' secondly, La Fortune has never shipped out more beef than the brand inspector's tally showed to be on the home ranch."

"An' on the other hand," said the clerk, eying him fixedly, "La Fortune's got a layout that's made to order for crookedness, if he was a crook. The Star Swastika is backed up against the Big Snake ridge. Accordin' to a few old Injuns over on the reservation, they's a trail over the divide that saddle hosses can cross. Where saddle hosses can go, cows can go. Just beyond the divide, on the valley side, a gent named Tawney has a two-by-four slaughterin' plant. It's rumored around that sleuths from the brand inspector's office has found hides at Tawney's bearing the Star Swastika brand."

"To checkmate that," said Lem, "is the fact that Tawney swore he'd picked up them Star Swastika calves at the stockyards and shipped 'em up as feeders. Yeah, an' made it stick in court. Sink yore teeth in that, ol' son."

Their gazes locked and held. The professor coughed nervously.

"Why, gentlemen," he protested, "really! I can see that even two disinterested spectators like yourselves have definite opinions in the matter. I hope no arguments arises out of this friendly discussion."

"Don't get me wrong," stated Lem hastily. "If La Fortune's a crook, I'm for putting him behind bars."

But it ain't been proved. It can't be proved."

"You mean," retorted the clerk, a wintry smile touching his wizened, hard-bitten features, "because his layout's shock-proof?"

"It can't be proved," repeated Lem, his teeth clenched in his cigar. "That's final. An' it's just such loose conversation as this, ol'-timer, that's goin' to cause plenty grief in these parts."

"Everybody knows where I stand," said the ancient one shortly. "They know where to find me."

"My word!" breathed the professor, peering from one to the other. "This is most amazing! The heated manner, I mean, in which you discuss a neighborhood problem. And still it must be a basic matter, this suspicion of cattle rustling. Elemental. It strikes directly at the roots of an industry upon which the welfare of the whole community depends. Strange that men would fight—and die—for economic principles! Such a situation is replete with scientific interest. But tell me, why hasn't your sheriff taken a hand in these affairs? If this La Fortune is a crook, why hasn't the sheriff's office brought him to account?"

"Because," growled the clerk, "it's too big a job for one man. Sheriff Holbrook's hands are tied. He's got the heart, but not the weapons, to fight La Fortune. He's known. He couldn't even approach Sutter's Butte without the lookout's soundin' an alarm. The Star Swastika is made to order for that kind of game. An' the country's divided, for an' against. The sheriff don't know who his friends are. For instance, here's two average citizens in front of you. I'm for Colonel Hofer. But where's Lem?"

"I tell you," said Lem angrily,

"that I'm for Hofer, too. If he's right."

"An' there you are," said the clerk, spreading his hands in an eloquent gesture.

"Hm-m-m," said the professor. "But tell me this, if you please. If your cattle war has assumed such proportions, and your local peace officers are powerless to cope with the situation, why hasn't outside help been brought in? It would seem to me that this would be a proper field for some State agency."

At this specific question, Lem and the ancient one eyed each other askance.

"Well?" challenged the latter. "You tell him, Lem. You talk like a gent with authority."

Lem studied both before replying. When he spoke, his intent gaze rested on the professor's unsmiling face.

"Rumors is all I got," he said slowly. "But it's the kind of surmise that generally pans out. The talk is that the sheriff an' Hofer an' several ol'-timers who're backing his play, has done appealed to the governor. It's rumored that the governor empowered the brand inspector's office to send up a special sleuth to kind of help straighten things out. This said sleuth, who's a gunman, an authority on brands, an' a general all-round hard egg, is supposed to be on the way here. Fact is"—he lowered his voice, grinning—"he was supposed to come in to-day, on the afternoon train."

The professor stared at him. His nimble brain, it was obvious, instantly grasped the significance of the other's words.

"Ha!" he chortled. "Marvelous! Excellent! I have an uncanny faculty of blundering into situations that are delightfully dramatic. A positive gift. So *that* is why I was

scrutinized so closely by good citizens assembled at the station, eh? I was the only stranger who couldn't be accounted for, is that it? I *thought* there was something unusual in the interest with which I was universally viewed! A gunman, eh?" He rubbed his hands with satisfaction. "Gentlemen, this is most refreshing."

"It might not have been so plumb amusin'," stated the clerk, "if folks had been sold on the theory that you was the gent they expected. Interested as you are in world affairs, professor, don't you wish yourself into no jack pot like that."

"You mean," questioned the professor, his enthusiasm chilled by the other's grim manner, "that it might have been—ah—embarrassing?"

"Embarrassin'?" The ancient one snorted. "Dog-gone it, mister, ain't you tumbled to the fact yet that this layout is pure, onadulterated *dynamite*? Don't you know the town's full of La Fortune's spies? Do you think that if this said gunman had strolled in as casual as you, he'd ever get out of town alive?"

"My word!" breathed the professor.

And still Lem eyed him watchfully, intently; studying that dignified, unsmiling face as one strives to peer beneath a mask.

"But where is this gunman?" The professor's frowning gaze was fixed upon the clerk. A speculative look kindled in his eye. "Ha! A trivial circumstance comes to mind. At the moment it made no impression upon me. It has now gained significance. There *was* a chap on the train when we left the Junction. He wasn't in the day coach. He was up in the baggage car. I chanced to see him when I went forward with the conductor, with whom

I was on friendly terms. This chap got off——"

"Wait," interposed the clerk. His face was bleak and grim. "Go slow, professor. Never mind this *hombre* on the train, nor where he got off. Not now. The walls have ears."

"What do you mean?"

"Blast you for an innocent-eyed blunderer!" said the clerk between his teeth. "That said bull in the china shop was a piker compared to you! Don't you know nothin' a-tall?"

"Leave him talk," said Lem, with equal fierceness. "Go on, professor."

The very air suddenly seemed torn with conflicting forces. The professor stared from one to the other, jaw dropping.

"Really," he protested, "there was nothing to the incident of importance. I talked with this person for a time. He seemed quite reticent, at first. But I have the knack of gaining the confidence of those with whom I come in contact."

"Where did he get off?" demanded Lem.

"In the canyon," said the professor. "On that steep grade just before the train comes up on the flat within sight of Lodgepole. I chanced to be looking ahead through the car window, and saw him swing down. He was quite nonchalant, as though it was not an unusual proceeding, though the train was in motion."

"What was his earmarks?"

"His earmarks?"

"Professor," interposed the clerk, almost with a groan, "if you got the brains of a peanut——"

"Key down," said Lem harshly. "Is this a free country, or ain't it? Go on, professor. What did this wolf look like?"

"I'm sure he was not a wolf, as you put it," said the professor. "A most pleasant young man. Dressed,

as I recall it, in faded jeans with a very broad belt. His high-heeled shoes were in a sad state of disrepair. His hat, too, was most disreputable. I took him to be a cowboy in very indigent circumstances. Seeking employment, perhaps. He was of very cheerful and engaging personality. He spoke drawlingly, with an accent that was decidedly Southern."

"Carryin' a gun?"

"That was a point that caught my attention," said the professor. "I am quite observing, you know, and even in my casual contact with him I studied him closely. I had already noted the fact that the other boisterous cowboys on the train carried their weapons openly, in holsters attached to their belts. This young man was carrying no visible weapon, but his shirt was partly open, where there was a button missing. I'm sure I caught a glimpse of a gun carried in some bizarre manner, as though it were strapped next to his body."

"Hm-m-m," said Lem. "So that's his caliber? One more question, professor. Just interested in general, you savvy. If you was to meet up with this gent again, what was they about him you'd remember first?"

"I believe," said the professor, "that the thing that appealed to me strikingly was a most engaging mannerism. As I have said, he was of cheerful disposition. When he was surprised, or pleased, or interested, he had a habit of grinning broadly and saying—like the average cowboy would use profanity—'Ho, gentlemen!' His grin was positively huge, displaying marvelous teeth."

"An' he didn't let drop nothin' concernin' his plans?"

"I was just a trifle chagrined," the professor admitted, "to discover,

later, upon analysis, that while he appeared to be very friendly and talkative, he had really revealed nothing about himself. The only clew of that nature that he vouchsafed was when I thanked him for a pleasant half hour and prepared to return to the day coach. He said, in his drawling and casual way: 'The pleasure, suh, was mine. I'll be seein' yuh to-mo'ow night, no doubt, in the wicked village.'"

LEM beamed upon the clerk. The ancient one glared back wrathfully. The professor, it was plain, was more and more impressed with the significance of what he himself had revealed.

"Surely, young man," he protested, "you don't suspect that this grinning cowboy——"

"No, no," Lem assured him. "Of course not. He was prob'ly just a footloose waddy headin' for town. Would the brand inspector make use of a maverick like him? It ain't reasonable."

Grinning, the genial rogue raised himself up from the desk and glanced at the clock. Momentarily his triumphant eye rested on the clerk.

"Well," he announced in an off-hand manner, "I got to run along. Cheerio, ol' son. See you later, professor."

He cast the stump of his dead cigar into an adjacent cuspidor, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and departed forthwith, whistling. He strode through the door into the street, and so was lost to view.

Turning back, the professor discovered the glittering eye of the clerk fixed upon him. Wrath was in his gaze, bitterness and a species of awe.

"Fellow," he said bluntly. "Are you La Fortune's spy? Are you

Tawney's man? What is yore game, anyhow?"

"Why—why——" stammered the professor. "What do you mean? Of course not! Really, this is most unusual!" He fumbled in his breast pocket. "I have papers here attest- ing——"

"Sall right," said the other with contempt. "You couldn't have done no better by them crooks if you'd been on La Fortune's pay roll. It takes just such a blunderin', *non compos mentis*, swivel-tongued windjammer as you to throw a large-size monkey wrench into world affairs. What I crave light on is how in blazes have you lived this long?"

"Really, my dear fellow!" gasped the professor.

"Just you stroll over to the door with me casual," said the ancient one grimly.

He came forth from his sanctum and laid hold on the other's arm. Together they moved toward the door, halting on the threshold.

"Look south." The clerk spoke in low tones so that passers-by could not hear his words. "See that bald dome beneath the mountains? That's Sutter's Butte, La Fortune's hang-out. Between them buildings at the end of the street, a hunk of trail south's in view. I'm bettin' dollars to doughnuts that in about fifteen seconds you'll see a gent ridin' that trail hell bent."

Through long moments they waited.

A horseman appeared suddenly in the gap between the buildings, tiny in the distance. Insectlike, he undulated, growing smaller. Dust trailed him, blotted him out. He was gone.

"Do you mean——" began the professor.

"Bah!" said the clerk. "Didn't I try to make it plain to you, while

you was soundin' off that a way, that Lem was La Fortune's man? Still you babbled on, pop-eyed. An' what's the answer? You done told Lem precisely what he craved to find out. He passed the word on to one of La Fortune's wranglers who've been hangin' around town. This wrangler's foggin' out to tell the boss rattler that the sleuth's done arrived. They got a description of him, thanks to you. They'll spot him on sight. With La Fortune an' his noble cutthroats drawin' in on him like wolves, he's sunk."

"My word!" breathed the professor, overwhelmed. "What an ass I was! What's to be done now?"

"Nothin'," said the other bitterly. "This skuth prob'ly had a plan figured. He's layin' low out in the brush. He's bankin' that the La Fortune gang'll be in town to-morrow night, as usual. He figgered to sneak in unawares an' circulate around while the riotin' was at its height. We can't get to him to warn him. You've upset the apple cart like nobody's business. He'll walk into sure death, blind."

"You mean that La Fortune and his men will come into town to-morrow night, even when they know that this gunman has arrived?"

"Will they come? Like buzzards, fellow. An' what chance will this unfortunate sleuth have? He'll be found in an alley next mornin'. One of them mysterious shootin's that nobody knows anything about, but which likewise serves as an example to any an' all optimists who undertake to horn into a layout that's plumb loaded with grief."

"Really," faltered the professor. "I didn't realize——"

"Bah!" said the ancient one, turning back into the lobby. "Hereafter, brother, you'd best stick to yore bug hunting. Yore interest in

world affairs is like turning loose a Roman candle in a powder house. Best not circulate around too much. Yonder's a checker game. Horn into that if you've a mind to. But don't say a word. Remember"—he spoke with a ferocious pretense of kindness—"don't say a word. It would prob'ly be fatal."

But the professor did not join the checker game. Nor did he circulate about the lobby, discussing topics of the day. He sat apart, in lugubrious meditation, his chin sunk on his chest.

When the supper gong rang he ate alone. His late gregarious impulses, it was plain, were utterly crushed. He did not stroll forth upon the streets during the witching twilight hour. Shortly after sundown he approached the desk and inquired with dignified meekness concerning the hour when breakfast would be served.

"At six," said the ancient one curtly.

"I will appreciate it," said the professor, "if you will have a lunch put up. Sometimes, when I am lost in my field work, I forget the time of day. It is probable that I won't be back until late."

"Gotcha," said the clerk. His severity relented somewhat. "Don't you take this business to heart, professor. You prob'ly meant well, at that. Everythin'll come out in the wash."

"If it were possible to do so," said the professor, "I would be glad to rectify the harm I have done with my loose talk. Please believe that I have the interests of law and order at heart. If there's anything in my power——"

"Sho!" said the clerk. "Forget it. You're just one of them unfortunate spectators. An' listen, professor. A word of advice while you're sprintin'

after insects to-morrow. Best keep away from travel. If you see any woolly hombraes ridin' by, hide in the nearest juniper thicket till they're plumb out of sight. If you see a fire off in the distance, stay away from it. They's lots of things goin' on in these parts that is plumb out of your depth."

"I've learned that already," said the professor fervently. "It's plain, even to my limited mentality, that this is a region whose ways I cannot hope to understand. You may be sure that I will attend strictly to my own business."

CHAPTER IV.

A FRIGHTFUL EXPERIENCE.

AT an early hour, the professor was up and about. His depression of the evening before had partly evaporated. He breakfasted with relish, and stowed his lunch in his knapsack. He filled his canteen and strapped it to his belt, readjusted various paraphernalia about his person—including a species of net similar to those used by optimistic fishermen—and departed into the open country.

The splendor of sunup was upon the land. The range was outspread to the brooding mountains with the vastness of an inland sea. The sky was cloudless, the air like wine. Gradually, as the hard-bitten cow town lay far to the rear, the professor's chest expanded, his shoulders squared, his step became more elastic. Though burdened with his knapsack and other gear, it was as though a weight of the spirit had been cast aside.

He broke into a half trot at intervals, skipping nimbly hither and yon. His voice boomed forth across the silent sage—hoarse, unmelodious, and exultant. He paused on a

high eminence, to lean on his net in rapturous contemplation.

"Ah!" quoth he with a sigh. "The wonders of nature! The cleanness and greenness and broadness of it! 'Where every prospect pleases, and only man is vile.'"

A tiny rustling in an adjacent bush caused him to stiffen to attention. He approached slowly, with the gait of a pointer awaiting the signal. He lunged forward suddenly, a determined leap that sent him into the heart of the thicket. He emerged again, scratched, disheveled, but triumphant, his thumb and forefinger holding a tiny black object whose many legs waved skyward.

Examining his catch, his triumph instantly changed to good-natured scorn.

"Bah!" said he. "*Coleoptera bitula*—an ordinary beetle. Away with you, my good fellow. We're not interested in you or your hundred brothers. We're gunning for rarer game."

Through the morning hours he bayed on the trail, ranging farther and farther afield. His stocky figure was silhouetted on bleak ridges. His weird cries of triumph reëchoed from the canyons. His energy was prodigious, his zeal unflagging. He did not pause to rest. He flitted here and there like a strange bird on the wing, his glasses glinting in the sunlight, perspiration oozing from his scholarly, enraptured features.

Watchers on a distant ridge, prone on the protecting rim rock, their eyes glued to powerful field glasses, could make nothing of it. Here were antics of a type that lay outside their previous experience.

"Cowboy," said one in awe, "do you see what I see? There ain't any such locoed critter as that."

"He's crazier than a coot," agreed

the other. "Lookit the maverick throw handsprings! At the same time, if he gets any closer, we've got to send down Geroux to give him the once-over. La Fortune's too much on the prod to take chances even with this benighted snake dancer."

SHORTLY after noon, as he charged up a dry wash in pursuit of a magnificent specimen of desert moth, the professor ran headlong, as it were, into a most frightful and distressing experience. He had himself boasted, back in far-off Lodgepole, of a positive gift for blundering into unexpected and dramatic situations. The dilemma in which he was now enmeshed was perilously close to the tragic.

For his erratic course across the plain had taken him to the very point against which the cynical clerk had warned him. It was La Fortune's lookout. Enormous pinnacles of some red formation reared on either side of the canyon. The canyon itself, sloping sharply upward, was shadowed and still. Great clumps of brush, shoulder-high to a mounted man, crowded the narrow trail.

Up this passageway the professor charged, his net poised, his eyes fixed with a predatory gleam upon his prey. The moth flitted to right and left, following the bends of the aisle; and suddenly the professor became aware that a mounted man, having appeared as casually as though he had risen up, full-grown, from the sweltering dust, was all but treading on his heels.

"Halt!" the professor commanded over his shoulder. "Stand still, I beg of you. One moment, please."

The horseman obligingly halted. With a last furious lunge, the professor snared his quarry and leaped upon it. He knelt beside it, chor-

ting with delight. He held it up in the sunlight, examining it with the air of a connoisseur studying a pearl. Having feasted his eyes upon it, he impaled it in his specimen box, arose, and dusted himself vigorously.

Belatedly, with an apologetic gesture, he turned to greet the newcomer. His eyes became round with amazement when he observed the horseman to be reeling in the saddle, obviously seized by some species of convulsion. He writhed and twisted, uttering strange, profane cries. He straightened up presently, wiping his eyes.

He was a swarthy youth, with a huge mole on his right eyebrow that imparted a terrifying aspect to his forbidding features. Momentarily, as he looked hard at the professor, teeth set, it seemed that he was about to be seized by a new paroxysm. Instead, he sat motionless, with an air of grave and studied composure. From beneath his teeth issued a bizarre statement.

Said he: "Well, sir, I'm a son of a gun!"

"Not at all," said the professor courteously. "Don't upbraid yourself, please. You had no means of knowing——"

"Lawsy!" interrupted the youth. "He can talk!"

"My dear sir!" protested the professor. "Naturally!"

The horseman sat silent, contemplating him with fixed, unwinking intentness. Though his cheek was already bulging, he produced a black plug of tobacco from somewhere about his uncouth person and tore off an enormous chew. His attitude, barring the trail, showed plainer than words that retreat was cut off.

The professor shifted uneasily from one foot to the other. Then,

his natural determination asserting itself, he spoke with dignity.

"Young man, I am engaged in taking field specimens for the Billingsworth collection at the university. I am Professor Billingsworth."

"Himself?" queried the inscrutable youth.

"In person," said the professor. "I hope this will explain any mystery that appears to surround my activities. And now, sir, if you will kindly stand aside, I will wish you good day and go about my business."

THE youth made no reply. His hand had been resting casually on a rope whose many loops, dark, twisted, and stained, hung from his saddle horn. A longer loop hung low; and this, with a lightning flirt of the wrist, he disengaged from the horn and launched upon the professor.

It settled over his shoulders, pinned his arms, and became taut. Another loop followed, and another. The professor was bound, helpless, trussed like a fowl. He struggled mightily against his bonds, his features purpling with the effort; but in vain.

"Sir!" he roared. "This is an outrage! Release me this instant!"

Instead, the youth spurred past him up the trail, twisting in the saddle to look back. The professor leaped away, obviously inspired by the theory that a sudden lunge would serve to drag the rope from his captor's hands. But the horseman, in the meantime, had contrived to wrap the end of the rope about the saddle horn. The very fury of his own effort caused the professor to leap high in air and descend, with a frightful impact, upon his shoulder blades.

Nor was this all. Indignity crowded on indignity. The instant he had regained his feet—an exploit of no mean proportions with his upper arms held as in a vise—the ruthless youth spurred up the trail toward the pinnacles. Having no choice in the matter—his bellows of rage and defiance unheeded—the professor was forced to follow along.

It was fortunate that the founder of the Billingsworth collection was, as he had boasted, of the athletic type. To fall would have been ruinous. His specimen box flew in one direction; his field glasses another. His lunch, which he had forgotten to eat, was scattered to the four winds. Still he retained his feet, leaping at the end of the line like a royal Chinook salmon, fairly hooked, his knapsack soaring in the rear.

It was a rough and stormy passage. Pinnacle and sage trooped by. Uphill the wild flight led, across a divide, then down again. The trail was rough, and obstacles were many. All the professor's footwork was needed here. He concentrated upon it, his breath whistling between his teeth; and at last, when his mighty resources were all but spent, they burst through the brush into a great clearing.

Here several men were grouped about a small fire. Saddled horses loomed in the background, reins trailing. A calf lay outstretched beside the fire, its forelegs held by a rope attached to a horse near by, its hind legs held by a kneeling man. As the professor dashed up to this circle—all but hurled into the midst of it by a last, cunning maneuver of his grinning captor—a huge, bearded rogue rose up and faced toward them. All the others leaped up, likewise gripped by the blankest astonishment.

THE professor stood, reeling and incapable of speech. His captor looped a leg over the pommel and saluted with an airy gesture. The bearded ruffian strode forward, a running iron in his hand. He looked hard at the professor, his sinister eyes bulging. Astonishment gave way swiftly to rage.

"Blast you, Geroux!" he roared, brandishing his iron aloft. "What's going on here? What's this critter?"

"You got me, chief," admitted the horseman gravely. "I been studying and studying since I laid a rope on it. I still ain't got it figgered. Slim seen it chasin' grasshoppers just below the lookout. He told me to corral the maverick and fetch it in, so you could give it the once-over."

"Great wall-eyed pikes!" said the man, kneeling beside the calf. "Fetch it closer, cowboy. As I live and breathe!"

"These be stirring times," murmured another.

"It's a bull owl," stated a third. "No, it ain't, either. Lookit the ears on it!"

The professor, meanwhile, had regained his breath. That his spirit had not been broken by the ruthless hazing was immediately plain. In masterly language, with fluent emphasis, he poured out the vials of his wrath upon them. His sweat-stained, scholarly features all but purpled with the effort. He roared and stamped on the ground. Singly and collectively, in terms that could not be misunderstood, he consigned them all to remote and sultry oblivion.

"And as for you, sir!" he belowered in conclusion, striving to shake his fist beneath the nose of the bearded chief, "unless you turn me loose this instant, it will be the worse for you. You shall sweat,

make no mistake about that. I am not to be trifled with. Do you hear me, you ruffian?"

The manner in which this outburst was received was demoralizing. His auditors acted like men demented. They leaned against each other, pretending to weep. One threw himself prone, smiting the ground with clenched fists, and howled like a wolf. Only the villainous leader continued to stare at the professor unwinkingly, his brows knitted.

Said he suddenly, with sinister calm: "What fetched you here, hombre?"

In more repressed fashion, as one dealing with subnormal intellects, the professor explained his presence. He interrupted himself, glowering at one of the near-suffocated youths in the background.

"I know you, young man," said he venomously. "You're one of those cowboys who were at the depot when I came in yesterday. Vouch for me, please. Inform these half-wits who I am."

"That's right, boss," said the one designated, wiping his eyes. "He's that bug hunter. Lem says he's harmless."

"Harmless, eh?" returned the bearded giant. "I dunno about that. Maybe he is, an' maybe he ain't. We're taking no chances at this stage of the game."

Up to that instant, so it seemed, the professor had clung to the delusion that laws and creeds governing more sheltered regions could still be invoked here. As the giant's fist knotted into a bludgeon, his eyes widened with amazement and horror. Being bound and incapable of self-defense, he ducked blindly. The impact of the blow, received on the top of his head, sent him crashing to earth.

"Leave him be, La Fortune! Don't you kick him!" The protesting voices of the others came as from a distance. "The unfortunate maverick's down and out."

La Fortune turned away, and thrust the iron into the coals. He looked over his shoulder from time to time, muttering.

THE professor, dazed but not altogether insensible, lay quiet to avoid further hurts. That he had carried this deception too far presently became plain. When the calf was branded and released to scurry, bawling, into the adjacent brush, the evil-smelling contents of a water bag were poured over his face. His bonds being released, he gasped, sputtered, and sat up.

And now came the incredible part of it. The thirst for rough humor, implanted in the breasts of these uncouth citizens, seemed to be boundless. As grimly as though they meant every word that was uttered, a bizarre debate began. The point at issue was whether he, the professor, should be permitted to live!

"Best copper our bets," said La Fortune, his hand on the butt of his gun. "He didn't leave a trail. We'll bury him here."

"No, chief," said one of his men. "He don't know nothin'—and proud of it. He's had his whiskers singed. Leave him struggle along."

"Haze him out of the canyon," said another. "Make him dance. Eh, boys?"

"Take a vote on it," said a third.

They withdrew to a distance, wrangling loudly. The pretense was kept up to the end. La Fortune, outvoted, shrugged his shoulders and spat viciously into the coals of the scattered fire. Four youths approached the professor, assisted him

to his feet, and pointed mutely toward the divide.

The professor departed forthwith, gathering his mantle of dignity about him. Swinging to the saddle, the quartet followed at his heels. They spoke no word as they mounted to the crest and so down the broadening canyon. When the professor would have paused at the scene of his first humiliation, to gather up his scattered gear, they crowded him so fiercely that the steel-shod hoofs of their mounts were all but on his back. He accordingly hurried on, jaw set.

When the flat was achieved, the quartet reined up. One of them, pointing to the vastness of the open country, spoke a terse command:

"Sprout wings, fella."

Though the professor failed to sprout wings, he did not pause on the order of his going. He hurried away, his bearing proclaiming his anxiety to put as much of the range as possible between himself and such human wolves. The quartet sat immovable as graven images, watching him go.

But the end was not yet. The wolves allowed him to get a tantalizing distance away. Then, when he appeared to be safely rid of them, they thundered in pursuit. The air was filled with their weird cries. Their guns belched upon him.

This, plainly enough, was no horseplay. They were intent upon doing him to death. Bullets whistled about him, crashed in the earth at his heels, cut savagely through the brush to right and left. But the professor turned and twisted like a jack rabbit in full flight, increasing his frenzied speed; and presently, either because they had exhausted their ammunition, or were persuaded that he bore a charmed

life, they fell back one by one, reeling in the saddle like men worn out by the very force of their own inhuman rage.

AT sundown, when sweltering day was drawing to a close, keen-eyed observers saw the professor's trudging figure approaching from afar. His robust stride had become a shamle. His head was bowed. Upon him was the imprint of terrific and crowded experience. His melancholy features, beneath his cap, were stained with sweat and grime.

He stumbled into the lobby and sprawled in the depths of a chair, beckoning with an exhausted hand. The clerk hurried from his sanctum, grinning. Other jovial citizens, including the intent-eyed Lem, speedily hemmed him in.

"Call the sheriff!" demanded the professor in a shaken voice. "Call him immediately, if you please. Frightful things have happened to me. I'm entitled to redress at law."

"Sho!" soothed the clerk. "Run smack into trouble, did you? After all the advice I donated? You'll have to go over to Holbrook's office, I reckon. No, by gravy! There he is yonder, across the street. Give him a hail, somebody."

Sheriff Holbrook, a grizzled veteran with an iron jaw, shouldered his way through the crowd. He looked down at the professor and about the grinning circle. His bleak eyes twinkled.

The clerk explained tersely.

"The professor started out this morning, happy as a lark, an' full of business. Somewhere out in them wide open spaces he lit spread-eagle in the midst of hostile events. Something's chawed him up plenty. What it is, we ain't found out yet."

The professor sputtered, all but incoherent at the memory of his wrongs.

"Hold everything," soothed the sheriff. He dragged up a chair and seated himself, reaching for the makings. "Take it easy, now. Begin at the beginning."

"It's outrageous," stated the professor, finding words difficult. "I realize that this is a rough community. I know that inexperienced persons are sometimes victims of practical jokes. But there are limits, sir, to the humiliation that a law-abiding citizen may be forced to undergo. I have rights, and I propose to maintain them."

"Sure, you've got rights," the sheriff began gravely. "But let's have the facts."

The facts, as the professor recounted them, all but paralyzed the spectators. They hung on his every word, their bulging eyes mirroring nameless emotions. The sheriff squirmed uneasily when the recital was done. He scratched his pugnacious jaw and cast a hunted look about him.

"On the face of it," he admitted at length, "you're entitled to action, and plenty of it. Best come over to my office, I reckon, and we'll make out a complaint in regular form. But there's plenty of time. You'd better eat first, eh? And get yourself kind of organized after your sundry experiences?"

"No," said the professor. He rose up with a groan. "We'll swear out the complaint now. Without loss of time. I won't eat to-night. This is by far the most disturbing day of my life. I have no appetite whatever. As soon as this business is concluded, I intend to return here, take a hot bath, retire to my room, and try to rest and forget."

NIGHT had fallen upon Lodgepole. Spectators trailed the sheriff and the excited professor forth into a brilliantly lighted thoroughfare that was already quickening to the jingle of spurs and the tramp of rollicking feet. At the sheriff's gesture, the jovial rear guard thinned, faded away, and the pair strode on toward the courthouse alone.

An hour later the professor crept back to the lobby, shaken and disillusioned. He peered at the clerk and shook his head mournfully.

"Law?" he questioned, without heat. "Justice? Equity? They are meaningless terms, my friend, in this day and age. Your sheriff is a sincere individual, no doubt; but I can see now why law-breaking is rampant in this godless region. Do you know what his excuse was for not pressing charges against this La Fortune and his savage crew?"

"You tell me," invited the other. "It was a pretext, an evasion, nothing more. He claims that I was a trespasser on La Fortune's land, that he was within his rights in ejecting me violently from the premises. He had the effrontery to assert that those buckaroos had no real intent to harm me with their savage shooting, but were merely urging me to greater speed." He shrugged his shoulders wearily. "What of it? Why debate the matter further?"

He had taken a shambling step toward the stair when a strange, wild cry, muted by farther distance, caused him to halt in his tracks. The buzz of conversation ceased in the crowded lobby. All about him, men stood motionless and intent. Again that wild yell reëchoed, seeming to soar up and up to shuttle among the stars. A fiendish chorus followed. Long-drawn wails ululated slowly into a silence that was

punctured by the staccato crashing of gunfire.

"What is it?" he whispered. "My word, what was that?"

"La Fortune," said the clerk simply. "Don't you worry, now," he soothed as the professor trembled violently. "Him an' his wild men won't harm you here. No, I'm not jokin'," he insisted with real compassion. "They can only get at you over my dead body. Just you lock the door an' crawl into bed. You'll be as safe as in jail."

Thus heartened, the professor turned away. But when the demoniac yells burst forth anew, nearer at hand, he charged up the stairs, his dignity forgotten, and sprinted rapidly into the sanctuary of the upper shadows.

CHAPTER V.

A SLEEPY GUNMAN.

A BROAD in the metropolis of the cattle country, on the jovial face of things, the carnival spirit common to Saturday night strode, raising up robust echoes. Shreds of pagan music were on the air, the rattle of poker chips, the clink of glasses, shouts, and laughter. Colorfully garbed denizens of the open country, with sombreros atilt and white teeth flashing, streamed in never-ending procession through swing doors, or wheeled, mothlike, in the brilliant light streaming from palaces of refreshment and chance that lined the way.

To the uninitiated, in short, here was presented new evidence of the ancient creed that men who toil in solitude must foregather at intervals where lights are bright, where booted feet rest easily on brass rails, where lonely, dust-laden trails are in the speedily forgotten past and to-morrows are far away.

But beneath these jovial pastimes, like the silent mounting of opposing tides, a division of forces went forward. No outward ripples revealed the presence of these invisible currents. But men eyed each other askance, even as they laughed and quaffed together, like those who await the striking of a significant hour.

More than the prospect of an imminent show-down between La Fortune and the mysterious gunman from the brand inspector's office had split the town into opposing factions. Differing points of view that were basic and elemental were this night approaching a test of strength. On the other hand, representing law and order, were certain old-timers whose brawn and blood, a generation before, had carved an empire from the wilderness. To these downright ones, the lawless enterprises accredited to La Fortune were symbols of a growing condition upon the range that must be destroyed at any cost.

In the opposing army was a younger and potentially sinister element to whom frontier traditions meant little—reckless youths who thirsted only for the wine of action, to whom cause meant nothing provided the dust of battle was thick; foot-loose persons with nothing to lose and an eye to future spoils; ruthless owners of small outfits who leaned at heart toward the downright methods of La Fortune had been reputed to use in his meteoric rise to prosperity. These awaited the prospect of a trial of strength with hopeful relish. Law-enforcing machinery within the county had already proved inadequate. If the representative of State law enforcement likewise failed, the sky, in a manner of speaking—in plundering and racketeering enterprises—would be the limit.

That open conflict lurked in the unwritten record of the evening was agreed by all. The information so innocently imparted by the professor—that the gunman had actually been on the train and was doubtless lurking somewhere in the environs of Lodgepole—had spread like wild-fire. Spies in the opposing camps were legion. Unofficial committees from both factions had combed the town in vain. No glimpse of the mysterious peace officer had been obtained. What was his plan? Why had he not shown himself and marshaled the strength of the law-abiding element behind him? Did he propose to take La Fortune and his cutthroat crew single-handed?

These were questions—it had become evident when night had stolen upon Lodgepole—that only the forthcoming hours could answer.

Thus when wild yells, bursting forth in profane and ear-splitting volume from close at hand announced the coming of La Fortune's army, glasses halted in mid-air, players sat motionless at green-topped tables, and the hilarious traffic in the brilliantly lighted street halted in mid-stride. Only momentarily was the carnival spirit stilled. Men stood listening, grins fixed. Then pagan life rolled on, louder and more reckless than before.

BARS were forsaken as thirsty ones poured forth into the street. Faces were grim or exultant as the numbers of the invading hordes were appraised. At first glance it appeared that here was a warlike army, twoscore or more mounted men, armed and bristling. It speedily became apparent that only four of the eleven reckless youths known to be on La Fortune's immediate pay roll were accompanying their leader. The balance was a

motley crew, unorganized but potentially dangerous, who had attached themselves to the notorious one's standard.

In the van rode the giant La Fortune, his bearded face outthrust, his sombrero flattened back in a buccaneer flair. His sinister eyes, roving over the crowd, were watchful. To his right and left rode his trusted buckaroos. Behind trailed the formidable mob.

All swung down at the hitch rail, with much noise and creaking of harness. La Fortune tightened his gun belt, hitching the holster a little forward. He bore down upon the nearest oasis of liquid refreshment, with his cohorts following like a slavering pack at his heels.

At the third round of drinks, at the crowded bar, those nearest the giant gave way, making room for Lem. The two leaned shoulder to shoulder and spoke in guarded tones.

"Well?" La Fortune growled. "What's it all about? Where's this gun fighter? You keepin' yore eye on the sheriff?"

"The sheriff's out of the picture," said Lem reassuringly. "He done retired to his office a couple hours ago, an' he ain't come out. The lights is lit, an' the shades is down. He prob'ly knows this is too big a bite for him to chew, an' he's lettin' nature take its course."

That the crown of leadership rested uneasily on the bulky one's head was plain. In the mirror beyond the bar, his truculent gaze studied each reflected face with suspicious intentness.

"This here's developed into too public an enterprise to suit me. Blast it, Harper, it looks like the pop-eyed universe is takin' an interest in our penny-ante affairs. All these vultures swoopin' around is just like tellin' the world the lid's

off. That don't suit my game a-tall."

"'Sall right," Lem soothed. "It might have been better, at that, if the professor hadn't shouted all he knew from the housetops. Then we could have bushwhacked this gunman in a genteel manner, an' no questions asked. But the fact that it's public property this a way betters yore hand. This sleuth's got nothing on you. You're a citizen standin' on yore rights. There'll be plenty witnesses——"

"Listen," said La Fortune. "About this dude professor. Where's he at?"

"In his trundle bed," said Lem. "I sneaked up there a while ago. When I knocked on the door, he kind of quavered at me, an' opined that 'less I went away pronto, he'd yell for help. There's one quaking citizen. You an' yore noble polecats shouldn't have rode him so rough this afternoon. He's plumb ruined."

"What ails the maverick?" growled La Fortune. "I been pondering the critter ever since we hazed him off the premises. He ain't even reasonable."

"I'll tell you what ails him," said Lem, grinning. "He's the kind of unfortunate an' bleary-eyed optimist that's got a positive gift for trouble. Out of all the months an' years he could have come to Lodgepole, he lights here at the precise minnit that things is ready to pop. They was plenty of other gents on the train, an' out of them all, he picks out this sleuth to set down beside an' visit with that a way. Ain't you got a picture of him wisecrackin' with a wil' cat of that caliber? But he played his luck too far when he chased his butterflies right smack into yore camp. You should have seen him when he come smokin'

back to town. What you lobos must have done to him was plenty. His eyes was stickin' out a foot, an'——"

"Bah!" said La Fortune. "To blazes with him. Let's turn our attention to heftier matters. What's this gunman's game? How come he's hidin' out around town instead of gunnin' for me? It looks like he's got some ace in the hole, like he sent word with this four-eyed dude deliberate, knowin' I'd come smokin' to town. They's somethin' fishy about the whole layout.

"An' on the other hand, what of it?" He drained his glass at a gulp and wiped his mouth with the back of a hairy hand. Already the fiery liquor he had consumed was bringing his inner savagery to the surface. "He's got nothin' on me. My trail's covered. I got four good lads with me, each an' every one of whom knows how to throw lead. All we crave is to meet up with this fire-spittin' pilgrim. Pronto. Eh, cowboys?"

"An' how," agreed those reckless youths. They called loudly for more liquor, fortifying themselves for the event after the manner of those who live, ride, and die hard.

"Where's the rest of yore crew?" Lem questioned. "These sanctimonious ol'-timers are roused up an' wrathful. If they happen to get to this gunman first, he's liable to have an army at his back, strengthenin' his arm."

"He won't use 'em," predicted La Fortune. "He's had plenty time to get recruits. If he's one of them Southern gunmen, he's a lone wolf. Where's the rest of my crew? I've coppered my bets, Harper. Nobody gets along as far as me without watchin' every detail. Two of my lads is out to the ranch, one guardin' the pass an' the other the canyon. The other four is layin' low at

each end of town. If a massacre starts, they come smokin'."

"Fine!" Lem approved. "An' if it comes to a free-for-all, you got plenty foot-loose gents backin' yore play, carryin' heavy artillery."

"Sashay around," directed La Fortune. "You got lookouts posted in every saloon, huh? Slide around an' tell 'em to be on their toes. As soon as this lone wolf's spotted, send me word pronto."

EVEN as the bulky one had boasted, the most robust currents of the increasingly reckless night life surged about himself and his party. They were in the Hornet's Nest at the moment, which was a friendly saloon. Most, in fact, of the oases of refreshment in the hard-bitten village catered openly to the forces represented by La Fortune; for these were the spenders, the prodigal and open-handed ones whose resources came easily and were dispensed with the same dispatch.

From the Hornet's Nest, they descended upon the Ten Strike like a thundering herd, poured forth new offerings to thirsty gods, and surged on to the Silver Palace. Voices had become more strident in La Fortune's wake; eyes more glowing. Openly now, the forthcoming slaughter of the mysterious sleuth was avidly discussed, and bloodthirsty ones called loudly for action. Where was this sleuth? Did he, in fact, exist at all, or was he but a myth? Only La Fortune kept himself in hand. He drank often, but not heavily, so that all his inflamed faculties would be at his command when the crisis came.

It was at Mickey's Palace that he came abruptly, for the first time, upon the trail of the mysterious stranger. Casual indeed was the

moment, compared to the blowing of trumpets and clashing of cymbals, in a manner of speaking, that had preceded it.

Mickey's Place was not a friendly saloon, the proprietor being of the old school who looked upon himself as a business man whose welfare and prosperity grew hand in hand with that of the community. He scowled upon La Fortune and his followers, even as he set forth the liquid refreshment they loudly demanded.

To the bearded giant he said curtly: "There's a gent here lookin' for you."

"Where's he at?" demanded La Fortune, stiffening.

"Over yonder," said the proprietor. "That sleepy wrangler leaning against the wall."

Something akin to an electrical impulse swept the crowded room. All faces turned in the direction indicated. A path opened up between La Fortune and the distant wall. Here, on lazily uptilted chair, a youth slumped in loose-limbed pose, his battered sombrero rising and falling with each contented breath.

There was, at first, nothing in his appearance to suggest that here was other than an indigent wrangler who had paused for an interval of languid rest. Certainly he would not have been selected from any crowd as a formidable gunman whose coming had been awaited with impatience by an aroused community.

Yet every man in the room knew instantly that here was the one they sought.

La Fortune moved down the human aisle, his bearded face out-thrust. His left hand swung free, but the thumb of his right was hooked in his belt. He came to a halt before the sleeper, his smoldering eyes unwinking, and his four killers ranged themselves at his side.

CHAPTER VI.

BEHIND CLOSED DOORS.

THE slumbering youth snored on. The heels of his dilapidated boots were hooked in the rounds of the chair, his knees wide apart. His hands were folded in his lap. A broad belt, innocent of artillery, held up his faded jeans. His hickory shirt was open at the neck, disclosing a segment of hairy chest. His head sagged a little to one side, nodding. His breast pocket bulged with tobacco sack and a pack of brown papers, and directly opposite that pocket the middle button of his shirt was missing.

These mediocre details were appraised by scores of intent eyes while the room grew still, and suddenly, as though the very cessation of noise had aroused him, the sleeper's head jerked up.

Without apparent surprise, unhurriedly, his gaze roved about the grim, intent circle and returned to La Fortune. A sudden grin cleft his features, an enormous and engaging grin that displayed even, dazzling teeth. He raised a tanned, sinewy hand toward his breast.

La Fortune stiffened, the fingers of his right hand outspread. His killers shifted their position a little, their gaze narrowing. The crowd fell back.

But the man in the chair, relaxed still, merely drew forth the makings, his grin deepening.

"Ho, gentlemen!" he murmured. "This heah's an occasion." Tobacco and paper became a brown cylinder, with the ends twisted. He hung this on his lip, but did not light it. "I'm lookin'," he announced, "fo' a lad named La Fo'tune."

"That's me," said the giant.

The other arose, his manner making of this act a gesture of courtesy.

"Mr. La Fo'tune," said he, "I'm wishful to make a little conve'sation with you-all. At yo' convenience."

"They ain't any time nor place better than this," growled La Fortune. "Shoot the works."

"Oh, no!" the youth protested. "Not heah. It's fo' yo' private ear alone."

"No stallin', fella," snarled the giant, his brows lowering. "These here are my friends. Get it off yore chest quick. You're from the brand inspector's office, huh?"

"Brand inspecto'?" queried the other, his grin fading. "You're pleased to joke, I take it."

"Well, then, who's pay roll do you claim to be on?"

"Before I answer that question, are you sure *all* these gentlemen are yo' friends?"

"Enough of 'em for what you've got to say," said La Fortune grimly. There was, nevertheless, a species of doubt in his smoldering gaze. The very ease of manner of this drawling youth was vaguely disconcerting. "Name yore poison. Whose pay roll?"

The youth lowered his voice so that only those in the front rank heard the word: "Tawney's."

The giant stared, gaping.

"Bah!" he said. "What's all this tomfoolery?"

"I can prove it to yo' satisfaction." There was an edge in the drawling words.

La Fortune glared from one to the other of his four buckaroos. Each shook his head.

"Listen, hombre——" he began wrathfully, but the other halted him with a gesture.

"I repeat, suh, that I can prove it. But not heah. Mistuh Mickey"—he raised his voice—"have you-all got a room near by?"

"Sure have," said the proprietor.

"Right this way. Here's a den where the city council meets onct a week. I'll open 'er up."

THERE was relief in his voice. Mr. Mickey, it was plain, with an eye to furnishings and glassware in the ornate saloon, was more than anxious to divert the forthcoming shambles to a more secluded spot.

Not so with the bloodthirsty spectators. They growled among themselves, casting baleful glances upon the soft-spoken stranger.

"He's stallin', La Fortune," warned one of these.

"Keep him in the open," urged another. "Make him show his hand."

Other growling voices assented. The sullen La Fortune, uneasy and dubious, would have called a halt. But the cheerful youth waved them on, grinning. Mickey had already unlocked the sanctum where the city fathers weekly transacted the business of the municipality. The door was at the end of the bar, and the crowd surged thither.

"Afte' you, suh."

The youth stood aside politely. La Fortune held back.

"You're loco, fella," he said with a sneer, "if you think I'm goin' in there with you alone. Where I go, these lads trail along."

"These fo'?" queried the youth, indicating the killers. "Why not?"

He waved them in, then faced the crowd with an apologetic grin.

"Sorry, folks," he said; "I'd invite you-al in, but this is pe'sonal and private thet a way."

Mickey had lighted an oil lamp on a table in the center of the room. The youth closed the door on his departing heels, and the disgruntled spectators heard a bolt thrust home.

"All right, hombres," growled

Mickey in his downright fashion. "Push away, if you please. No use crowdin' against that door. It's too thick to hear nothin' through, an' it ain't too thick for flyin' lead. Take it easy, gents. Sit tight. If there's goin' to be a show, it'll start pronto."

The spectators milled, disgruntled and wrathful, like small boys who have heard the calliope and seen the parade and are denied entrance to the big tent. Moment by moment the saloon grew more crowded. The news had spread that La Fortune had met the mysterious stranger, and pounding feet came running from afar.

Among these was Lem. He burst through the close-packed ranks, breathless and wild-eyed.

"What's goin' on?" he demanded. "Where's La Fortune? Where's this sleuth?"

"He's in yonder," growled several voices, pointing.

Lem strode forward and laid hold on the latch. He shook it with vigor, then pounded with clenched fist on the unyielding panels.

The door opened sufficiently to frame the grinning features of the mysterious stranger. But his eyes, fixed upon Lem, were mirthless.

"Excuse me, suh," he drawled, "didn't you-all unde'stand that this was a private session? Yo' mustn't knock on the doo' thet a way."

"Leave me in on it," pleaded Lem. "Fella, I got a right to know——"

The other shook his head. Lem placed his foot in the door.

"La Fortune!" he raised his voice. "This here's Harper. Come out in the open——"

The grinning youth extended a long arm through the aperture. He placed his hand on Lem's face, fingers outspread. The motion he imparted to that hand and arm was

seemingly without effort. Yet Lem's feet left the floor. He was hurled backward, crashing among the spectators.

Whereupon the door slammed shut. Again the bolt shot home.

Despite the tenseness of the moment, a hoarse chuckle arose at Lem's expense. The disgruntled one leaped to his feet, fairly trembling with wrath.

But Mickey placed himself on the threshold.

"That's all," he announced. "Just you curious gorillas leave 'em be. Yes, I mean you, Harper! Stay put. If you're a friend of La Fortune's, you don't have to worry. The odds is five to one. An' if you're a friend of the lad's," he added significantly, "it's too late now. All right, wolves, slide up to the bar. While we're waitin', the drinks is on the house. Give it a name."

CHAPTER VII.

BRAND HISTORY.

IN casual pose, leaning a little forward so that his finger tips rested on the table, the youth faced the five, who stood opposite. The oil lamp was between them, as in the center of a circle, lighting up their faces dimly and throwing grotesque shadows on the farther walls.

The four killers stood impassively, stony-faced and intent. La Fortune twisted his bulky shoulders, turning his head in owlish fashion to peer about him.

It was a fairly large room, of the primitive type common to the high desert. Walls and ceiling were sheathed in coarse building paper, battened in vertical sections. The rough, unadorned floor was beneath. Several rawhide-bottomed chairs stood shoulder to shoulder in the

farther shadows. Otherwise the room was bare of furnishings.

A gleam of satisfaction kindled in La Fortune's sullen eyes as he turned back to face the youth. Here was a secluded nook made to order for just such a conference as this. The public was barred. Tribute to the sound-proof qualities of doors and walls was the fact that the noise of the millings crowd in the adjacent barroom seemed remote. His gunmen stood at his shoulder, their numbers providing an impregnable bulwark against assault from any single individual, no matter what his caliber.

Five to one, and no witnesses! His late uneasiness faded. He motioned his cohorts to draw a little farther apart, so that their gun arms would have free play; and stared questioning upon the youth.

"I should apologize, suh," said the latter, his white teeth gleaming in the dim light, "fo' makin' my meetin' with you-all a matter of public news. When I spoke to the profeso' on the train, I had no idea the good citizens were so wrought up this a way. But it amused me, suh, to make talk with the precise gentleman——"

"Just a second," cut in La Fortune. "Whilst we're telling bedtime stories, let's begin at the beginning. Just who are you, hombre? Before answering that question, bear in mind that me an' the lads know Tawney an' the men that are close to Tawney. Yore claim to be on his pay roll is plumb ridiculous."

"You're mistaken, suh," said the other with dignity. "I've been representin' Mistuh Tawney at the stockya'ds the past fo' months. Buying beef an' shippin' to his plant so he could have boughten hides of record to show the brand inspecto'. An' othe' little activities that fitted

into yo' an' Mistuh Tawney's campaign."

The five eyed each other, somewhat taken aback by this announcement. La Fortune shook his head.

"There was a lad at the stockyards," he conceded. "Tawney hired him about four months ago. We never met up with him. But how do we know you're that gent?"

"I can give you, suh, a detailed list of all the beef shipments I made fo' Mistuh Tawney, includin'—"

"That don't mean nothin'," interrupted the giant. "Spies could have that dope. Most of it's of public record, down to the stockyards. But first, let's have your bright ideas on this. If you're what you claim to be, where's the sleuth from the brand inspector's office?"

"Sho, now!" drawled the youth. His expansive grin lighted up his face anew. "Don't tell me yo' haven't suspected *yet*? His insect-huntin' pastimes might throw dust in most folkses eyes, but not you-all!"

"You mean that dude professor?" breathed La Fortune incredulously. "Go way, fella! They wouldn't make use of a stall-fed squash like him. What does he know about cows? It ain't even reasonable."

"An' yo' ready opinion, suh, is the precise reason the brand inspecto' commissioned him fo' the job," retorted the youth. "Don't you-all underestimate the caliber of those lads down to the State capital. They're cagy as brush-poppin' cayuses. This studious pilgrim happens to be an autho'ity on brands. If the brand inspecto' sent up a lad who was a cowman plain to the eye, what could he hope to accomplish? They took a chance that a gentleman of the professo's eahmarks might pick up enough info'mation to help out the local peace officahs."

"Bah!" said La Fortune. "It's plain to the eye that you're out on a limb. You seen this bug hunter on the train, an' you're tryin' to run a bluff that *he's* the sleuth for whom we formed this said reception committee! Let's get down to brass tacks, fella. Wipe that grin off yore face an' make big medicine fast. Right pronto, now, this said parley's liable to cease to be amusin'."

"O. K.," said the youth. His genial manner fell from him. "I'm also losin' interest in a thankless ente'prise. Mistuh La Fo'tune, suh, I come up heah at Mistuh Tawney's request to give you a message. He was my employeh, suh, an' I was happy to oblige. He told me to identify myself to you-all first, an' to talk afteh you-all was convinced I was his man. I'll now proceed to do so, an' yo' can take it or leave it."

"Shoot," said La Fortune. "We've done unfolded our quiverin' ears."

THE youth struck a match, lighted the cigarette that had previously hung untouched from his reckless lips, broke the match and tossed it away. He stood in easy pose and puffed slowly, arms folded.

"So I could identify myself to you-all, Mistuh Tawney took me into his confidence. He named all the tallies of beef, fo' the past year or mo', that you'd driven oveh the pass an' delivied to him. Shall I name the tallies an' dates?"

"Tain't necessary," said La Fortune, his eyes unwinking beneath lowered brows. "It wouldn't mean nothin'."

"An' the brands?" queried the youth softly.

"Can you name 'em?" countered the giant.

"Flying Pitchfo'k," said the youth, without hesitation. "Two lots last

August, totalin' three hundred an' fo'ty-six head. Double O an' Lazy Z, two lots of eighty-odd each just befo' snow flew. Five lots of XLX yeahlin's this spring, the biggest tally of them all—eight hundred. I'm speakin', you savvy, of original brands. Not what the beef showed when they got to Tawney's. Am I speakin' correct?"

La Fortune made no immediate reply. He eyed the drawling youth almost with awe.

"Go on," he said at length.

"Yo' are nonplussed," stated the youth, nodding. "Only Tawney and his trusted men who had a cut in the profits had this info'mation. But you still doubt me, yes? No?" He shrugged his shoulders. "I shall now proceed to tell you something that will sweep away yo' last suspicions. Are these men"—he indicated the four killers—"on the inside?"

La Fortune nodded.

"I mean," the other persisted, "with respect to yo' an' Mistuh Tawney's most valuable secret? I'm about to mention," he said, speaking slowly and distinctly, "the maneh in which you've been able to gouge the XLX."

"Go on," said La Fortune hoarsely. "These lads are on the inside with me. On everything."

"Well, then," said the youth, "I shall proceed with confidence. It is common prope'ty, suh, down at the stockyards an' elsewhe'e that cowmen discuss the problems of the indust'y, that they's bad blood between the XLX an' the Star Swastika. It's also well known by anybody who knows brands that XLX can't be wo'ked oveh into Star Swastika. The two brands are so unlike that it has always been plain on the face of it that any talk of changin' one to the otheh is out of the question. That was the fact

that made yo' layout unbeatable. That was the fact that enabled you an' Mistuh Tawney to laugh at the brand inspecto's office. Because mo' than eighty per cent of the beef you shipped to Mistuh Tawney was originally XLX stuff. It is a secret, suh, that has made you rich. An' that secret, which is known only to men that you an' Mistuh Tawney trust, I will now set fo'th. What do you say to that?"

Even the impassive gunmen were shaken now from their stolid pose. La Fortune's somber eyes flamed.

"I would say," he said hoarsely, "that you'd done proved—— But go on, fella. Let's see it."

THE youth fumbled in his shirt pocket and slapped his hips questingly. La Fortune produced a pencil and extended it. From a drawer in the heavy table, the other drew forth a sheet of paper and spread it in the circle of light.

"In the business of demonstratin' one of the cleve'est brand alterin' in the history of the cattle industry," said he, "I'll first draw the XLX as made by the runnin' iron. Like this."

In bold strokes he set down the oldest and most familiar brand in the high desert.

"Next, we have yo' brand, the Star Swastika, also as made with the runnin' iron. Now, then, gentlemen all, comes the black magic. When you have retired from yo' labors, Mistuh La Fortune, an' settle down to enjoy the fruits of yo' industry, I'm gambling that many shekels will change hands on the bet that it can't be done. Speakin' as one who has seen many brands, suh, I stand uncove'ed in yo' presence."

"Let's see it," said La Fortune between his teeth.

"It's virtue," said the youth, "is its simplicity. Draw the star around the 'L.' Like this. Through the 'X,' both ways. Thet a way. Change the 'L' to the Swastika—fo' ways—an' theah yo' are!"

It was done. He laid down the pencil with a flourish, drew erect, and folded his arms. He murmured softly: "Ho, gentlemen!"

The five straightened up slowly. They looked at each other, at the grinning youth opposite. There was no longer doubt in La Fortune's bulging eyes.

"Son of a gun!" he breathed. "You *are* Tawney's man! Talk fast, fella. How come he sent you up here?"

"Because," said the youth, taking an obvious delight in piling sensation on sensation, "when I talked to Mistuh Tawney, befo' I caught the train, he was in jail. All the lads in pa'tnership with him are likewise in jail. The brand-inspecto's office has taken ovah his plant. Mistuh Tawney told me to info'm you of these unfo'tunate circumstances befo' you made yo' next delivery ovah the pass."

"Judas!" whispered La Fortune.

"He told me to tell you-all," continued the other calmly, "to scatter the stuff yo' got on hand pronto. Brand-inspecto' men are posted on the pass, hopin' yo'll bring mo' beef ovah. Brand-inspecto' men will be here next week to make arrests on the evidence which they hope will be secu'ed in the meantime by the brand-huntin' professo'."

"He won't have no evidence," stated La Fortune in a shaken voice, mopping his brow. Horror dawned in his eye. "Son of a gun! We were workin' over an XLX calf when he showed up! Blast that four-eyed critter——"

"But you knocked him out," in-

terposed one of his killers. "He was dead to the world. He didn't see nothin'. Get a holt of yoreself, chief. They'll still time——"

"But we got the rest of them calves on our hands," snarled La Fortune. "Those sleuths will go over the whole Star Swastika range with a fine-tooth comb. If we work over them brands now we're sunk. If we don't——" He gestured helplessly. "An' you"—he turned upon the messenger of bad news, enraged—"what a helpful critter you turned out to be! How come you didn't come foggin' out to the Star Swastika pronto instead of layin' around town? What in blazes was the idea of——"

"Hold everything," soothed the grinning youth. "Don't snap at me thet a way, suh. I had to lay low, because the professo' had me spotted. In the vile tempe' that seems to be abroad on this heah range, I'd nevah have gotten to the Star Swastika alive. But they's still daylight in the swamps, Mistuh La Fo'tune. You got anotheh day o' grace. Why not scattah those calves back on the XLX range?"

"Can't be done," groaned the giant. "Them XLX wranglers are patrollin' my line like wolves. We couldn't take them calves way around again without runnin' 'em plumb into the ground."

"Way round?" queried the other.

"By way of the Rattlesnake," said La Fortune. He scowled. "Didn't Tawney tell you how I got that stuff through to my range? Them nesters got a cut on every trail herd, just for the privilege of usin' 'em for a blind. But they're too far away. Yeah, an' they'll prob'ly smoke into their holes like coyotes as soon as it's noised around——"

"Hm-m-m," sad the youth. "So the nesters on Rattlesnake was in

on the pie? That makes the swing complete. It was a beautiful lay-out you had, La Fo'tune. Half the range would have been undeh yo' control befo' long. If the brand inspecto' hadn't stepped in, eh?"

He nodded, almost in pity, and sighed. He raised his hand toward his breast pocket, as though in the act of reaching for the makings.

"Sho, now!" he said in mild surprise, looking past the killer on his right.

ALL whirled in that direction. A papered panel of the wall shivered and turned inward with a harsh, rasping sound. Vague illumination was revealed beyond. Sheriff Holbrook stepped into the room. The old gun fighter's weapons were presented from the hip, the twin muzzles covering the group like cold, unwinking eyes.

Like men carved from stone, the five stood, their hands poised over their guns. The peace officer had said no word. None was necessary. And the silence that had fallen on the dimly lighted room was broken by a drawling voice:

"Raise yo' hands, gentlemen. Reach high!"

A gun muzzle pressed harshly between the shoulder blades of the one on the right. His weapon was eased from the holster and tossed aside.

"Move a little oveh, suh. Keep yo' hands up. Mistuh La Fo'tune, yo' next. No, don't move." The soft, purring accents dripped with menace. "Do yo' wish to die heah, suh? Without benefit o' clergy? That's right——"

One by one the group was disarmed. The sheriff spoke sharply over his shoulder.

"Jeb!"

A wizened old-timer emerged from the aperture in the wall. He

was instantly recognized as one Jeb Harris, court reporter at unnumbered tribunals at Lodgepole, and a gleaming array of manacles was in his hand.

"Slim," said the sheriff, his unwinking gaze fixed upon the killer at the right. "Hold your hands out. The rest of you stay put. Slip 'em on, Jeb."

Thus the coup was completed. When the last of the five was shackled, Jeb subsided in a chair, mopping his brow.

"D-d-dog-gone!" he stuttered. "I wasn't afraid a-tall while I was taking down the transcript. But when I got to thinking that that p-paper wouldn't be much protection if shooting started, I d-dang near passed out!"

"'Sall right, Jeb," soothed the peace officer. "You done noble. You got down all the evidence, huh? Their own admissions'll convict them." He achieved a feeble grin of relief on his own account. "Well, that's that. We had to work fast to get this false wall up before things were ready to bust. Mickey's entitled to a crown o' glory for his assistance. But did the brand inspector's office earn their keep? And how, citizens! La Fortune, your hand's played out."

The four accomplices of La Fortune sat as men stunned. The giant turned his bearded face slowly. A species of horror was in his bulging eyes.

"Fella"—his voice was hoarse—"you're a brand-inspector man, after all?"

The youth nodded, rolling a cigarette. His face seemed suddenly to have grown old, as though the end of a joyous game was at hand.

"Well, then," said La Fortune, "who in blazes is the professor?"

"The professo'?" said the other wearily. He lighted his cigarette, tossed the match away. "Just a lowly bug huntah, I reckon. Thass all."

CHAPTER VIII.

A PUZZLING TRAIL.

IN the barroom, breathless spectators crowded shoulder to shoulder. They stood on chairs in the rear, perched on tables, all but hung down from the ceiling in their eagerness for a glimpse of impending drama. Windows had blossomed with faces, and in the street outside, those denied admission by sheer lack of space milled like impatient cattle.

To these assembled citizens, in ignorance of what had transpired beyond the closed door, the first hint of the spectacular coup, which later resulted in the break-up of the most powerful cattle-rustling gang in the high desert, presented many of the aspects of black magic.

Through dragging minutes they had waited, their excitement, born of suspense, mounting in successive waves. No shots had reëchoed from the sanctum. There had been no sounds of struggle or argument. Only the rumble of deep-toned conversation had come as from a distance, and this dwindled finally into silence.

Came the sudden rattling of the inner bolt guarding the door. It swung open, and the crowd gasped in astonishment. Not the grinning youth, but the veteran Jeb Harris strode forth.

The ancient one was clothed with importance. His person bristled with firearms. At his meaning glance, Mickey signaled toward the crowd. Instantly several old-timers thrust forward. These, pushing the dazed spectators back, formed a dou-

ble row on each side of the door, guns in hand. Into this armed cordon the sheriff urged his manacled and sullen prisoners.

La Fortune and his gunmen were taken! The room burst into an uproar. Excited shouts and conjecture filled the air. Methodically, as according to a preconceived and well-oiled plan, the sheriff herded his prisoners toward the street, his armed bodyguard cleaving the way.

That the sheriff was prepared for a hostile demonstration, perhaps an open attempt at rescue on the part of disgruntled persons who had fattened in the shadow of the fallen gang, was plain. As he proceeded down the street toward the courthouse, where steel-barred sanctuary awaited his quarry, other veterans rushed in to array themselves beside the bristling column. These eyed the trailing mob with truculent intentness, patently prepared for war.

But there was no demonstration, no attempt at rescue. Dazed ranks of the reckless army, with their leaders fallen, were merely a mob, nothing more. Plain to the eye, too, was the fact that in an actual crisis, with the victorious blow already struck and the issue fairly joined, the strength of those who leaned toward law-abiding standards could not successfully be assailed.

And where was the brand inspector's man, the drawling youth who had accomplished single-handed that which local peace officers and volunteer vigilantes had attempted for months in vain?

This question, unanswered, shuttled back and forth through the crowd when the details of what had transpired behind the closed door came to light. He had disappeared. He was gone. Somewhere in the shuffle, under cover of the excite-

ment, like one who thirsts only for the drama and pays no heed to the applause, he had withdrawn from the stage as surreptitiously as he had come.

LEM HARPER, in the outer ranks, eyed the triumphal procession with speculative intentness. He motioned to several sinister-featured youths close at hand. These signaled to others more distant. A considerable group fell out of the line of march without attracting undue attention, and foregathered in the darkness of an alley.

"Gents," said Lem, with meaning emphasis, "no use now to cry over spilt milk. Dynamite's been set off, an' our hand's scattered. At the minnit, and probably for the next half hour, the bulk of the hoy polloy will be millin' around the courthouse. Meanwhile, they's a grin-nin' snake at large in this man's town who'd ought to have his rattles trimmed just for percentage. If they was ever a pest that had ought to be abated, he's it. What say, wranglers?"

"Let's go!" chorused a dozen voices.

"Scatter," Lem directed. "He can't get out of town on account of La Fortune's optimistic hands still standin' guard. He's layin' low somewheres. Ferret him out, an' we'll earnestly strive to plant somethin' else beside pleasant memories among his soovenirs."

The reckless ones departed forthwith, fading into the shadows.

Even the wolfish eagerness that inspired the search would have availed little against the resources of the sleuth who had already demonstrated his ability to avoid public notice. But Lem himself was pres-

ently pursued by an excited youth who laid hold on his arm and whispered guardedly in his ear.

"We got him spotted. A gent seen him slide into an alley. Right after the excitement busted."

"What alley?"

"Back of the hotel."

"Of course!" said Lem with a joyous oath. "What boneheads we were not to think of it! They's no better hide-out in town than that rookery. Let's go, citizens."

At a distance, with the hotel in view on the deserted street, Lem held whispered conference with his gang.

"You an' you," he directed, "slide into the alley an' stand guard. You two lads watch the front. The rest of us will go through that polecat's nest from cellar to garret. If he's there, we'll smoke him out."

Save for the ancient and hard-bitten clerk, whose duty kept him at his post though riots and earthquakes might threaten, the lobby was deserted.

"Friend," Lem addressed this one, "we're a committee of citizens lookin' for a gent. He's supposed to be hidin' out here. We're lookin' the joint over, with yore permission."

"You can't have it," stated the clerk sourly.

"We got it," retorted a hard-bitten youth, presenting a gun muzzle within inches of the other's nose. "Rise up, ol' son, an' follow along. Fetch yore keys with you."

UP and down the halls, beginning with the third floor, the invaders scurried, dragging the enraged but helpless clerk in tow. In swift and thorough fashion the hostelry was combed. Empty rooms and closets were explored, the farthest corners of the

gloomy basement illuminated with lighted matches. Gradually the search narrowed, until only the professor's room was left.

They had passed his door on the first round, at the clerk's insistence. Now, with determination, Lem approached that stronghold.

"We're goin' to give the dude the once-over," he announced. "No, they's no use arguin'," he informed the protesting clerk. "We're overlookin' no bets. They's plenty funny business goin' on to-night. Open 'er up, ol' son."

That the professor was not asleep was immediately apparent when the clerk's unwilling key rattled in the door.

"Who's there?" demanded his quavering voice. "I warn you, this is a private room, and you will enter at your peril."

"S'all right," soothed the clerk. "Just a bunch of noisy gents, professor, who ain't goin' to harm you a-tall. Don't you pester him," he warned Lem beneath his breath. "He's so scairt it hurts."

The professor was standing beside his bed, hands clasped together, his knees plainly shaking beneath his nightgown, when the formidable column strode into the room. These downright youths appraised him and his nocturnal costume with ludicrous amazement, and he peered back, a pitiable object, the whites of his horrified eyes gleaming behind his owl-glasses.

"W-what is it?" he stammered. "What is the meaning of this unwarranted intrusion? You have failed me, sir," he accused the clerk, his teeth chattering. "You assured me that I would be disturbed only over your dead body. This—this is an outrage!"

"Smooth down them hackles, pro-

fessor," said Lem reassuringly. "If you're as innocent as you look, we ain't stayin' long. Don't you be scairt of us."

"Ah," said the professor with a sigh of relief. "It's you, Harper! Rising up so suddenly from my troubled dreams, I was sure that La Fortune's cutthroats were pursuing me again." He shuddered. "But who are these others? And why have they forced entrance into my private room?"

"Lookin' for a gent," Lem explained, "who ducked into the alley an' might have shinned up over the back stoop. Just sit tight, professor. A quick once-over an' we're gone."

They looked in the closet, peered under the bed. There were, obviously, no other places of concealment.

Lem was about to wave his cohorts from the room when his roving glance lighted on a book lying face downward and tilted a little against the base of a reading lamp on the small table. It was a large book. The title was plainly marked: "Selected Poems of Charles Alge-non Swinburne."

A sardonic gleam kindled in Lem's eye. He drew nearer. In idle curiosity he picked up the volume. Having done so, he dropped it again, with an oath of astonishment.

For a gun lay upon the table, having been concealed by the book. It was no effete toy, no trinket such as the city man might have been expected to carry with some vague idea of self-protection. It was a very heavy-calibered, long-barreled weapon of the type used exclusively on far ranges and dusty trails, where armament is not carried for personal display or idle vanity, but for strictly business purposes.

THE sight of this weapon in itself was not startling to Lem.

His own person, on occasion, bore similar artillery. But how could such a formidable six-gun have found its way into the professor's untried hands?

He was about to pick it up, but the professor leaped nimbly forward and snatched it away.

"You shall not take my revolver," he announced, brandishing it aloft. "It is my last protection against just such outrages as have been heaped upon me in this hellish town, my last recourse. I warn you, I shall not give it up!"

"Ol' son," said Lem softly, "where'd you get that young cannon?"

"Why—ah——" The professor hesitated. "I borrowed it. From a friend."

"That's correct. But where's the friend?"

The professor peered from one to the other of the intent group. In some indefinable manner, as though he had acquired a part of the sinister personality of the weapon in his hand, he was not now the cringing and ludicrous object that had excited their amused pity on their first entrance to the room. He did not answer Lem's question. Instead, he drew himself up and spoke with severity.

"Young man I object to further cross-examination. This outrageous business has gone far enough. You have broken into my room, which is temporarily my home. Under the law, I am privileged to eject you forcefully. I will ask you, therefore, to withdraw at once. Immediately. Or suffer the consequences. I warn you," he insisted, an edge creeping into his voice, "not to ponder the advisability of resisting. I have some standing as an amateur marks-

man, and would not hesitate, at the slightest hostile move——"

But the crisis foreshadowed by his words was here interrupted. Came the sound of running feet, mounting from the lower floor. The hall echoed. The door burst open. Sheriff Holbrook strode in, an armed column at his back.

That peace officer—upon whose bearing was writing the exultant record of the evening—took in the tableau at a glance.

"Outside, Harper." He jerked his thumb curtly toward the door. "This gentleman's rest has been disturbed long enough. You and your hoodlums make dust. Beat it. Vamoose. No argument! Harper, you've been skating on thin ice. We haven't enough evidence to convict you of playing La Fortune's game. You've been smart enough to cover up your stool-pigeon activities. But watch your step in the future. A new leaf has been turned over in cow-country history. Do I make myself plain? And as for the rest of you foot-loose pilgrims——"

But these latter were already sidling through the open door into farther shadows. Thus deserted, Lem peered about him at the glowering citizens, at the sheriff's grimly exultant face, and shrugged his shoulders in a gesture of defeat. He cast a piercing, questioning, baffled glance at the professor, turned on his heel, and strode forth without a word.

One by one the armed citizens likewise turned away. With his hand on the knob, preparatory to closing the door behind him, the sheriff's truculent eyes twinkled upon the professor.

"Good night," he said. "You won't be disturbed any more. I hope you sleep soundly."

"Thank you, sir," said the pro-

fessor warmly. "I'm sure I shall. Since you have spoken to those ruffians so severely, I'm satisfied they won't attempt to intimidate me again."

He had already leaped into bed and drawn the covers about him. His formidable weapon was on the table. His book of poetry was in his hand. The sheriff's bristling ranks had already withdrawn from view. Above his book the professor winked gravely, his dignified features unsmiling.

"The reading of classical verse," he said, "is a spiritual sedative, composing one for slumber. Haven't you found it so?"

The sheriff did not trust himself to make reply. He merely nodded, his features contorted, and softly closed the door.

CHAPTER IX.

LEM RISES TO INQUIRE.

THE professor descended upon the lobby, at approximately twenty minutes before train time, sedately garbed for travel. Behind him trailed the elongated bell boy, burdened with aristocratic baggage. Plain to the eye of the Sunday-morning loungers forgathered in the smoke-hung room was the fact that he was about to shake the dust of the high desert from his well-shod feet.

Apparently oblivious to the buzz of comment that filled the lobby, the professor approached the desk, called for his bill, paid it, turned to the cigar counter, and selected a choice perfecto. While thus engaged, Lem, who chanced to be seated in the front rank of the lounging ones, rose up and leaned in confidential pose beside him.

Purely by chance, too, it seemed, the sheriff and a group of cronies

with whom he had been in conversation, drew near and stood at the professor's elbow.

"Leavin'?" inquired Lem in an off-hand manner.

"Correct," said the professor. He lighted his cigar and beamed through the billowing smoke. "My short visit here has been most interesting and—ah—enjoyable. But all pleasant intervals must come to an end. Yes, I must run along."

With the sheriff's frosty glance upon him, Lem spoke apologetically, grinning. But his eyes were intent.

"I don't aim to discommode you none, professor. But before you pull out for good, they's a thing or two on which I crave light. You don't object to a question or two, huh?"

"About myself?" The professor peered blandly at the genial rogue. "Not at all, sir. You flatter me. Though I'm somewhat surprised that a person of your obvious intelligence should find anything either interesting or obscure——"

"Don't kid me," said Lem, grinning. "Up to a couple days ago, I figured that when it come to finesse, diplomacy, or what have you, I was a wolf. Since then my ears have been knocked down plenty. Hereafter I'm confinin' my genius to the livery stable, an' nowheres else."

"Those are noble sentiments," the professor approved. "Each of us has our little niche to fill, the groove along which our destiny unfolds. Our candle shines brightest in the obscure corner in which it belongs. Removed thence——" He checked himself with a courteous gesture, glancing at the clock. "Pardon the digression. Time presses. Proceed, sir."

"In some way or another," said Lem bluntly, "you were hooked up with last night's business. But how?"

"Really, my dear sir! Are you advancing that as a serious question?"

Lem nodded, frowning with puzzlement. "You light in town, pretendin' to be a bug hunter. You only chase bugs one day, and are hazed so strenuous on that expedition that you lose all the bugs you do catch. Now you're on yore way. Meanwhile, a fire-spittin' gunman comes, does his stuff, and is gone. Where did he come from? Where did he hide out? Whose gun was that layin' on yore table? If *he* was the brand-inspector man, who the Sam Hill are you? For the benefit of pop-eyed posterity, let's have it all in a bunch."

"Marvelous!" breathed the professor, beaming upon the sheriff. "My dear sir," he addressed the peace officer, "when I swore you and your friends to secrecy, it was solely for the purpose of permitting our plans to go forward without hitch. I didn't dream that there would be anything obscure in the matter after the dramatics were over. Yet here we have one of the most sagacious minds of the village still groping in the fog! This is almost incredible."

"S'all right," said Lem. "I'm just that dumb. An' they's plenty others hereabouts."

"After all," mused the former, "why not? The facts will soon be of public record. Nothing is to be gained by further concealment. There's only one proviso, Harper. Since the village appears to be still in the dark, don't noise it around until after I have departed on the train. As you have doubtless noticed, I shrink from too much public attention." His somber eye twinkled. "The whole affair is really very simple. Are you ready for the dénouement?"

"Whatever that is," agreed Lem. "Unload it."

THE professor motioned them to draw nearer, turning his back to the crowd. He placed his cigar upon the counter. From his breast pocket he drew forth a spotless handkerchief, removed his glasses, and polished the lenses with care. He breathed upon them, polishing them anew, and all the while his twinkling gaze rested upon Lem.

Suddenly his features were split by a grin, an enormous, expansive grin in which beautiful teeth flashed.

"Ho, gentlemen!" he murmured softly.

He replaced his glasses, his features unsmiling as of old. He returned his handkerchief to his pocket and took up his cigar.

"Does that," he inquired, "answer your several questions, Harper?"

Lem stood gaping, rooted to the spot. Equally dumfounded was the hard-bitten clerk, whose quivering ears loomed as a part of the circle.

"Son of a gun!" breathed the former. "Who in blazes are you, anyway?"

"Professor Billingsworth. Assistant professor of zoölogy at the State university. Former classmate of the brand inspector at the University of the South. Commissioned for this particular enterprise because of my knowledge of brands. And also, perhaps, because of some little talent as an actor. My boyhood, suh," he lowered his voice and spoke drawlingly, "was spent in the Brasada, in southwest Texas. I am thi'ty-fo' yeahs old, but even atfeh fo'teen yeahs of classical and studious pu'suits, I look back longingly to the follies of youth. Compa'ed to the Brasada, suh, wheah I cut my eye-teeth in riding, roping, and reading brands, this heah region is peopled with gentle, kindly, and law-abiding citizens."

"Lawsy!" whispered Lem.

"From the information I have just imparted," said the other, resuming his professorial manner without effort, "you will readily deduce the answers to any other questions that come to mind. As a minor detail, for example, it was no mere coincidence that caused me to approach you at the depot when I first arrived, Harper. Much advance data had been supplied me by your efficient sheriff." He waved his cigar. "Do you begin to see—ah—daylight in the swamps?"

"Daylight?" repeated Lem, utterly crushed. "I'm blinkin' in the presence of a flock of white lights. When La Fortune an' his lads hazed you out of the canyon, you'd already gotten just the dope you needed. Laid there, by gravy, an' watched 'em alter the brand!"

"That," said the professor, "academically speaking, was the most interesting phase of the whole episode. The manner in which XLX was altered to Star Swastika has added another chapter to the history of the industry. The privilege of witnessing it amply repaid me for any—ah—minor inconveniences involved. And now," he continued briskly, "I must be running along."

"Wait," pleaded Lem. "Even when you're right smack in front of me, it don't seem reasonable. How in blazes was you able to pass yoreself off as this gunman without anybody suspectin' nothin'?"

"The most individual of the human features," said the professor, "easiest of recognition, are the eyes. Next come the lips. I am not, as you have doubtless suspected, as melancholy as my professionally adopted expression might suggest. In the lecture halls at the university, you understand, I must deal daily with hyenas, jackals, baboons, and

other—ah—goat-getting species of healthy American youth. To keep them in check, to suggest to them the dignity of the classroom, it is necessary to maintain a severe and impressive front. Not so on the Brasada, my dear sir, fifteen years ago!" He sighed. "Ah, well. It was easy, as you perceive. My glasses removed, a broad grin added, some uncouth clothing, plus a little judicious make-up that would pass muster beneath artificial light, and presto! the hand of steel, as it were, had emerged from the velvet glove!"

"But really, I must go now. The train is almost due. A pleasure to have met you, Harper." He turned to the sheriff. "If you and these gentlemen will be good enough to accompany me to the station——"

"It's safest," agreed the sheriff. "The wolves are scattered, but some misguided optimist with a grievance might be waiting in an alley. Let's go. You walk ahead, and we'll trail you to the depot."

"Thank you," said the professor. He peered at Lem. "And now, if I could find some courteous gentleman to assist me with my baggage——"

"That's me," said Lem instantly.

"I knew it!" approved the professor with delight. "Misguided as you may have been in the past, my dear sir, I was prepared to wager that you were sound at heart. For a gentleman of sporting instincts"—he turned to the counter, beaming—"another cigar, if you please!"

With Lem at his side, festooned with baggage, and with the sheriff and his cohorts following after, the professor moved toward the door. At the threshold he paused to wave a cheerful farewell to the grinning clerk, then strode briskly forth into the sunlit street whose Sabbath quiet was similar to the hush that treads on the heels of a storm.



CRAZY COW THIEF

By GUTHRIE BROWN

Author of "Leading Strings," etc.

SURE, that's the guy you wanta strike for a job. You'll be more apt to get one from him than anybody else in the room."

The two cowboys, their eyes sparkling with mischief, urged the pale, undersized lad of sixteen toward the bar. It was a bitter spring night in the little cow town, and the saloon was crowded with men who had come in out of the cold.

"Step right up to him, kid." One of the punchers took the boy by the arm and half propelled, half dragged him across the room. "Don't you be afraid. Yates Reardon, he likes 'em to be brash, and stand up to him.

Come on, now. You said you had to get you a job, and here's your chance. You got to act the man in this country, or you don't get along."

The thin shoulders in the ragged coat straightened. The gray gaze under the mop of uncut, fair hair hardened, and the square young chin lifted with resolve. Chet Gable was not the kind who was normally afraid, but a run of extra hard luck had shaken his confidence. His broken shoes slapped soddenly on the floor, for it was slushy outside; but he looked straight up at the big rancher in the shining leather coat and the shining top boots.

"Mr. Reardon, can you give me a riding job?"

The rancher half turned and glanced down at the shoddy little figure.

"Huh!" he snorted. "Did I hear a mouse squeak somewhere?"

"No, sir," Chet told him, eyes steady, though the blood began to creep up about his ears. "I want a job, if you can give me one, Mr. Reardon."

Yates Reardon turned fully upon the boy and looked him over from head to heel. There was no mistaking that cold, sneering glance. Chet knew now that the punchers were only having fun at his expense, but he stood his ground, trying to look as if he didn't understand that he was being made sport of.

"Can you beat it, boys?" Reardon asked in a loud voice. "This shrimp wants a *riding* job!" The rancher threw back his head and guffawed, and a lot of the men followed suit. Most of them believed that it paid to laugh with Yates Reardon. He went on:

"Say, you young skinful of bones, do you s'pose if you tried extra hard, you could stick on a burro—not a big burro, you understand, but just a medium-sized, pretty tame burro—if you had a good stout saddle to hang to? We-ell, maybe, maybe. And you *might* be able to lay your loop over a post, if you didn't get it tangled up with your nice long curls." Reardon had to stop and laugh again. Then he drew a long face and shook his head sadly. This was his idea of exquisite humor. "No, no, half-pint. Come back in eight or ten years, and I'll let you hold the branding iron, when it gets cold."

Chet, his thin cheeks paper-white, tried to speak. But his voice went thin and high and added to his

shame. He could only choke out: "I—I'll remember that!" before he stumbled blindly toward the door.

Yates Reardon guffawed once more, and turned his back.

One man muttered to his neighbor, "I call that pretty rotten! The kid is hungry!"

"Yates Reardon," was the answer, "is one of the ugliest devils that ever wore shoe leather. And yet there's one thing—well, a guy don't hardly know what to think about the big bully."

The other nodded shortly. "I know what you mean. Just the same, the walloper needs knocking down. I'm goin' to find that kid and feed him."

But Chet Gable had disappeared into the black and stormy night, in his heart a hate blacker than any night.

BURR LOUIS realized that Chet had been acting uneasy for several days now. Chet Gable was his partner. The two young men, who had been punching cattle for the Wolf River outfit on the other side of the range, came north when the first snow fell. They built a snug camp and established a trap line along the headwaters of the Nightshade Creek. Before the weather got severe, they hauled up baled hay for their two saddle horses, from a ranch in the creek bottom, and laid in a four months' supply of grub.

Chet Gable, well set up, wiry, agile as a lynx, with a flashing gray glance that never fell for any man, stood in the open cabin door with a lowering January sky behind him.

"I'm goin' to take a sashay across the State line, Burr, and look the country over."

"We got a good layout right where we are, Chet. What's your

idea? You came ahead and looked over every foot of this country, I thought." The muscles of Burr's powerful shoulders flowed under the brown woolen shirt as he stooped from his bench to pick up a trap.

"Yeah," Chet agreed. "But I want to go back and have another look at some of that north timber country again. It may be better than where we are, here. I'll be back in a couple, three days. So long."

"So long," Burr responded, and watched his friend swing into the saddle and take the packed white trail down the gulch. What in the deuce was working on Chet? Had he run across a girl, when he was out riding the trap line? Burr's heart tightened a little. He guessed that it meant too much to him, this friendship of seven years' standing. It no doubt meant more to him than to his partner. Chet was a better mixer than the rather taciturn Burr, an easy talker, a free spender. He never forgot a kindness. Nor, Burr reflected, did Chet ever forget an injury. His memory was just as tenacious of one as the other.

Burr shrugged his shoulders, giving up the riddle of his friend's peculiar behavior. He shoved aside the traps he had been repairing and put over the fire some venison to stew for supper. He rummaged in the cupboard for the salt sack, and a minute later exclaimed:

"Is that all the salt we have left? And I'm sure I didn't stow any with the grub."

Nevertheless, he made a search of their stores, but discovered no salt. It was unlikely that Chet would think of it, even if he knew about the shortage. Burr concluded that there was only one thing for him to do—go to Ainsville, the county seat just north of the State line, and get a supply. It was now near noon,

and the best he could do, he would not be able to complete the round trip before to-morrow night.

It was close to two o'clock that afternoon when he passed the stone cairn that marked the State line, and turned to the left to skirt the foot of Bald Mountain. He followed a fresh horse track down a deepening gulch which gradually widened into a broad canyon. Chet had come this way, for that was the track of his horse—a peculiarly long hind foot. The floor of the canyon was fenced pasture and hay land.

Up a side gulch, Burr saw a cabin and feed racks, placed well out of the wind. He thought, "Somebody's winter camp in here," and followed the trail through a belt of timber above the fence line.

As he was leaving the trees, his eye caught something that made him pull his horse to an abrupt stop. He stared a moment, then carefully drew back into the shadows of the spruce and muttered to himself, "Now, what in the devil does that mean?"

ACROSS the side gulch, directly opposite him, sat a man on a horse. It was his partner, Chet Gable. Chet was watching a busy man below intently, a man who was filling the racks with hay from a wagon. The small bunch of cattle that crowded around the racks, Burr could see even at that distance, were a particularly fine strain of red Durham. His attention went back to his friend.

Chet watched until the feeding was finished, then he descended into the gulch. He rode straight for the cabin, dismounted at the door, and knocked. There was a short talk before he disappeared inside.

Burr rode thoughtfully on his way. Did the man who was tending

this winter camp have a daughter? He felt pretty sure that that could be the only explanation of his partner's mysterious conduct. Still, why should Chet wait until the father was inside the house, if that was the case? Again Burr shrugged away the puzzle.

An hour later he caught up with a cowboy who was driving a small herd of cattle down the canyon road. When they had ridden for a while together, he asked:

"Do you happen to know who owns that winter camp, back up here six or seven miles?"

"Clear up in the head of the canyon?" the puncher asked. "That belongs to Yates Reardon. S'pose you've heard of him?"

Burr gave an inner gasp, but managed in a normal tone, "Yes, I've heard the name."

"He's a big shot here in the south end of the State," Burr's chance acquaintance was going on. "Surly devil, but gobs of dough. He's keepin' a few pure-bred young Durham bulls up there in that camp. Grainin' 'em and buildin' 'em up on the native hay, tryin' to get 'em acclimated. They cost him a good fat penny, and he does everything but wrap 'em in lambs' wool. I bet if anything'd happen to them bulls, there'd be a national revolution. Well, here's where I turn off."

When the man was finally out of sight, Burr lost no time. He reversed his course and took the back trail at a lope. So that was why Chet had come into this country—to get revenge! Burr groaned to himself. If only Chet weren't such an obstinate mule about holding a grudge. Burr, who of course knew the story, sympathized with his friend's feeling, but he had tried to tell him that hate injures worst the holder of it. Chet could never see

it. Still, it had been a long time since he had mentioned Reardon, and Burr had hoped that he was forgetting the incident. He should have known Chet better. And now what was the darn chump up to?

The light of the short winter day had already begun to fade. There was no one in sight at the winter camp. Burr let himself through two gates and headed straight for the cabin. He knocked on the door. There was no response. He knocked again. He could hear nothing. The place must be empty. Once more he pounded the heavy panels. Still no response. Deliberately, he lifted the latch and pushed open the door. Then his heart seemed to stop entirely for a moment.

Sprawled in the middle of the floor of the small, littered log room lay a man, face downward. Burr fought off the paralysis that had laid hold of his limbs. He sprang forward. He turned the body over. It was the man who had been feeding the cattle this afternoon.

Burr dropped him back with a grunt of profound relief. Not injured, not killed, just dead drunk. The place reeked of whisky. His gaze swept the room—the scattered cards, the empty bottles, the banked fire. What, exactly had happened? Chet had made the man drunk—yes. He had banked the fire, so the fellow would be warm until he came out of his stupor. That was like Chet.

WITH a cry, Burr sprang through the door and slammed it behind him. Of course! He'd been a fool, wasted precious time. There were only a few cattle around the feed racks. All of those dark, broad-backed Durhams were gone.

Burr ran to his horse, flung him-

self into the saddle, drove in the spurs. He picked up the track—about a dozen head of cattle, with the track of Chet's horse behind them. Burr swore with immense zeal. Where was the fool heading them?

He followed the trail across a pasture and through a gate on the farther side. From there, it took a diagonal course upward along the western face of Bald Mountain.

"Heading south over the top," Burr muttered. "Taking them across the State line. Where to, for Pete's sake? Why not up the canyon, where it's shorter? Afraid of running into me," he answered his own question. "Tracks are pretty fresh. If I can just catch the idiot! He's got a long start on me."

The day darkened swiftly. Heavy storm clouds drew across the dome-like top of the treeless mountain. Presently Burr noticed by the tracks that there were now two riders behind the cattle. Some one had joined Chet.

Burr came to the top, where the State line crossed. Suddenly, to his right, going down the south slope, he saw the little herd. He could make out only one man in the fast-gathering darkness. Probably Chet's companion was somewhere on ahead. The herd was moving faster, as the country dropped away in front of them and they were pushed by the rising wind behind.

Burr spurred forward to catch up. A sudden gust of snow-filled wind drove between, and he called:

"Chet! Chet, you fool, you!" Then he was beside the other, a hand on the taut bridle rein.

Burr heard the bark of the gun, even as he saw the motion of the hand. The bullet missed, and he drove a lightning fist upward at the face which was only a gray shape

in the snowy dimness. The rider toppled, and Burr caught him. Only then did he know. The man he held was not Chet Gable. The weight was too light, the muscles too stringy. He appropriated the gun, looked for other possible weapons, and lowered the dazed figure to the ground. He lifted up his voice in a roar for Chet. There was no answer.

He stooped and shook the man on the ground.

"Where's the other man?" he demanded.

He had to repeat the query several times before it was grasped. The fellow all at once came to life and burst out:

"Whatta hell busta loose? Go 'way! Who you? Me—me——" Outraged dignity choked him. "Nobody treat José Gomez thisa way. No, zir!"

He tried to get up. Burr could see the black eyes blazing in the gloom. He knelt in the snow beside the Mexican, who was torn between fear and wrath, and placed the muzzle of the gun accurately and uttered a few carefully selected words. The story came out—reluctantly—but it came.

There was a rancher named Art Costello, who lived a few miles from the foot of the mountain, south of the State line. This man Costello hated Reardon, who lived north of the State line. Everybody hated Reardon, stated the Mexican with embellishments. Burr told him he knew all about that and to get on with the story. The Mexican continued, feeling the cold muzzle of the six-shooter.

Art Costello had made a bargain with a young stranger—no, the Mexican did not know the stranger's name—and it was a good bargain. The stranger was to take all

the risk. Very nice. He was to steal the so very valuable young bulls of this same unmentionable Yates Reardon. He was to steal them and deliver them at the top of the mountain, on the State line. He was to do this the first time a heavy storm threatened, in order to cover up the tracks of those same accursed bulls, which were even now drifting out of sight and hearing before the wind. The Mexican choked and spluttered.

"Meester Costello send me, José Gomez! I take cattle. I obey order. Am I a pig, to be treated so?"

Burr rose to his feet.

"Get up, you! You're to help me turn those bulls and head them back down the west side of the mountain. Oh, yes, you are! And you'll help me put them in their pasture, where they belong. Which way did he go, the man who delivered these cattle to you?"

"How I know?" was the sullen answer. José Gomez hated to obey, but the other man had the only gun. They rounded up the drifting cattle and turned them in the face of the wind. In a few minutes the storm struck with savage force. The animals hated to face it, and it took constant vigilance to keep from losing any in the smother. The knife-like wind was full of fine sleet that bit like hail. Three times Burr caught the Mexican trying to slip away. The fourth time the man made it.

ALONE, Burr bent doggedly to the nearly hopeless task. He had to push his horse cruelly to keep the cattle bunched and moving. He was soon chilled to the bone, in spite of woolen clothing and a slicker that turned the snow. The bitter wind cut through everything, and the sleet was like sifted

dust. But he drove himself and the animals relentlessly. The one thing that mattered was to get them back where they belonged.

He knew when he had crossed the top of the mountain, because the wind fell away, then died altogether. The snow was coming down in great, thick flakes that piled up with amazing speed. The air was not nearly so cold, but the going got steadily worse. The tired young cattle floundered through the piling drifts, and it seemed to Burr that he had been out here since the beginning of time. He had not realized, in his hurry to catch up with Chet, that he had come so far. Would he ever get back down in the canyon again, and off this cursed mountain?

He sighted something dark ahead. Timber! Never was spruce grove more welcome. He herded the bulls in under the low-spreading branches. They thankfully lay down. He built a tiny fire. By its light, he cleared a spot of dry grass for his worn-out horse. Then he fell asleep by the fire. His last conscious thought was, "The pasture can't be far now."

Stiff and cold, he awakened at the first hint of dawn. He had trouble getting the cattle on the move again. They hated to buck the snow. He was compelled to break trail for them, then come back and drive them, over and over again.

It was a raw, gray morning, with no hint of the position of the sun. Burr scanned the country in some perplexity. "I must've come a lot farther down country than I figured. But there's a fence, and there's the road."

He saw a single horseman coming along the road, and went ahead to meet him. He would find out exactly where he was. The stranger

was an oldish, rather grim-looking man, who eyed Burr keenly as he approached. The young man had his mouth open for his question, when the other said:

"Well, I'll be blowed! I never figured you'd walk right into my arms like this. Just hand over whatever hardware you're packin', young feller."

The astonished Burr saw a shiny-nosed pistol poking across the saddle horn opposite him.

"What in the devil——" he asked, too amazed to obey.

The stranger's tone took a sharper edge. "Are you goin' to come across, or have I gotta plug you?" With his left hand the man pulled aside his coat to show a star on his vest. "I'm Sheriff Tynan of Ains County, in case you got any lingerin' doubts about mindin' good."

Burr handed over the gun he had taken from the Mexican.

"Now," he said quietly, "will you tell me what this is all about?"

The sheriff remarked: "Cool one, ain't you? Ride right out on the road in broad daylight with a bunch o' stole' cattle, and wanta know what it's about."

Burr had turned a startled head to look back.

"But those——" he began, and halted. Weary, his mind on the single idea of finishing his job, he had for the time forgotten that he was driving stolen cattle. "Good grief!" he muttered in a dazed tone.

"Plenty o' that," the sheriff agreed cheerfully. "Sa-ay, you! Are you a little batty, or something? You're a kinda funny-actin' cattle thief."

Burr retorted: "The funny side of it, my friend, you'll never know." Never in his life had he been so completely stopped. He could not utter a word of explanation without

involving Chet. Presently he asked, the officer still watching him closely:

"Where am I?"

Sheriff Tynan chuckled grimly. "Can you beat that? You're about six miles from Ainsville."

"Am I on the *east* side of Bald Mountain?"

"No place else but. I'm beginnin' to tumble that you went and got yourself lost in that storm last night."

"It seems so," Burr agreed, contemplating the enormity of the situation with wide eyes.

"Come on," the sheriff commanded, turning his horse. "I'll send somebody out for the cattle. Yates Reardon'll likely be in town, time we show up. He's sure been burnin' the telephone wires since midnight. You didn't make that feller in his winter camp quite as drunk as you thought you did."

AT the county seat, the two put away their horses and then walked up street toward the sheriff's office. A voice suddenly rang out on the crisp morning air, surprised and pleased.

"Hello, there, Burr! What brought you here?"

Burr stopped dead. Chet was wading through the snow of the street toward him. He had a few seconds to make his decision. He met the eyes of his partner with a stony lack of recognition. Chet planted himself on the sidewalk before the sheriff and his prisoner and demanded:

"What's up, here?"

Sheriff Tynan ordered sternly, "Get outta the way, young feller."

"And who are you?" Chet's bold, gray gaze was rich with scorn. "Burr, what's eating on you?"

Burr gave the sheriff a bored look, asking him to get rid of this pest.

If he could only shake Chet and get safe inside that office!

Tynan displayed his badge.

"Now, will you move, or shall I take you in, too?" he said.

"Too?" Chet repeated in a startled tone. His glance flashed to his partner's face. "Burr, for the love o' Mike, what has happened?"

The sheriff's .45 appeared.

"Young feller, you're obstructin' justice. I'm tellin' you just once more to move."

"And I'm telling you," Chet cried passionately, "that you'll have to move me! This man's my pard! He never in his life did anything to be arrested for! He's trying to let on that he doesn't know me. Man, you've got to tell me what's up!" he appealed.

Even so hard-boiled an individual as Sheriff Tynan could not doubt his sincerity. The officer looked deeply at his prisoner. He said:

"Come on, both of you."

Burr could stand no more. "Chet, keep out of this, will you? Who asked you to come butting into something that's none of your business?"

"Ho!" said Tynan in his throat. "There's more here than meets the eye! Get a move on, you two."

They walked up the street, Burr looking like a thundercloud, Chet watching him keenly. At the office, the sheriff told them to sit down, while he built a fire in a wood stove. The heat was more than welcome to Burr. He moved close to the stove and sat with his head in his hands. Chet, whose gaze had never left him, announced:

"I'll get you a cup of coffee, and a sandwich."

As he started for the door, Tynan stated with emphasis:

"You're under arrest, young feller."

Chet spun on him, furious.

"Sure, I'm under arrest! And this man is hungry! I'm goin' to get him something to eat, and you see if you can stop me!"

He stalked out and banged the door, and Tynan's grim mouth twitched. Burr spoke quickly.

"Sheriff, don't let him back in! He's capable of any kind of crazy stunt, if he thinks I'm in trouble. He never has an atom of judgment or sense when his feelings get mixed up in things. Don't let him come back!"

Tynan listened impassively to the plea, and Burr had a wild impulse to try force. But here came Chet back. He brought a complete breakfast. Burr learned afterward that he had practically snatched the meal from under the nose of a customer in the restaurant across the street. He watched with immense satisfaction while the unhappy Burr ate. When the last crumb had disappeared—

"Now, Mr. Sheriff," said Chet, "the truth, if you don't mind."

TYNAN had never seen anything like this pair. Chet's blunt highhandedness tickled a man who had always seen men afraid of him. He watched closely the countenances of the two as he made terse explanation. Burr's eyes, fixed on the stove, grew darkly somber. Chet's became cold and steely, the kind of expression that the sheriff knew would bear close watching. When the tale was finished, he looked at his friend.

"So you followed me."

"No," Burr answered. "I found that we were about out of salt. I didn't know which way you had gone, until I started for Ainsville. And I didn't know that that was Reardon's camp until I was a long

way below it. Otherwise, I'd have caught you."

"Salt!" echoed Chet. "That's why I came on over here, instead of going back to camp. I was just leaving town with it, when I saw you coming up the street. Sheriff, do you know what this poor sap went and did? He——"

The office door flew open, letting in a gust of freezing air. A big, fur-coated figure entered and slammed the it shut with a bang that jarred the building.

Chet sprang to his feet, his eyes ablaze.

"There you are, you dirty little snob, you! Yeah, I said *little*! You may stand six feet in your boots, but you can hardly be seen with the naked eye! What's left, after your beef is figured, would go through a knot hole, easy! Why, you two-by-four, dried-up wart!"

The dumfounded Reardon looked at him with sagged jaw, at first not able to take it in. It must be reported that Sheriff Tynan did nothing to dam the flow. In fact, Burr detected a satiric gleam of approval, far down in the official eye. Chet whirled from Reardon to the sheriff.

"Gimme a piece o' paper! I'll write out a full confession, right here and now. And whatever I get handed for stealing his cattle, it's well worth it, just to tell the frowzy little rat for once how he really stacks up in the minds of white folks!"

At this point Yates Reardon at last got his tongue in running order; but his reprisal was pale beside Chet's brilliant attack. Moreover, the latter was not listening. He was writing with a stub of indelible pencil, his tongue in his cheek and his eyes bright with wrath. He finished with furious energy, signed, and handed the result to Tynan.

"That all right?" he demanded. "That clear Burr for good and all, make it plain that he was trying to put the cattle back, and got lost in the storm?"

Tynan read carefully. "This seems to cover it," he decided.

Chet got up from the desk and turned once more to Reardon. The big rancher advanced with doubled fists. He had taken about all he intended to take. Chet laughed and stepped close to him.

"And here's another earful, punk! You'd never in this world known what became of those bulls, if I wasn't hampered and hamstrung and generally bedeviled by the finest, squarest partner that a man ever had on God's green footstool!"

Chet's move was like a flash of light. He was gone through the door, had slammed it shut behind him, and was out in the street before any one could get in motion. The sheriff sprang for the window, swearing, his gun out.

"The young fool! What's he think that'll get him?"

AHAND shot out and jerked the officer back from the window. Reardon had the shoulder of the amazed sheriff in a grip that made him squirm.

The cattleman demanded in a slow voice: "What's that he said?"

Tynan tried to tear loose.

"He'll get away, Yates, you——"

"What's that he said?" repeated Reardon and shook the shoulder.

Burr said wearily: "I'm the liability he spoke about." The young man felt numb. Now Chet had fixed things up right, bolting like this, making himself a fugitive from justice.

Between Burr and the angry Tynan, the tale all came out. Then

Yates Reardon walked over to the sheriff's desk. He picked up the confession Chet had written, tore it into small pieces, and dropped it in the waste-paper basket.

"No complaint," he stated, and strode out.

The sheriff stared at the door with a queer expression and murmured: "Holy smoke!" He looked at Burr. "You saved him, after all! By Harry, it was the one thing that could've saved him, too!"

"What are you talking about?" asked the thoroughly bewildered Burr.

"Friendship," answered the sheriff. "It's the one thing in this world that that bird has any real respect for. Once, a long time ago, there was a man he cared a lot about. The man lost his life hauling Yates out of a quicksand trap. Since then, Reardon has never failed to take off his hat to true friendship."



Out of the SHADOWS

From her lips came a terrified sob!



*Thrills
Chills
Galore
in*



15¢ CLUES

at all News Stands **DETECTIVE STORIES**



THE STICKIN'EST FRIENDS

By JOHN BRIGGS

Author of "Out Of Season," etc.

A FROWSY group of saddle horses and mules half encircled the weathered one-room log shack that had been the solitary residence of old Gabe Jethers. Most of the dejected-looking mounts stood unhitched, except for the bridle reins or halter ropes suspended from their drooping heads to the hard-packed, red mountain earth. Tails switched continuously at swarms of deer gnats and blue flies buzzing in the warm sunshine. A pot-bellied mule's long ear twitched spasmodically; a horse stamped disconsolately at stinging

insects. Bridle chains jangled. Some of the chunky, hill-bred beasts bore no saddles. Others had gunny sacks held to their swayed backs by surcingles.

A dusty mule standing by the open cabin door was equipped with a crosstree pack saddle. A dark-bearded man stepped out, picked up the lead rope, and held the pack mule while the funeral cortege emerged from the shack.

Four stout men carried a stiff, blanket-wrapped figure and carefully descended the single step to the hard ground. Their heads were bared, revealing shaggy, unkempt hair of

various shades from dark to brick-red. Somehow their faces seemed patterned alike—faces that were granite-cast, as if nature had molded them to reflect her glacier-gutted mountain peaks which steeped the distant sky line, aloof and eternal above the surrounding timbered ridges. The pallbearers wore hob-nailed boots, blue jeans, and six-guns. They were followed by a half dozen mountaineers who strode out bareheaded. From around the corner of the small, log building came four others who had been peering in at the cabin's open window.

That window had been found open. And Gabe Jethers had been found lying in his bed with a .44-caliber bullet hole through his skull. Death had overtaken him in his sleep. The hoofmarks of the unknown assassin's horse appeared in the soil under the window through which the fatal shot had been fired. But the tracks were blurred, being several days old when found.

SPECTATORS in the motley group stood with hats removed while the body was being roped to the pack saddle with two fence rails supporting it. Deceased, Gabe Jethers was receiving more respect than he had earned during his lifetime. For he had been a spiteful and irascible hermit. He had ranged Angora goats promiscuously, often destroying his neighbors' crops thereby. And Gabe had never made any restitution for damages thus resulting. He had even been suspected of breaking down fences to permit his goats free access to standing grain and corn. He had always backed up his depredations by threats of violence against protesting homesteaders. He was known to have killed two men in open arguments.

While living, he had been feared. Yet the fact remained that he had been murdered by some one who had been too cowardly to fight him openly.

Certainly a number of the men gathered about the cabin had suffered enough cause to hate Gabe Jethers. Now their grizzled features smoldered with suspicion and vague uneasiness. Each eyed his fellows furtively. None was certain that the murderer was not among them. Killings were none too rare in their backwoods Sierra settlement. Their law was still the law of the Western frontier, yet they were rigidly just, according to their lights. The murder of even their meanest neighbor was regarded as a moral blight that must be erased.

The mounted funeral procession wound slowly down along the narrow canyon trail, the raucous cawing of blue jays, the roaring of cascades, and the moaning of wind in the pines its only dirge.

Six men thoughtfully watched the dusty procession out of sight. By a sort of unvoiced understanding, this small group had remained behind. Two were huge men, as erect as fir saplings, their white, bared locks curling about their shoulders. They were "Gramp" Gaylord and Eriah Fitch. Once they had been leaders of opposing clans. Now they were looked upon as dictators of mountain law.

Soberly they put on their hats and faced each other. Eriah Fitch was the shorter in stature, the width of him appearing to equal his height. A tinge of russet still lingered in his stubby beard and mustache. Gramp Gaylord's full-fleshed, ruddy cheeks showed above his silvered whiskers.

"Eriah," said Gramp, "they ain't none o' my kin nor yoren present.

Aire yo' willin' I should speak my mind?"

"I'm a-listenin'," replied the other.

Gramp Gaylord eyed each member of the solemn-faced group.

"Be it agreed thet each of us airs his s'picions, 'thout sparin' friend nor kin?" he asked.

Slowly each head nodded in affirmation.

The aged speaker turned to his companion graybeard.

"This here procedin' is done opened," he announced. "Eriah, is they airy man yo' suspect o' murderin' Gabe Jethers?"

Eriah made a grating sound to clear his throat for speech that came hard. "Gabe was nigh ornery enough to deserve what he got," he growled. "But I shore hate to think thet airy kinfolks o' mine is low enough to murder a man in his sleep."

He paused, swallowed and added, flat-toned: "Last week Gabe's goats bust down a young apple orchard o' one o' my nevvies. I reckon yo' know whose orchard 'twas."

Gramp Gaylord answered gravely: "It hain't fer me to be namin' yore kinfolk, under s'picion, Eriah."

"Well, 'twas young Luke Fitch's trees them goats et down," said the other old man. "Makin' the third time Luke's planted an orchard, jest to hev' them critters break in an' ruin it. This time, he swore to collect damages from Gabe, or collect Gabe's hide."

Gramp's hoary head gave a jerky nod. "Luke Fitch and my gran'son, Hoot Gaylord, be the stickin'est friends I ever see, Eriah," he declared. "One 'ud as leave do murder fer tother as not. I reckon yo' heered how Hoot threaten' to swop lead with Gabe Jethers, over Gabe a-shootin' his best dawg?"

The other replied cautiously: "Ef I heered it, it don't cut no figger since yo' aire mentionin' it. I ain't accusin' nobody, but one or tother o' them two young hot-bloods 'pears most likely."

He met the grim looks of the four other mountaineers.

"S'pose we-all do some more rootin' fer sign hereabouts?" he suggested.

THE investigators scattered about the place, Gramp and Eriah making a final search of the shack. Two men looked into the barn and discovered that some one had turned Jethers's horses into the fenced pasture, apparently after the horses had stood many hours unattended in their stalls.

The open cabin window attracted Zach Thumlow. Zach was a lank, leathered, and freckled man with a warted neck and small, squinted eyes. He had first reported the murder. The body might have remained many more days without discovery, except that Zach had been bothered by a bunch of Jethers's straying goats and had ridden over to complain to the owner. Zach was a blacksmith and horse-shoer. His homestead and blacksmith shop were on the main stage road about two miles north of the Churn Creek settlement.

Zach Thumlow now made a very close examination of the hoof marks beneath the window. He finally traced them in the direction which the supposed assassin had taken. They led into the scattered underbrush of the timbered slope above the shack. Apparently the murderer had not departed by the trail.

The other searchers saw Zach working up through the brush. Between the trees, they caught glimpses of his long, bent figure as

he frequently stooped to examine the ground. Finally his shout echoed back to them.

"Hey, Gramp—c'm'ere!"

The old man, thus summoned, hurried up the gentle slope. Billows of tobacco smoke haloed his hoary head, punctuating every step as he puffed at his blackened pipe. He came upon Zach squatting on his heels. The melancholy-featured blacksmith squinted up at him, then pointed to a number of circles that he had drawn about hoofprints plainly indented in a bare section of marly soil. Gramp Gaylord knelt and emitted a series of grunts as he scrutinized the tracks.

"Huh, the hoss warn't shod," he said finally.

"Uh-huh," Zach languidly returned. "Yore eyes aire as good as mine, Gramp. What more do ye see?"

"The aidges o' them hoofs was sorta ragged," Gramp declared. "The shoes was fresh pulled off, and the hoofs warn't much wore down yit."

"Uh-huh," Zach repeated. "Them shoes hadn't been on long, neither, cuz the hoofs hadn't spread out much. The hoss stepped lighter with the left hind foot than with the right, bein' a mite tender in that hoof. It hadn't been shod all round at the same time. Hind hoofs was shod last, and the hoss was goin' tender behind, afore them last pair was put on. I put on them shoes myself. I had to trim down pretty close't on the left un. It had been draggin' a little. Notice the toe is blunt?"

"Shore 'nough," Gramp agreed. "Whose hoss was it?"

Zach's little eyes nearly closed as he squinted at the old clansman.

"That's what fer I called ye here alone," he replied, " 'thout havin'

Eriah Fitch come. These here tracks was made by Luke Fitch's sorrel mare. Eriah's nevvv must 'a' rid her hisself. He don't loan her out to nobody."

Gramp's brow puckered deeply.

"What war Luke's idea in pullin' off his mare's shoes?" he querulously demanded.

"You smarter'n I be, Gramp," stolidly returned the blacksmith. "I dunno how come he done it, less'n he figgered he wouldn't leave no plain tracks, or mebbe he wouldn't make much noise a-ridin' up to the cabin with Gabe asleep in it. Feller hadn't oughter pull off a new set o' shoes, 'thout some reason."

"Yup, I reckon he hed reason enough," the patriarch acknowledged. "Thet do look bad fer Luke. Still I've got a dawg sartin notion 'twas my gran'son, Hoot."

"How come ye s'picion Hoot?" queried Zach.

"Cuz," the old man confessed, scowling, "thet young hellion has done lit out from home, 'thout leavin' no word!"

SOBERLY they marched down to the cabin where Gramp Gaylord stonily confronted Eriah Fitch with the evidence that implicated the latter's nephew.

Eriah nodded without a trace of sentiment. "I'll ride down and fetch Luke back here," he said.

But Gramp announced his suspicions concerning the mysterious disappearance of his grandson, "Hoot."

"If Hoot done it," he declared, "yore nevvv knows it, Eriah. Cuz, ef Luke rode up to this yere cabin and made them tracks, he done it so's to steer us off from suspectin' Hoot!"

Eriah doubtfully shook his head. "I've hear o' our folks tryin' to

shield one another," he admitted. "Jest the same, they ain't no reason to s'pose that my nevvv never done it. He was sot to shoot Gabe Jethers on sight. But Luke warn't no fast gunman to stand up agin' Gabe. Reckon he jest weakened and ketched Gabe asleep."

Several of the others exchanged agreeing glances.

"I'll fetch Luke right here," Eriah declared. "And he'll get his trial. The peace has been kept in these yere mountains fer fifty years, without no meddlin' outsiders. They ain't been no innocent men hung, and they ain't been a hangin' without a trial."

Each of the clansmen nodded soberly.

"Yo' ken fetch yore nevvv," Gramp Gaylord agreed. "But, ef my gran'son Hoot is guilty, we won't get no information out o' yore nevvv, Luke. Fitchs and Gaylords don't squeal!"

"Well, I ain't fer lettin' none o' my kin shield a murderer, nuther," Eriah Fitch emphatically avowed. "Ef Luke ain't guilty, he must 'a' made them hoss tracks cuz he knows thet Hoot is! I calc'late to make him talk, or stand the consequences!"

Eriah nimbly mounted his mule and rode down the trail at a jolting jog-trot. Reaching his nephew's homestead, he greeted a buxom, rosy-cheeked young woman who was vigorously swinging an ax at the log pile. She was cutting stove wood, and her two toddling youngsters were carrying it into the house.

"Mornin', Mame," saluted the old mountaineer. "Whar at is yore man?"

The young wife rested on her ax handle, as he drew up.

"Mornin', Uncle Eriah," she returned. "Luke's out some'eres

a-huntin' hawgs. But he don't never miss noon. You ken best ketch him by stayin' fer dinner."

Eriah appeared to have nothing on his mind more serious than a social call as he accepted the invitation. He settled his squat, broad figure on a squat, gnarled stump and whittled a twig while Mame cut a few more sticks for the stove.

In a gossiping manner, he asked: "Warn't it Luke I seen out ridin' late, tother night?"

And Mame answered innocently: "Mebbe 'twas. Luke was out night afore last—no, 'twas the night afore that."

"He war out till 'most midnight, warn't he?" Eriah questioned the unsuspecting young woman.

"Why, it warn't that late!" Mame exclaimed. "He got home round ten. Aire you shore 'twas him you see, uncle? Seems like you must 'a' been out powerful late yoreself!"

"Waal, mebbe I be kinda mixed up on the time," the old man confessed, reflectively rubbing his stubbled chin. "Or mebbe 'twarn't him I seen. Mebbe 'twas young Hoot Gaylord a-ridin' this way. Was Hoot hereabouts, same night?"

"Why, yes—Hoot was," Mame replied, a trace of apprehension clouding her rosy face. "He come here whilst Luke was over to see him. They sorta missed each other that a way. But 'twas on'y 'bout nine o'clock when Hoot come here!"

"Did Hoot say where he was agoin'?"

"Why—no, he didn't," confessed Mame, real worry now widening her dark eyes. "What aire you a-drivin' at, Uncle Eriah?"

"Jest thet Hoot's done left these here woods, I reckon," Eriah returned evasively. "Luke and him bein' right close't friends, I think

Luke mought know whereabouts Hoot headed fer."

Nervously the young woman wiped her hands on her apron and stared at the patriarch.

"Might be Luke do know," she declared. "Hoot left word by me that Luke would know where at to find him."

Mame Fitch suddenly suspected that she had said too much. "Uncle Eriah," she begged, "has Hoot or—or Luke gone and—and done suthin' turrible?"

The stocky old man answered slowly: "Gabe Jethers has been kilt. But don't take on, Mame. Reckon it warn't the work o' no Fitch."

The young woman's frightened look showed that she was not so confident of her husband's innocence.

"Was Gabe Jethers kilt at night?" she gasped.

The aged clansman agreed that the murder appeared to have been committed at night.

"Well, I don't care!" Mame flared up. "Gabe Jethers was jest mean ole no-account trash! He been fightin' and bullyin' everybody fer thirty years!"

Old Eriah shook his head. "Gabe had a right to a chance't," he said. "He was snuk up on and ketched asleep."

"Luke—Luke——" the young wife choked.

Again the stolid old man shook his head. "I dunno," he confessed. "But I reckon it warn't Luke—not ef he warn't out later'n ten o'clock."

THE conversation was halted as Luke Fitch rode in with a sow tied on behind his saddle. He was carrying the sow's young litter of pigs in a sack. His uncle walked out to the corral and waited

until he had penned up the porcine family.

Like his elder relative, Luke was built on broad lines. After closing the pen trap, he lifted his ruddy, round face and met Eriah's look with mild blue eyes. There was something about his lips, doggedness or surliness, that vanished when he smiled. For the smile lighted up his homely features with contagious good humor. The gravity he read in his uncle's face did not affect his broad grin.

"You look like you've been to a funeral, uncle," he said.

"I hev!" the stern mountaineer declared. "And they's to be some inquirin' done, so yo're wanted at thet there inquest!"

"Where's it to be held?" asked Luke.

"At Gabe Jethers's place. Gabe's a'ready been tuk away."

"Ain't you found how he come by his end?" the young man inquired cheerfully.

Eriah frowned at the levity, but proceeded with judicial calm. "He met with a .44 rifle bullet, whilst he was abed asleep. And I reckon thet bullet come in by the open winder, from somebody a-lookin' in thet winder!"

"He'd oughto kept his window shut," said Luke. "But bein's it's all settled, what ken I do?"

"Yo' ken explain how come yore mare's tracks under thet winder!" his uncle sternly reproved. "Yo'll hev to do yore explainin' to the rest o' yore elders. Not here!"

"Well," Luke remarked, "bein's you ain't spoiled my appetite, we ken eat first. I hope you ain't upset Mame."

"Yo' mought 'a' thunk on thet yoreself!" snorted Eriah.

But Mame was oddly quiet serving the dinner. She asked few ques-

tions and bore a peculiarly determined look, as if she had resolved upon some private action. She gave way only to one outburst.

"Did you do it, Luke?" she entreated.

"Nobody's a-claimin' that I did, Mame," he replied. "And I ruther be accused o' murder than accused o' lyin', so I jest ain't a-sayin'."

Old Eriah Fitch shrugged ponderously and put in: "I'll draw out and let yo' talk private, ef yo' want."

Luke chuckled and shook his head. "Then you'd on'y have to look at Mame to know what I'd told her, uncle," he said, rising from the table. "No, I'll take a ride with you, now."

An hour's uphill ride brought them to the Jethers cabin where other members of the mountain tribunal had availed themselves of the deceased's food supplies and had also been joined by a number of the men who had been there earlier that day. Luke was ordered to stand facing Gramp Gaylord who was seated on a chopping block, while the small crowd pressed around, squatting or standing. The procedure was carried on with a solemnity exceeding that of the average court, but minus all complications and red tape.

THE first of the questions put to Luke by Gramp Gaylord advanced the trial far toward its close. The patriarch lifted his pipe from his mouth and said:

"Luke, ef yo' kilt Gabe Jethers, say 'Yes.' Ef yo' didn't, say 'No.' Ef yo' cain't answer thet a way, say nothin'!"

Luke held his stiff grin until it was considered that he had indicated his silence.

"Will yo' explain how come yore mare's tracks under thet there win-

der?" the hoary prosecutor next inquired.

"I rode the mare up to that window," said Luke.

"At what time o' day?"

"Mebbe between nine and ten o'clock at night."

There was a silent pause and a significant exchange of glances among members of the tribunal. Eriah Fitch spoke up:

"Luke's wife says he was t'home by ten, the night he went out. Thet was three nights ago. Thet night, the moon was jest past full. It couldn't 'a' shone in thet west winder till after midnight. And thet's the on'y winder any moonlight ken come in at. Luke couldn't 'a' seen Gabe a-layin' in bed, unless they was a light burnin' in the house. And he couldn't a-rode up with Gabe unawares, ef Gabe was awake. Fu'thermore, a man livin' alone, like Gabe, ain't apt to go to sleep a-leavin' his light burnin'!"

Gramp Gaylord glared hard at the culprit.

"Luke," he demanded, "was they a light inside thet cabin when yo' rode up?"

"You ken figger that one out," said Luke. "Seems like I couldn't 'a' shot a man so easy without a light!"

A low murmur of dudgeon responded to his retort.

"Luke," asserted the aged accuser, "yo' tuk off yore mare's shoes and rode up to thet winder fer jest one o' two reasons. Yo' rode up and kilt Gabe Jethers, or else yo' tuk all thet trouble so's to make us think yo' done it, after yo'd a'ready found out thet Hoot Gaylord hed murdered him! Whichever way 'twas, yo're a-meddlin' with justice. We cain't allow fer no cold-blooded murder to go unpunished."

Gramp paused, for he had made

a long speech. Eriah took up the theme:

"I've discivered that Luke knows whar Hoot Gaylord be hidin' out," he announced. "Ef he won't tell us whar Hoot is at, it's cuz he knows that Hoot would most likely take a hangin' jest to save him."

At his uncle's bit of logic, Luke himself displayed vast amusement. "I couldn't 'a' done better explainin' myself!" He laughed. "If I let you ketch Hoot, then Hoot will take the rope to save me. Accordin' to that, he's prob'ly tryin' to protect me, jest to make you-all think he done the killin'. Won't Hoot be mad when he finds out Zach Thumlow recognized my mare's tracks?" Luke ended with a chuckle.

"Is them remarks meant sarcastic, Luke?" Gramp demanded.

"They mean," said Luke, "that you've got to let the case hang—or hang me!"

"And that be what we'll do, sir!" his uncle growled. "Fer yo're a-takin' it on yorese'f!"

Luke turned a stolid face upon the assembled prosecutors.

"You-all aim to hang me fer killin' sech as Gabe Jethers?" he demanded.

Gramp Gaylord paused in refillin' his pipe.

"Fer a sneakin', low-down yaller murder!" he amended implacably. "Now yo' ken speak yore last say!"

Luke's round face went white but remained set.

"I say that Gabe Jethers got what was comin' to him!" he grated. "Go ahead with your hangin'!"

During the solemn hush, Gramp stood up and spoke:

"Luke Fitch is the same as confessed himse'f guilty o' murder," he announced. "What be yore say in this yere matter, gentlemen?"

"Guilty!" rumbled a deep bass.

"Guilty!" echoed several others.

"Be they any thet says he'd oughtn't to hang?"

No voice was raised.

"Jake," directed Gramp, addressing a burly mountaineer, "thar's a good limb on thet thar black oak frontin' the goat sheds. Swing yore lass' rope over it!"

LUKE'S hands were quickly bound to his back, and he was roughly hoisted onto a horse. His sarcasm had been more convincing of his guilt than either a denial or a confession would have been. It assured his hearers that he had not been quite cowardly enough to shift the guilt onto the only other possible suspect. He had made just a pretense at hinting that he might be shielding Hoot.

Luke looked down at old Eriah while a mounted man tied the rope to his neck. His pale lips expanded in another grin.

"Uncle," he bantered, "you ken tell the rest o' the Fitches that I hung proud!"

Almost following his words, three rifle shots rang out in quick succession from across the canyon. The executioners halted uncertainly. In the silence, a hail was plainly heard coming from the direction of the shots. Puzzled looks were exchanged, and the condemned youth's voice impatiently broke the hush.

"What's cloggin' this here wheel o' justice? I'd ruther have it run smooth!"

Incredulous faces were upturned to him. And Zach Thumlow voiced the sentiment in awed tones:

"He's a-takin' it jest like gravy!"

A second shout echoed from the farther ridge. Then a rider was seen entering a cleared slope, waving his arms as he perilously descended the hill. A dozen spectators recognized

the reckless horseman as Hoot Gaylord! A reprieve was called until Hoot breathlessly burst upon the gathering and flung himself from his sweating mount. His words were as wild as his appearance.

"Take Luke outta that rope, you cock-eyed ground owls!" he yelled. "Say—what fer did you-all figger I skipped out? You'd oughter knowed it was me that kilt Gabe Jethers! Luke knows it hisself! He must 'a' suspected why I was high-tailin' it, tother night. So he come here and learnt that I'd settled with Gabe. Reckon the danged ijut hid my ridin' gloves that I fergot and left in the cabin!"

The mountaineers were unmoved, unless slightly insulted by the metaphor hurled at them. No one found ready speech except the condemned young man on the horse.

"Hoot," he twitted, "how come you to know you dropped your gloves in the cabin?"

"Cuz I remembered it afterwards!" Hoot growled, glaring up at him.

Luke laughed. "Folks, you ken see that Hoot's a liar! He prob'ly come here and found Gabe dead, so he jest obligin'ly leaves his fancy gloves, aimin' to draw all the glory to hisself!"

"Yeh, listen at the locoed jack-ass!" Hoot sneered. "He knowed I done the killin', so he pulls off his mare's shoes and makes them tracks to look like it was his job, and like he was tryin' to hide it! O' course he didn't kill ole Gabe through the window at night when they was no moon to see by! He made them tracks the next day, by daylight—then's when he made 'em, after Gabe was already cold dead!"

"How come you know when I made 'em?" Luke demanded, minus his customary grin.

"Cuz I seen you!" Hoot howled. "I been hangin' close around here to see how this turns out. I wasn't fer lettin' you take no bump fer me. I 'lowed mebbe the Gaylords 'ud nab you! I was watchin' fer all this t'-day, too, and I come close't to missin' it!"

"Hoot," growled Luke, "you're a liar!"

Gramp Gaylord ordered a halt to the argument. He spoke dryly: "One don't tell nothin', and tother tells lies! Put Hoot on his hoss and fetch another rope!"

A SECOND rope was swung over the limb. And both contestants for hanging honors eyed each other with belligerence.

"Well, which one o' yo' don't want it?" bellowed Eriah Fitch.

The agile climber who had straddled the spreading limb peered down and swore irritably.

"A pusson 'ud think they was a reward offered fer killin' ole Gabe Jethers, the way them hell-cats argyfes! They's two ropes, what more do they want?"

Both confessed murderers stared at each other. They were suddenly cool and puzzled.

"Honest, Hoot," Luke queried, "ain't you guilty?"

"Guilty as hell!" roared Hoot. "Ain't you?"

"Shore I am!" affirmed the first captive.

Then both declared in unison: "You're a liar!"

"Well," Gramp Gaylord challenged, "who done the job?"

"Honest, Gramp," Hoot informed his aged sire, "I thought Luke done it! When I come here and found Gabe dead, I left my sign in the cabin and run fer cover. 'Twas easy fer me to drift—I've got no woman and kids."

"Yeah, you puddin'head!" Luke grinned. "I found your fancy gloves! But I allowed you'd kilt Gabe, figgerin' to save my life, meb-be. Ken you beat us fer dumb? Each thinkin' the other kilt him—when he was dead afore either o' us found him!"

Both culprits grinned sheepishly.

"Well, who done the murderin'?" old Eriah thundered.

Gramp Gaylord suspiciously eyed Zach Thumlow.

"Zach," said he, "yo' repo'ted this yere murder, and yo' done tracked us down a clew thet's turned out bogus! Mebbe yo' got another idee who kilt Gabe. It's shore enough he never kilt hisse'f!"

"I dunno," said Zach, staring up against the hillside with a gaping, startled, and half-foolish look. "I dunno," he repeated dully, letting his awed gaze drift from a point on the hillside to the cabin. "Mebbe I'm loony— Or, mebbe he kilt hisself, at that! Let's go look yonder above them beehives."

Zach forged up the slope with long strides, bending forward. Doubt of the blacksmith's sanity impressed the excitedly following crowd. Zach halted the gang just below a natural bench that was backed by a limestone wall.

"Look out fer the bees!" he cautioned. For there were about twenty beehives ranged along the shelf at the base of the low bluff. "Yup—shore enough!" Zach suddenly exclaimed. "There's the dad-blamed contraption he got me to make fer him. And it's been sprung. Dawg-gone!"

He pointed to a .44 rifle that was mounted on a framework of iron stakes. The observant woodsmen

were able to recognize the rigging as a trap gun. They could see a piece of cord tied to the rifle trigger, leading down through a small pulley and extending along the ground in front of the gun muzzle. The end of the cord was minus the bait that had been attached thereto.

"D'you all ketch the idee?" Zach demanded. "He baited thet string with a slide o' comb honey, fer the bear thet'd been robbin' his hives. The gun frame works on a swing bolt, so's it ken be aimed up and down. He sets the gun to fire about a foot above the bait, y'see. Mr. Bear grabs the honey, and the bullet can't hardly miss his brains! Thet is," he amended, "it would've, ef the gun had been bolted down solid. But, look't thet muzzle! Mr. Bear must 'a' pulled hard on thet string—and it jerked the muzzle up to shoot over his head, afore the gun went off. Looks like thet string knot ketched on the trigger guard, at fust.

"Gramp," he suggested, "yo're a crack shot. Betcha ken sight along thet there barrel and see she's aimin' right fer Gabe's winder—at jest about the slant it would 'a' tuk a bullet to ketch Gabe a-layin' in bed!"

Gramp cautiously crawled up between the hives. Finally he reared up behind the trap gun, and they could see his round blue eyes squinting down the sights.

"They's a bit o' bresh in the way," he announced judiciously. "But she 'pears to p'int at the winder, to'ards the nigh side. Thet'd about do it, I reckon—countin' a few twigs thet mought 'a' he'ped the bullet to curve a mite. It's 'bout eighty yards. Yup!" he attested. "I reckon Gabe was shot by a b'ar!"



HEP'S LONG-LOST UNCLE

By GLENN H. WICHMAN

Author of "Hep Raises An Army," etc.

THE bartender had taken an unusual interest in my partner, "Hep" Gallegher, almost from the first moment we'd entered the Nugget. And when a bartender takes an unusual interest in a fellow, it's time to hoist the danger signals and get ready to duck, especially so with a barman like Lars Swenson, who looked like a cross between a baboon and an escaped convict. I'd never seen a more villainous-looking guy or one with a crookeder smile.

A few beers and Swenson had dis-

covered that Hep and I were wandering cowhands with a bit of change in our pockets and that we, or rather Gallegher, was open to any kind of an adventure provided it was foolish enough. It was Hep who gratuitously provided the opening and the necessary information for the bartender to operate on. When Gallegher gets a bit too much under his belt, he's possessed of two desires. One is to sing a song, and the other is to find his uncle Obadiah.

Hep sang a song, a sorrowful ditty about a cowboy who'd lost his

gal. There was an endless number of verses to it, but it got no place in particular. The cowboy never seemed to get any nearer to his woman. She was hopelessly lost.

"Just skip the remainin' stanzas," interrupted the bartender, while the loafers who'd gathered around laughed. "The rocks an' gravel an' other harsh sounds in your vocal cords reminds me of a fella by the name of Bush Gallegher. You an' him suffer from the same form of throat trouble."

Hep overlooked the insult to his larynx. "You don't tell me!" he exclaimed. "Bush Gallegher! My name happens to be Gallegher also. If this fella's real name is Obadiah Gallegher, he must be my long-missin' uncle. Mebbe the 'Bush' portion is just a nickname."

"I don't know nothin' about Obadiah," replied Swenson, "but you an' Bush must be some relation, judgin' from the noises you make. If you're interested in lookin' him up, I'll tell you where he lives. First, though, we'll have some more beer."

"Well, I should say I am interested!" declared Hep. "I been lookin' for my uncle for years."

WE had the beer, quite a lot of it. Some jasper who appeared to be a friend of the bartender held a whispered consultation with him and then drifted out through the batwing doors. I could hear a horse move at a mad gallop down the short street and fade away, off in the distance. Swenson had Hep's attention and was holding it. Mebbe a half hour passed.

Finally the barman got around to give Gallegher his traveling directions. "Follow the road north for about ten miles an' take the first turnin' to the right. Follow that

road for a couple miles an' you'll see Bush's house in a draw off to the left. That is, it'll still be there if it ain't fell down."

Gallegher thanked Swenson, not once, but a dozen times. A quarter of an hour more and we were mounted and heading north. Personally, I was right glad to be out in the fresh air. Five miles, and the wheels in Hep's head had slowed down sufficiently so that what he said made at least a little sense.

"Shucks!" He chuckled, as though he'd just made a fresh discovery. "This is the first time I've heard of Uncle Obadiah in ten years. I used to hear about him when I was a kid. Never did see him, but he was a great guy from what the folks said. Had a lot of money that he'd gathered up while roamin' around the West. Let's see—he must be gettin' up in the eighties or nineties by now.

"Heavens an' earth, George," he continued, after a moment, "a fellow ought to do somethin' for his relatives. Here's poor old Uncle Obadiah livin' all alone by himself out here in the middle of no place without a soul to comfort him in his declinin' years. It ain't right. A fellow ought to pay a little attention to his family tree."

"Ain't you runnin' a bit ahead of yourself?" I asked. "In the first place you don't know whether he's your uncle or somebody else's uncle. 'Bush' may be short for Bushrod or Bushel or Bushby. I can't imagine bearin' a handle like Obadiah—or, at least, ownin' up to it. As for his livin' alone—shucks! he may have as many kids as Brigham Young."

The possibility that he might be wrong depressed Hep for a moment, but not for any longer. He was quick to think of things, especially foolish things. "Say," he exclaimed,

"don't you remember what the bartender said about Uncle Obadiah's voice? He said that it reminded him of mine. Those things run in families. All goats, for instance, sound practically alike. One burro makes pretty nearly the same kind of noise as all other burros do. If you was to hear a cow moo-o-o-o, you wouldn't think it was an elephant, would you?"

"No," I said, "I wouldn't. But every mule isn't an uncle to every other mule nor are all goats uncles to each other. Your remarks are all nonsense."

"Anyway, I'll bet the old man's rich," said Gallegher, disregarding the logic that I'd tossed at him.

"That's another dumb statement," I couldn't help saying. "According to Swenson, his house was about to fall down on him if it ain't already fell. Perhaps we'll have to dig him out from under the wreckage."

Silence then fell between us because at that exact minute Hep got mad. He had no business to get mad, because I was just trying to ease the jolt for him, to let him down softlike when he should discover that he was mistaken. Gallegher was an inveterate rainbow chaser, and his experience with rainbows had never been fortunate. Experience may be a good teacher, but Hep was certainly a backward pupil.

FINALLY we took the road off to the right and in a couple of miles saw a house off to the left, just like the barman had said we would. Hep's disposition had improved during the past few miles to the point where he could again hold civil conversation.

"See," he said, "there's Uncle Obadiah's domicile. It looks kinda threadbare, don't it?"

Indeed it did. It was a small, two or three-room ranch house, with a peaked roof. Most of the shingles were missing; it looked considerable like a cow's skeleton that the coyotes had about half finished picking. As we came closer, we saw that there was a small corral to the rear of the house in which a long-legged range horse was sound asleep, despite the fact that the critter was on its feet. In addition, there was a tumble-down barn, a few trees, and some odds and ends of fence that didn't seem to go any place in particular.

"Uncle Obadiah must have been playin' into hard luck lately," said Hep, as we stood surveying the ruins. "It's a good thing for him his nephew's come to look after him."

Just then the barn door creaked open, and an old man came out. He was tall and thin and dressed in blue jeans, that is, they had once been blue jeans. The most astonishing thing about him was his whiskers and the head of hair he carried. The latter was almost like an umbrella. As for his whiskers, they completely buried his face to a depth of from two inches to two feet. His eyes and the tip of his nose were all that was visible, otherwise there would have been no reason to even assume that he had a face.

"There's a certain facial resemblance there," I said to Hep, "that reminds me of you. Your uncle Obadiah is a noble example of the Gallegher line."

"What are you tryin' to hand me!" said Hep. "You can't even see him. I've heard tell of people hidin' behind bushes, but that fella's concealed in a forest. He looks like a hair mattress that's busted open."

The old man saw us and came

over to where we were standing. The whiskers opened, and words came out.

"Howdy, gents!" he shouted, speaking as though we were several miles away. "I'm right glad to see you! It's time we was startin'!"

Saying which, he turned on his heel and moved off toward the barn.

"Hold on a minute," said Hep, touching him on the shoulder.

"Does your name happen to be Obadiah Gallegher?"

"Sure—it's been a dry year!" replied the old fellow. "Bush Gallegher said it was goin' to be dry as much as six months ago! I ain't lived here forty years for nothin'!"

"Disregardin' the weather an' the yearly rainfall statistics," persisted Hep, "would you mind telling me if you was christened Obadiah Gallegher? If you was—why then, I'm your nephew Hepburn C. Gallegher, who's come to see you."

"That's all right!" said old Bush. "Don't apologize! Now's as good a time as any! I like men who speak right out from the shoulder!"

"Cast your voice up into a higher key an' repeat the question," I suggested to Hep. "Uncle Obadiah seems to be kinda deaf."

Hep did. He yelled until the blood vessels in his neck nearly burst.

"Sure! Sure!" squealed Bush in reply. "I'm glad you fellas wanta help me!"

"You got me all wrong, uncle," sighed Hep. "I didn't say anything about helpin' you, although I'd be glad to. George, do you imagine he'd look anything like me if he had a shave?"

"It'd be the same as murder to find out," I answered. "If we was to cut Uncle Obadiah's hair an' give him a shave, he'd catch cold an' die of pneumonia."

"Mebbe then I'd better write him a letter," said Hep. "I'll explain to him what it was that I was tryin' to ask him."

But this was an equally poor idea. "You know good an' well, Hep," I told him, "that if you can't even read your own handwritin' after it's got cold that you haven't any right to expect Uncle Obadiah to read it."

"Come on! Come on!" urged the old man. "You boys are slower than an itch! Why don't you say somethin'? Be sociable! We might as well have a good time while we're about it!"

BUSH took a playful punch at Hep, hit him a good one on the chest, and sent him sprawling. The old man had strength. Hep sat there on the ground looking up with considerable wonderment.

"He's full of fun, just like all the Galleghers," I said.

"What's that?" yelled Bush at me.

"Ha! Ha! That's a good one!" Then he let fly at me, and the first thing I knew, I was sitting there on the ground beside Hep.

"Another blow like that," gasped Gallegher, "an' my ribs will be done for."

"Don't feel so bad about it!" put in the old snoozer. "When I was a kid back East I could have tossed you all the way over into the next State!"

"What part of the East did you come from?" yelled Hep, as we got up.

"Oh, that's all right! Don't be always apologizin'! You fellas make me tired!"

Bush made another start for the barn.

"If it wasn't for my family tree," said Hep, "I'd mount up an' ride

away. Ain't it a pity to see such a fine man as Uncle Obadiah is, go to seed?"

"Seed, nothin'!" I objected. "He's gone to weeds. I'm all in favor of movin'. If we go in that barn, it might fall down on us. The world's too short of cowboys for us to take such a chance."

"Pshaw!" said Hep. "I ain't the kind of a guy to give up so easy. You ain't got no imagination. Perhaps uncle's got some pictures of his people hangin' up on the walls."

"One Angora goat looks about like another," I said, "and so you wouldn't know any more than you do now."

Bush had disappeared in the barn while we were talking. Finding that we hadn't followed him, he came out in a moment and yelled at us as though we were a couple of Mexicans.

"Come on," said Hep to me. "When the Galleghers start something, they finish it. I don't know anything about your lineage, but mine assays at least a few cents to the ton."

And so, having had the situation reduced to such a basis, there was nothing much left for me to do but go on in with him.

When we got inside, Uncle Obadiah had about half finished harnessing a couple of mules to a buckboard. The barn, like the house, was full of holes. It was mostly holes; there was no back wall at all, and most of the roof was missing. A jiffy and the old man had completed his task. He led the mules, followed by the buckboard, out behind the barn. Then he got three shovels and a .30-30 rifle and tossed them in under the seat.

"Climb up, gents!" he yelled at us, pointing to the wagon.

"No, thanks!" answered Hep. "I

got a horse to ride! I don't like wagons!"

Old Bush's eyes were flashing with anger. With one hand he caught Gallegher by the seat of the breeches and with the other by the nape of the neck. Hep flew through the air and was deposited on the buckboard seat, much to his chagrin and mortification. Then Bush turned toward me. I beat him to it and climbed up beside Hep.

"Giddup!" shouted Bush at the mules, as he, too, climbed up. We began moving off in a southerly direction.

There was no road. Presently we were going up through a wide wash toward the foothills.

"Have you any idea what your relative is up to?" I asked Gallegher.

"Shut up!" growled Hep. "I wanta think!"

So I asked Bush what he was up to, but he couldn't hear me.

"Three shovels an' a rifle," I remarked. "Mebbe we're goin' to dig post holes or shoot rabbits."

AN hour passed while we continued to wind our way up the wash. It was the most unexciting thing I ever indulged in.

"The Spaniards were great hands for buryin' treasure!" finally roared Bush out of a clear sky. "You gents are goin' to dig some up for me!"

"Hep," I said, "your uncle's crazy. How'd it be if we made a break for it?"

"George," sorrowfully admitted Gallegher, "I believe you're right. I hate to say that about a kinfolk, but this buried-treasure business proves it. When a guy begins to dream about the Seven Cities of Cibola, it's a sure sign he's gone nutty. But I don't think uncle'd

let us go back. More 'an likely he'd shoot us."

Right then we had a surprise. For the first time Bush spoke in an ordinary tone of voice.

"I wouldn't advise you to try an' run off," he said. "I got a job for you birds to do, an' you're goin' to do it." One thing was sure now—he'd heard every word we'd said an' had pretended that he hadn't.

"Well, well!" exclaimed Gallegher. "So you ain't deaf after all! Mebbe now you'll tell me if you're my long-missin' uncle an' what's the meanin' of this wagon ride?"

But no answer came out through the old man's whiskers. Two more miles we rode, an' by that time the wash had narrowed until it was almost a canyon. Finally we came to a pretty sharp bend. The floor of the wash was covered with boulders and the sides with greasewood and brush. There wasn't room for the buckboard between the rocks, so the old man turned it around in a cleared space.

"Get down!" he shouted at us. "What are you sittin' there for?"

"Your uncle's a pleasant guy," I said to Gallegher, as we climbed down off the wagon seat. "An' from the way he speaks now, he must be deaf again."

Bush gave each of us a shovel; he took the rifle himself and carried it in the crook of his arm as though he was expecting to shoot something at any moment.

"All right!" he yelled. "What are you standin' there for? Get goin'!"

He prodded us gently with the rifle barrel. So it was that we walked ahead of him around the bend in the wash.

"Stop!" hoarsely whispered Bush. So we stopped. He was pointing up the narrow wash with his crooked finger. "See that outcroppin' of

rock up there about two hundred yards?" he continued. "It's right beside that rock where you're to do your diggin'. You'll find a sack there with money in it—gold an' silver! Dig it up an' bring it back to me!" Suddenly he cocked the rifle an' pointed it right at us. "It'd better not take you more 'an five minutes! All right! Go on!"

Gallegher wanted to argue, but I had another idea. I got Hep by the arm and half dragged him up the wash.

"We'll keep right on goin' an' never come back," I said, when we were out of earshot. "There's somethin' funny about this whole business. It was that rascally lookin' bartender who sent us out to see this crazy guy——"

"Spanish gold!" interrupted Hep. "If he knew it was buried there an' would only take five minutes to dig up, why didn't he go an' get it himself? I'll have a look, anyway."

"Premonition is roostin' on my shoulder," I told him. "I think we'd better run."

But when we reached the spot, Hep's curiosity got the better of him. The ground beside the outcropping had been recently disturbed.

"Somebody's been diggin' here already," said Gallegher, as he sank his shovel in the ground. "Hello! What in the world——"

THE very first shovelful of dirt he turned up revealed the beginnings of a canvas bag. I reached down and pulled it up out of the hole. It was certainly heavy.

"I'll be darned!" gasped Hep, as he undid the tie string. "Let's see now what's inside it!"

But if we'd thought to find gold and silver there, we were sadly mis-

taken. The sack was full of bolts, nuts, washers, an' chunks of lead. The whole caboodle might have been worth a quarter, provided the quarter had a hole in it.

"Spanish treasure!" I sneered. "Now I *know* your uncle's buggy. We'll take this sack to him an' go back to the ranch an' say good-by to him forever!"

But nothing as simple as that was in the wind. We hadn't taken seven steps down the wash when a gunshot rang out, the bullet passing right in front of my nose.

"Hoist 'em! You fellas! We got you covered!" The voice came from the north bank of the wash, in among the brush somewhere. And judging from the sound, the fella meant business.

Gallegher and I stopped in our tracks, dropped the shovels and the bag full of bolts and put up our hands. I could see Bush standing down by the bend, his rifle to his shoulder.

"Somebody's makin' a mistake," muttered Hep.

It was right then that we thought a war had started. There was a burst of gunfire! It seemed to be coming from both banks of the wash. We dropped down on our stomachs as though we'd been shot, which we hadn't been. A second and I realized that the slugs were all passing over us. Fellas from opposite banks were shooting at one another. We were right in the middle, but on a lower level.

"This sack of scrap iron must be very valuable," whispered Hep. "Mebbe there's diamonds an' pearls mixed up in it. Come on! We'll see if we can't wriggle our way outta this!"

We began moving through the brush on our stomachs like a pair of

Indians. A couple of wriggles and a slug went through my hat. So we decided not to move any more until the battle was over.

"Lay still there, you guys!" yelled the man who had first shot at us. So we lay still while the battle raged. And, believe me, it raged all over.

From where I lay I could see a fella dodging about on the south bank. There was something familiar about him. *He was Lars Swenson, the bartender at the Nugget!*

"Look what's come of your singin' that bird a song," I said to Hep. "It was him that arranged all this."

"George," mumbled Gallegher, "I'm beginnin' to hope that Bush Gallegher ain't my uncle."

For mebbe a quarter of an hour, the slugs whistled over us, and then the one-sided battle began to thin out. The men on the bartender's side were either retreating or getting licked. Presently the last gun barked, and silence came.

Three or four fellas slid down the north bank of the wash and came toward us. The leader had a sheriff's star on his vest.

"Get up, you mangy buzzards!" growled the officer.

So Hep and I got up.

We were considerably astonished to find that we knew the star toter. Three-four years had passed since we'd last seen him up in Colorado. But there was no mistaking the guy. It was our old cow-punching friend, Rance Tolliver.

"Thunderation!" exclaimed Tolliver, as he and three members of his posse pushed in. "Since when did you birds turn bank bandits?"

"Bandits, nothin'!" said Hep. "All we got here is a bag of miscellaneous junk. You're welcome to it."

TOLLIVER laughed and holstered his guns. "I know what's in the sack because I put it there myself. However, three days ago there was twenty thousand dollars in gold an' silver in it, which has now been safely returned to the bank from which it was stolen. The fellas who stole it had one of their number bring it here quietly an' bury it, figurin' to wait an' lay low until the excitement blew over. However, I followed this man an' captured him just as he was finishin' the job of hidin' the sack. He wouldn't tell me who his confederates were so I buried a sack full of washers an' nuts an' waited for the gang to show up. I never imagined it was you two guys!"

"It ain't us!" corrected Hep. "You ought to know better! Somebody put something over on us. We're victims of circumstances."

"Have a heart, Rance," I put in. "Gallegher was just lookin' for his uncle Obadiah——"

This made the sheriff laugh again. "Obadiah!" he said. "I remember hearin' you once speak of him. But neither of you know how close you came to bein' shot. Those guys certainly made suckers out of you two.

They must've known that I was watchin' the place. They figgered on you helpin' 'em to pull their chestnuts outta the fire. Durin' the shootin' they calculated to get the bag of money, not knowin' that I already had it."

A young member of the posse came hurrying up.

"Sheriff," he said, "the old snoozer with the whiskers, Silas Higgenbottom by name, who was drivin' the buckboard, is dead an' likewise the bartender, Lars Swenson."

"Huh!" mumbled Tolliver. "I never suspected those fellas."

"The bewhiskered gent was Hep's uncle," I put in. "He's real proud of him."

"You're a liar!" exploded Gallegher, and began marching down the wash. There was no stopping him. He walked all the way back to the dilapidated ranch house with me at his heels.

"George," he said, as we mounted and rode off, "if you ever mention Uncle Obadiah to me again, I'll shoot you!"

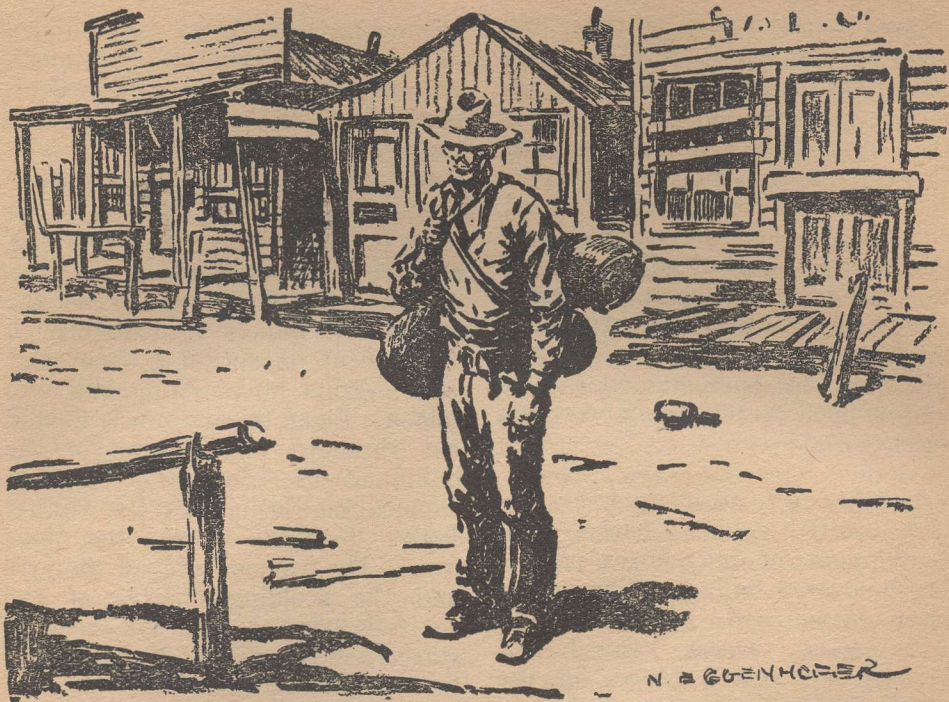
"If that's the way it stands," I answered, "then I'll never get shot!"

DO YOU LIKE YOUR WORK?

If not, perhaps Shirley Spencer's advice in *What Handwriting Reveals*, published in every issue of **STREET & SMITH'S DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE** will aid you in getting work that you will like.

ARE YOU WORKING?

If not, perhaps Shirley Spencer will discover, from your handwriting, qualities and capabilities in you that you did not know you possessed, and which might help you in getting work.



SHERIFF GHOST

By JOSEPH F. HOOK

Author of "Ending At Scratch," etc.

THE long freight train came to a rattling stop at the water tank, and "Tug" Tuell slipped stiffly from a box-car door, turned and grabbed his well-filled pack, then darted into the bushes that lined the right of way. A feeling of absolute security swept over him for the first time in many years. He was at last on ground he knew, in a district that was perfectly familiar to him, and a smile of satisfaction twisted his cruel lips even as a sigh of infinite relief parted them.

He had put almost three thousand miles between himself and the

menace of sudden death. Ahead lay freedom and a chance to acquire some much-needed money. But in spite of the feeling of security, Tug Tuell was quite aware that he was not completely out of the woods. Those twin steel rails, merging at the distant horizon, were as yet a connecting link between himself and the death that lay in his wake. And the telegraph poles, standing like upright, honest sentinels, were also a rapid means of communication for the use of the Law—the Law that had searched for him relentlessly though, so far, fruitlessly. To get away from them was now his aim.

So after the train had proceeded

on its journey, Tug Tuell slipped his arms through the pack straps, came out of hiding, and struck out for the mountains that loomed up out of the heat haze like things seen through a shimmering veil.

After many weary days of travel, climbing higher and higher and avoiding all signs of human habitation along the way, he at last topped a hogback that overlooked the ghost mining camp of Helluva. There he put down his pack, sat on a rock, and mopped his perspiring brow and face.

AT his feet, as it were, lay deserted cabins, shacks, remnants of sluice boxes, piles of brush-covered tailings. The streets were dotted with sagebrush, lush with grass. Doors swayed and creaked on rusted hinges in the gentle breeze; rags that had once been curtains, fluttered from paneless windows. Picket fences leaned at crazy angles, as though seeking support in their old age, and wild vines rambled over decaying porches and roofs.

A blue jay set up a raucous din and was answered by the defiant chatter of a squirrel. They were the ordinary sounds of bird and animal life, but to Tug Tuell's ears they sounded unusually loud, startlingly hollow in that tomb of unfulfilled hopes.

It seemed neither unusual nor strange to him to be sitting there and looking down on the havoc time had wrought. For to his ears, long ago in a far Eastern city, had come a faint rumor of the fate that had eventually befallen Helluva. Besides, in his early youth, he had witnessed fickle Dame Fortune's little trick of burying a few of her many treasures in some gulch or canyon, planting them in the paths

of men, to the end that they builded and delved, striving to find more, only to move on later to other fields in the wake of the beckoning, alluring siren.

Nevertheless, Helluva again lived in the mind of Tug Tuell as he sat there in the sunlight. The swinging, creaking doors suddenly came alive, and banged and slammed as the streams of miners passed through them, bent on spending their dust and nuggets in gambling hall and saloon. Laughter and music floated out through the windows of the buildings—the Pastime, the Last Chance, the Casino, and the Mother Lode. Familiar names, the West over! The raucous cries of the jays and the scolding chatter of the squirrels became now the creak of stagecoach wheels and the clatter of tailings falling from the ends of many sluice boxes.

"The Mother Lode!" Tug Tuell murmured aloud, and there was a wealth of fear in his voice. But a hasty shrug of the shoulders freed his mind of that.

It was in there that he had set himself up as a gambler, dealing a crooked game of faro whenever the chance offered, making money hand over fist. That kept up until "Cub" Mackay drifted in with his brother Hugh. They looked like a couple of suckers to Tug Tuell, with pokes bulging with gold that fairly burned to be spent.

However, as he now recalled with a grimace, the Mackay brothers looked green, but were not, as he soon found out when he tried to cheat them. But if they were wise to the ways and means of crooked gamblers, they certainly were not wise to the use of six-guns. So Cub, being somewhat slow on the draw, went down with a bullet in the brain,

while Hugh reeled back against the bar with one through his lung.

After that it was run and hide for the killer, knowing that he dare not remain in Helluva and face a short trial and a long rope. The memory of what followed then was a nightmare to him yet, when he recalled how Hugh Mackay had taken the trail of his brother's slayer, forcing him farther and farther east, causing him to live in constant fear of a sudden meeting and a sudden death. Only when he had finally reached New York did he really feel safe from the avenging brother.

"Twenty-five years ago!" he muttered, awed at the swift passage of time.

A LONG time, surely, and much had transpired since then. For a while, he had done fairly well with his crooked gambling. Then had come more lawful times, and down fell the lid, followed by furtive games in dank cellars,OUNDINGS by the police, arrests, fines, and sometimes jail.

Prohibition had followed, and Tug Tuell had grasped the golden opportunity eagerly. Bootlegging, racketeering, hijacking, double-crossing, and wholesale slaughter had been the order of the day. Gangs wiped out each other in endless feuds, police fell riddled, innocent bystanders were blasted—a bloody rein of terror, with Tug Tuell playing an important rôle.

Repeal had made little difference in the lives of such men as Tug. There were still old scores to be settled, and guns continued to blaze. The booze game was at an end, but not the game of tag. So when Tug had suddenly discovered that it was his turn to be "it," he had put these thousands of miles between himself and the other armed players, retreat-

ing to the West, to Helluva, where he knew he would be safe until the search for him had died down.

Not that the revenge-seeking gangsters would have followed him there. Oh, no. They were too busy looking for others on their list. The trouble was that Tug had garnished his share of Eastern scalps, and the law had put a reward on his head, dead or alive, for each one.

That in itself was bad enough, but there was more besides. The matter of the killing of Cub Mackay, for instance. There was a neat reward placed on his head by the State for that crime, and although Helluva had long since joined the swelling ranks of ghost towns, it still held good.

Twenty-five years is a long time, and a man's features undergo many changes. But Tug Tuell was a marked man. His skin was drawn, wrinkled; his hair gray and his eyes furtive and sunken. His unusually high cheek bones protruded more than even, and therein lay the trouble. They drew the skin of his face tight, causing a long knife scar to stand out prominently.

Tug's mind came back to the present with a rush, and he picked up his pack, descended to the grassy street by sliding down the steep slope of the canyon. He wasn't afraid of meeting any one in that deserted place, much less Hugh Mackay, Cub's brother. He, like the rest, had undoubtedly left for other placer fields, or perhaps had died. Not the slightest danger of his ever returning to Helluva. Or any of the rest of the old-timers, for that matter; that is, those of them who were still living.

Tug crossed and recrossed the familiar street, peering into cabins, saloons, dance halls, looking for something suitable in which to stay.

When at length he found the cabin he desired, he unpacked his grubstake, arranged it on the shelves, then went out and gathered some sagebrush for a fire.

His future was definitely assured, so he had no worry on that score. The government had started buying gold, and there was still plenty of it in Helluva's tailing dumps; for the old-timers had not bothered much about trying to save all the flakes and dust. At the old price, a Chinaman would have starved to death working the tailings over. But with gold at thirty-five dollars an ounce, why, there was money to be made.

THE old-timers had built a dam at the head of the gulch, conserving the waters of Pinhead Creek, a mere trickle, for placer purposes. Tug took a look at the dam and was pleasantly surprised to find it not only intact, but in far better shape than when the miners had quit the camp, thanks to the beavers that had strengthened the rotten logs with alder stakes and brush, well plastered with clay.

"Jest the dope!" Tug cried jubilantly. "All I gotta do now is tear down a few shacks, sort out the best planks, make me a flume, and carry the water down to a sluice box at the tailing dumps."

That reservoir of water was like dumping gold in a fellow's lap. It would beat panning a mile. When the flume and sluice box were constructed, Tug realized that four or five ounces of gold a day should be his reward.

So he started to work eagerly the next day, and for the first time in twenty-five long, silent years, Helluva echoed to the sounds of industry again. The squirrels didn't like it, and said so in their chattering way. Neither did the blue jays, and

they yelled harshly and stridently at the man for spoiling their sanctuary with the din he was making.

However, Tug Tuell never got a chance to use either the flume or sluice box; for it started raining on the third day of his arrival, and it kept him busy patching the many leaks in the roof of his cabin in order to save his grubstake from utter ruin. Naturally, he figured it would soon let up, but it didn't.

On the fourth day it stopped raining and started pouring. The overflow of Pinhead Creek, through the artificial spillway at the dam, had trickled down Helluva's main street for years, a shallow ribbon of moisture. Now it had been suddenly swelled to the proportions of a good-sized stream.

"Wonder if the dam'll hold," Tug questioned, and went to see. It was holding, all right.

And then the weather changed again. It seemed as though some one had opened a trapdoor in the heavens and let all the water down at once. The steep sides of the gulch were turned into courses for miniature cascades that cut deep channels in the light, shallow soil. Presently they became regular waterfalls that roared and hissed and dislodged boulders and sent them crashing to the floor of the gulch, to disappear with a mighty splash into the torrent that tore down the center of the street.

Terror gripped Tug Tuell when the water finally began lapping against the cabin step. He had never experienced anything quite like this before. And that night he cowered in a corner of the cabin while the lightning snapped and cracked over head and the rain swished down to the accompaniment of shuddering peals of thunder. The drumming of the rain on the roof, to-

gether with the roar of rushing water and the storm, made it almost impossible for him to think clearly.

But of one thing he was absolutely certain: He must get out of that gulch before the dam broke, or it would be too late. So he lighted a candle and began hurriedly to pack his grubstake.

In the midst of that work, he heard something thud softly against the rear of the cabin, something that seemed to lean heavily against it, pushing it mightily until the chinking fell from between the logs and the building groaned under the strain.

He rushed outside into the darkness, with the purpose of finding out about it, but he didn't get very far. An avalanche of wet mud was even then sliding down the side of the gulch. It had piled up behind the cabin, divided, and oozed across the street into what was now a river that roared down the center.

PANIC-STRICKEN, the killer stood there in it, up to his knees, peering into the blackness of the night, half sobbing and half cursing in abject terror. Invisible forces were at work all about him, and the fear of death went hand in hand with him.

At last he turned, tore each leg free of the sucking mud, and finally regained the cabin, wet through and trembling.

"I guess this is the safest place!" he cried.

But the cry died in his throat. Mud was now beginning to ooze into the cabin through the rear window. Like a huge yellow snake, it slithered through slowly, inexorably, piling upon the floor, then spreading out, its tawny surface corrugated and undulating.

Tug Tuell stared at it with ever-

widening eyes, then turned and fled. Into the mud and water he splashed, knee-deep, then waist-deep. Fighting forward with all his strength, he forged through the mud slide, pausing on the other side for breath. He next turned with a wild cry toward the steep side of the gulch, trying to climb it.

He slipped to his hands and knees repeatedly, staggered erect, and tried to gain the summit by clutching at the sagebrush. However, the rain had soaked the soil to a pulp, and the brush came away in his hand, roots and all, precipitating him to the bottom.

At last he gave up the attempt to scale the side, and struck off down the street, only to encounter another mud slide. Plunging headlong into it, he breasted his way to the center, sinking to his armpits. There he paused, sensing movement, power. The mud was moving, lifting his feet from under him, bearing him steadily toward the thundering torrent in the middle of the street.

He screamed hysterically as he tried to fight free of the mud's slimy clutch, but the torrent's roar and the crash of thunder drowned his screams. Onward the sea of mud bore him, while he struggled frantically to keep from being sucked under.

A flash of lightning revealed the raging torrent close at hand, with the sea of mud oozing into it. Then, the next thing Tug Tuell knew, he was being tossed about like a ball in the ice-cold water. It was, to him, just another case of falling out of the frying pan into the fire. Before, he had been in danger of suffocation by mud. Now he stood in grave danger of drowning.

Floating débris buffeted his ribs and shoulders, causing him to cry out in agony. Never much of a

swimmer, nevertheless, he struck out with the frenzy and despair of a dying man, trying to reach the edge of the channel the stream had cut in the street.

Then, suddenly, he was swept against something that loomed up big out of the night, swept against it with a violence that almost knocked the wind out of him. Instinctively, his fingers shot out toward the object. He felt wood, grasped it, checked his onward progress, and held on with bulldog tenacity.

When he had gained his breath, he drew himself out of the water, and rested. A flash of forked lightning showed him the outlines of a shack that had been carried into the stream by a mud slide. He was sitting astride the ridgepole.

Happening to turn his head, he could see the glow from the candle he had left in the cabin. Feeble though it was, it proved a welcome sight to him. Never before had he dreamed that a feeble candle flame could appear so friendly, offer so much encouragement, seem so warm and inviting.

Quickly he summed up the situation. If he gained solid ground again and pushed on down the gulch, the chances were that he would encounter more slides, get caught in them, and be again carried into that raging stream. Perhaps, he reasoned, there would be no providential shack in the way to arrest his progress and to save him. On the other hand, to return to the cabin was risky business, but at least he knew what to expect.

ACCORDINGLY, he inched along the ridgepole, dropped off the other end, and gingerly approached the slide of moving mud that had almost swept him into oblivion. There he waited

until a flash of lightning showed him that the slide had slowed down considerably; waited there while the heavens literally deluged the earth.

This time, however, he was not to be caught unawares. The powerful suction of the moving mud slide had taught him a lesson. So he crept up the side of the gulch as far as he could, then raised up off hands and knees, and plunged slant-wise across the slide. Submerged to his armpits, he fought against the grip of it and won out to the other side.

Without waiting to rest, he raced for the security of the cabin and the inviting light of that lone candle.

But on the threshold of the door he came to an abrupt halt, a cry of surprise welling from his lips. An elderly man was standing in the center of the room, with mud and water dripping from him. His hat was missing, and his long hair, almost gray-white, was plastered down over a pair of eyes that burned like twin coals as they stared at Tug Tuell. From the ends of his beard water dripped in a steady stream to the floor.

"Well, for Pete's sake," Tug cried. "Who are you, mister, and what're you doin' here?"

The stranger continued to stare at him while the thunder crashed overhead and the lightning slashed the night to ribbons with jagged blue forks.

"Me?" he finally said in a calm voice that seemed entirely unexpected in such surroundings. "Why, I jest drifted back into Helluva, sort of, and got ketched in a mud slide—me and my burro."

Tug Tuell clutched his arm in a frenzied grip.

"We gotta git outta here!" he cried excitedly. "We can't stay. The dam——"

The stranger shook off the other's hand and pushed him away.

"Calm down, feller," he said, "or I'll do it for you with the butt of a gun. It's bad enough to fight through this mass alone, without havin' a crazy man hangin' onta me. We gotta use our heads. This here mud that's pourin' in through the back winder has jest about slacked up. If we climb outta the cabin that way, the chances is we can strike solid footin' and git to the top of the gulch. Otherwise——"

There came a mighty roar like that of a gale of wind, and both men glanced at each other in alarm.

"It's the dam!" the stranger shouted. "Outside, quick! If we git ketched in here——"

The cabin reeled under the impact of a terrific blow just as the two men gained the door. The next moment they were caught in a vortex of mud, water, and uprooted brush, and whirled rapidly down the gulch. Feeling himself about to go under, Tug Tuell made a quick grab for the stranger, who was floating beside him, and received a stunning blow in the face for his pains.

"That'll hold you for a while!" the stranger shouted, then seized him by the collar, held his head out of water, and struck out with his free hand in an effort to direct their course.

On rushed the seething, swirling water toward the mouth of the gulch. There it spread out, losing much of its speed and giving the stranger a chance to work nearer to the more solid ground on his right. Finally his feet touched bottom.

WADING out to the higher ground, he dragged Tug Tuell after him like a sack of wet hay, and draped him across a clump of sagebrush. The heart of

the sagebrush was dry, and the stranger peeled it with his knife, lighted it with a match from his waterproof box, and fanned the tiny flame into life.

"On yore feet, feller!" he yelled at Tug in order to make his voice carry above the roar of the flood water. "Git busy and gather more brush so's we can git warm and dry ourselves out."

The killer gained his feet slowly, reeled over toward the stranger, and held out his hand.

"I wanna thank you, stranger, for savin'——" he began.

"Git busy and gather that brush!" the stranger snapped, ignoring the outstretched hand.

And when they had a generous supply of the brush piled near the fire, they began to strip off their sodden clothing. It was then that Tug Tuell happened to glance up at the stranger. Something that glittered in the firelight caught his eye, something that was pinned to the man's shirt.

"What—what's that there thing on yore chest?" Tug demanded in a voice that shook with fear and not cold. "Is that a——"

"A sheriff's star?" the stranger interrupted. "Shore it is. I'm the sheriff of Helluva."

Tug's face, already white under the tan, turned a sickly green. He tried to say something, but his tongue refused to frame the words.

The sheriff of Helluva! Tug knew there must be some mistake there, surely. He had known no sheriff during his stay in that camp during those wild, hectic days. Not even a marshal. Every man was a law unto himself, with the Colt at his belt the judge of last resort.

"Why, I never knowed that there was a——" Tug finally managed to gasp out, and then caught himself

in time. He had been on the point of giving away the information that he had once been a citizen of Helluva. "What might your name be, stranger?" he asked hurriedly.

"Sheriff Ghost," the stranger replied, drying his clothes before the fire.

"Sheriff Ghost!" Tug repeated in surprise. "Why—why, that's a queer sorta name!"

"Yeah, but lotsa things is queer in this world, feller," the sheriff observed. "Y'see, it was this way: A lotta riffraff drifted into Helluva, when things was boomin'—crooked gamblers, gunmen who thought they was real bad men, and the like of that truck. There was killin's galore, and the rest of the boys got danged good and sick of it. So they app'inted me sheriff, and I started to fill up Boot Hill Cemet'ry. I was doin' a right smart job of it, and I'd filled it plumb fulla them trigger-pullin' gents, but the pay dirt petered out and everybody left. That is, everybody but me. So that's how I come to be sheriff of Helluva. And since nobody come back to put me outta office, I'm still sheriff."

"So you stayed behind, huh?" Tug remarked, as a great fear tugged at his heart. "Why didja?"

"Well, I didn't exactly stay right here in camp," the sheriff explained. "I sorta hung around in the district, jest driftin' inta camp once in a while to take a look at the ol' place. I got somebody buried in Boot Hill Cemet'ry," he added quietly.

"Oh, I see." Tug Tuell nodded. "A wife, huh?"

"And then there was another reason for my stayin'," the sheriff continued, seemingly unaware that a question had been asked. "I was a lunger. The camp doc said one

lung was bad, and that I'd hafta stay in the mountains, where the air was jest right."

"What was you doin' in Helluva this time?" Tug inquired, trying to conceal the eager curiosity in his voice.

"I was aimin' to wash them ol' tailin' dumps over," the sheriff answered readily enough. "Y'see, with the gov'ment buyin' gold, and with the price per ounce purty nigh thirty-five dollars, I thought as how——"

"That's funny!" Tug cut in. "That was why I come here, too!"

"Yeah, I know." The sheriff nodded understandingly. "I sorta looked for some of the ol'-timers to come driftin' back."

"Old-timers?" Tug Tuell repeated. "Well, that let's me out, I guess. I ain't no old-timer. This is my first trip to Helluva."

The sheriff turned around slowly and stared hard at the man. Tug felt himself shriveling up inside as those burning eyes seared clear to his very soul.

"You're a liar!" the sheriff declared in a voice that was hard, cold, and bitter.

Tug Tuell dropped the shirt he had been holding toward the fire, and stood there with perspiration beading his face in spite of the chill wind that was now sweeping down the gulch.

"Who—who are you?" he demanded in an awed whisper.

The sheriff ignored the question entirely.

"A little while ago," he said, "you started to thank me for savin' yore life. I did that 'cause I'd took an oath I'd dance a jig on yore grave. Then you asked me if my wife was buried in the camp cemet'ry. Well, she ain't, 'cause I never had one.

But my brother's buried there—Cub Mackay, the man you shot dead, Tug Tuell. I'm Hugh, the one you shot through a lung. These whiskers fooled you, but that scar on yore face never fooled nobody."

"Hugh Mackay!" the killer gasped, and then raced on pleadingly: "But, Hugh, you ain't goin' to hold what happened in the early days agin' a feller, and after all these years! Why, I——"

"Time, Tuell, don't mean a thing to the law, nor to me."

"But, Hugh——"

"Dry them clothes," the sheriff snarled. "I'm goin' to take you down to the county seat and hand you over to the law, and I'm goin' to collect the reward that's still on yore head, Tuell. Then I'll come back here with that money and finish the flume and sluice box you started, and fix the dam. After that, I'll wash them ol' tailin' dumps and git back the gold I didn't have time to mine while I was chasin' you and, later, while I was fillin' Boot Hill Cement'ry with sech varmints as you."



STORIES • THAT CATCH

STORIES

READ

- • *the Crack of the Bat!*
- • *the Thud of the Leather!*
- • *the Thrill of the Game!*

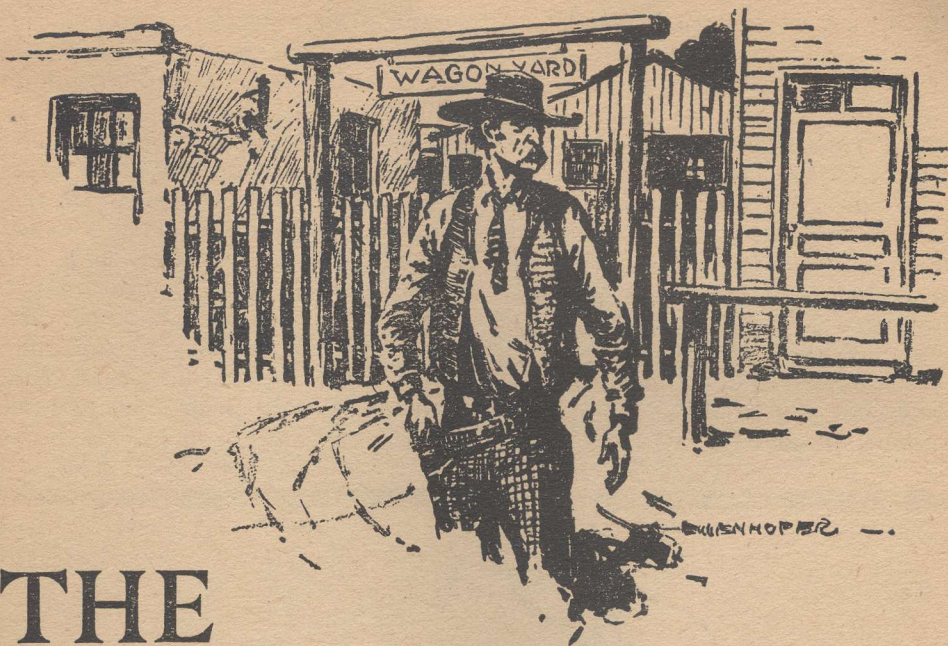
STREET & SMITH'S

15¢

SPORT

TWICE A MONTH

STORY MAGAZINE



THE SCARED RANGER

By W. D. HOFFMAN

Author of "Border Bloodhound," etc.

ALL in the line of duty," murmured Sergeant Loring, unbuckling his heavy cartridge belt and laying his scuffed holster and single-action Colt on the dust-laden desk. His perspiring, weather-seared countenance was grim with the business in hand.

"Old Man of Iron" of Company B, Ranger Sergeant Loring glanced quickly about him, his keen blue eyes surveying the dilapidated adobe room. Suddenly he swung into action.

Instead of attacking the enemy with carbine or battle-scarred six-shooter, the old campaigner snatched up a broom. Vigorously he

plied the instrument; clouds of dust rose in the hot interior as the broom swished on the pineboard floor. Sergeant Loring was sweeping out.

His scrawny throat contracted, he gagged and sneezed from the air-laden grit and silt. Little wonder. For two years, this part of the mud-brick building had been unoccupied after a cattle buyer had thrown up his lease; since then it had accumulated the powdery grime of many a Texas storm. The broom drove the deep dust toward the door, much of it rising to settle again on the ancient furnishings, two desks, two swivel-rusted chairs, an earthen water vessel, and a mirror that long since had ceased to reflect objects in

front of it. Sergeant Loring persisted, swishing, swishing. All in the line of duty.

Little rivulets of sweat raced down his seamed countenance, into his blue eyes. Presently a fit of coughing from the stifling dirt drove him to the plank sidewalk for air.

Through smarting lids he saw Private McNulty advancing jauntily down the street, with the characteristic air of every raw recruit just sworn into the service. Many a sergeant would have put the kid Ranger on the clean-up detail on such a hot morning, but not Old Man Loring. Where the job was ugly, the enemy formidable, there Sergeant Loring always led his men. Making that old room into a decent headquarters office for Captain Barrows was as tough an undertaking as charging a band of rustlers to Sergeant Loring's way of thinking.

ADVANCE guard of Company B, Frontier Battalion, the sergeant and Private McNulty had come into Angelo to set up headquarters for the Rangers due that afternoon. After expelling much of the dust from his lungs and drinking in the clear air of the sunny morning, Old Man Loring stepped back into the office to resume the battle against dirt.

Picking up the broom, he smiled that gentle smile of his, and a dreamy look came into his eyes. He was thinking of the words of Captain Barrows:

"Looks as though there would be some promotions at last," the commander had said. "Ranger companies are being expanded to full personnel. I believe you stand next in line for a lieutenantcy, sergeant."

Everything comes to him who

waits. "Thirty years in the service," mused Old Man Loring now, as he swept the floor. "Been a long time to wait. Won't know myself as *Lieutenant* Loring, hardly. The woman, she will be pleased a heap."

Sweeping the cobwebs from the ancient mirror on the wall, the raw-boned peace officer stepped back and took a swift look at himself. The years had left their mark, including a bullet scar across his wrinkled forehead. Lieutenants usually had younger faces than his. Promotions had come slowly in the old days, the service gradually contracting as law-breaking became less troublesome. Of late higher tariff duties had stimulated smuggling, given rebirth to criminal activity along the Rio Grande—the legislature was expanding the mounted forces to cooperate with the customs men. Promotions were in order.

Again he glanced into the mirror, advanced briskly toward it, dropped the broom, wiped the perspiration from his brow, and addressed himself:

"*Lieutenant* Loring," he said brusquely, imitating the manner of Captain Barrows, "go down river and see if you can't pick up the trail of those bank robbers, *lieutenant*. Report to me if you need more men, *lieutenant*."

"Yes, sir," the veteran addressed his mythical captain, looking up as though the company commander were actually seated at the desk in his room. "I'll do my best, sir."

A chuckle came from the wide, straight lips. He reckoned this promised promotion was going to his head. Foolish of an old crow like him to act silly that way. But "Ma" Loring would be pleased—so why shouldn't the old campaigner be a trifle sentimental about the new advancement? For all these

years, he had gone about his business apprehending criminals without the cherished reward. All things come to him who waits.

Again he resumed his attack on cobwebs and dirt. When he had cleaned that room, it would serve very well for headquarters, with its thick, unburnable, bullet-proof walls, and its shuttered windows. Good enough for ten dollars a month. By the time rent was due again, he hoped the notorious Egan gang operating in this stretch of the border would be in the toils of the law. Then Company B would move on elsewhere, possibly with *Lieutenant* Loring in its personnel. The old man would do his best to remain with his company after promotion came.

He was wiping the fly-specked window when Private McNulty looked in to report the horses had been fed and watered.

"Go find a carpenter, son, to mend that old corral fence on the sand lot across the street. Be handier for the company's horses there than down to the livery yard."

"Yes, sir," said the young Ranger. "I'm sure excited, dad, at what you told me about the Egan gang bringing the company here. Think we'll get a chance at 'em?"

"Nary doubt, son."

THE old man shook his head, gazed longingly after the youth crossing the wide street. It seemed like yesterday that Sergeant Loring was a raw recruit starting in the service like that soft-cheeked lad of twenty-one.

"Some boy, that," he meditated, continuing to wag his angular head. He had got young McNulty into the service, at the urging of his friend, Stet McNulty, the new private's father. "Got sand, like his dad. Same

gray eyes, same fightin' jaw. He'll stand up under fire."

That was the test—the thing that made or unmade a Ranger. No one could be sure how any man would act until the time came, true enough. But Sergeant Loring knew the boy's cattleman father, and that was ninety per cent proof.

"Hope the young un gets his chance quicker than I did," the veteran murmured. "Be right nice if he could have a hand in corralin' the Egan gang."

Working faithfully at his cleaning job, Sergeant Loring got things fairly presentable by noon. After filling the earthen olla with drinking water, he buckled on his belt and gun and moved down to the Angelo Rooming House to make arrangements for barracks quarters for the company. That done, he paid a visit to the livery corral and made a deal for board for the horses.

When coming out of the livery yard, he abruptly halted. His tall frame tensed, head bent forward, his sharp angular shoulders uplifted at the corners. For an instant, his eyes focused on the five horses just beyond the Bank of Angelo.

Now ordinarily the presence of five or a dozen horses at the hitch racks in Angelo was nothing to get excited about. But these animals were bunched together where none had been a few minutes before. They were untied, their reins laid loosely over the top rail of the rack. They were within ready reach of men who might be robbing the bank. More important still, they were all good-grade horses, larger than the usual run of range bronchos, with a mixture of thoroughbred, two blacks and three browns—fitting pretty well the description of the animals ridden by the Egan gang when last seen.

All of these things the old Ranger took in at a glance. Immediately he broke into a brisk run up the street, his hand instinctively feeling of the gun in his holster.

On that race to the bank he looked about for Private McNulty; if his suspicions were correct, this promised to give the young Ranger an unexpected chance to participate in a real brush with outlaws. But McNulty was not in sight.

Sergeant Loring continued on, his lanky legs at a long, steady stride; he motioned back several unarmed townsmen who stared or called to him to know what was up. Covering the two hundred yards quickly for a man near sixty, he reached the front brick wall of the bank.

He slackened pace slightly, stooped under the large plate-glass window to hide his presence from those within, then glided to the entrance.

Suddenly he swung around the edge of the open door. His big walnut-stocked six-shooter was in his hand, ready to rise. Only the chance that he might be mistaken prevented his going in with the weapon leveled.

No old-time lawman would have done otherwise; no real Ranger without positive knowledge would have risked pointing his gun at innocent customers of the bank. If his failure to do so was an error, it was one of the few that could be chalked up against Sergeant Loring in years of campaigning against lawless men. One of the desperadoes was guarding that entrance with his big-bored Colt facing the street.

The moment the Ranger's figure crossed the doorway, the guard's pistol faced him, and two others swung upon him.

"Drop it!" snapped the entrance watchdog.

SERGEANT LORING stiffened, his blue eyes flaming. No fear was in him. But he knew the position in which he was placed, knew the men he was dealing with. He marveled they did not shoot him down on the spot, without the command to drop his gun. Perhaps they mistook him for a foolhardy townsman, since he wore no uniform. Three .45s were on him, their huge hammers back at cock.

Gritting his teeth, the old peace officer let his weapon slip through his fingers to the floor, chancing an explosion in falling if the hammer struck first. The gun fell sideways, thudded harmlessly. Quickly one of the bank robbers snatched it up.

"Set down!" snarled one of the outlaws, motioning to the leather-covered window seat.

Loring obeyed; the veins in his neck bulged; his hands flexed into hard fists; to be whipped without a fight was a new experience to him. He glanced at two other men near the end of the bench—bank customers caught inside when the robbers had appeared. They, too, were unarmed, unable to lift a finger.

While one of the five desperadoes kept his gun pointed at the prisoners, another remained on watch at the door, and the other three turned to the wicket to complete the robbery. Unless there was formidable interference from some one outside, the gang would have its way here, while Sergeant Loring, arch foe of criminals, sat and watched the robbery as a helpless spectator.

"Private McNulty?" breathed the old Ranger, with a new, strange light in his blue eyes. Certainly he must discover that a robbery was in progress here. It was the one chance of the law against the bank

looters. And what an opportunity for a raw recruit to win his spurs!

Yet in one sense the old-timer almost wished the boy Ranger would not venture in here. Against those five desperadoes he would have scant chance. Young blood was reckless; McNulty might not show such discretion as Loring had shown. If he gave vent to the old fighting spirit of his father, Stet McNulty, the outlaws would surely kill him.

Silently, ruefully, Sergeant Loring watched the man behind the cashier's window set up small sacks of coin and stacks of bills, under cover of outlaw guns. In the rear, a white-faced official of the bank was swinging open the thick steel door of the vault. Scooping up money bags and paper currency, one of the band shoved them into a large gunny sack. He seemed to be the leader, a black-eyed, stubble-bearded outlaw who had given most of the orders to the robbers—doubtless the notorious Burt Egan himself.

Chafing at his inability to prevent the holdup, the veteran Ranger began to slide inch by inch along the bench toward the door, thinking to make a break, obtain a gun outside, and try again to corral the gang. At this moment his glance fell upon the familiar figure of Private McNulty, just beyond the entrance.

The young Ranger poked his head in at the doorway. Sergeant Loring saw the amazed, startled look in the lad's gray eyes, saw the color sweep from his cheeks. He seemed awestruck, too frightened to act.

But Private McNulty's gun swept up. Mechanically, as though in a daze, he stepped into the bank.

"Drop that hoglaig!" yelled one of the two desperadoes who instantly covered him.

THE Ranger acted as though transfixed; he did not let the gun fall, or raise it higher on the outlaws. For the moment, Sergeant Loring's heart leaped to witness such cold courage in the son of Stet McNulty. The years rolled back to the time "Fighting Stet" had jumped into a battle with rustlers on Sabine River, killed three of them, turned the tide against the thieves, and saved Sergeant Loring from ambush. Now Stet's boy had jumped into a fight even more one-sided.

Loring's lean frame stiffened on the window seat. He would have given an eye to have his gun at this moment. Private McNulty took another step, did not obey the command to drop his weapon. Fear for the boy's life gripped the veteran, quickly supplanting the emotion of pride in the Ranger's sand.

Then to Loring's astonishment, he saw Private McNulty's gun was shaking in his hand. The whole arm was trembling, the fingers glued to the weapon. It was fright, not courage, that had prompted him to disobey, the veteran realized. He could not drop that gun!

It was the raw recruit's first face-to-face meeting with outlaws. In a moment the attack of "buck fever" might pass, Sergeant Loring tried to console himself.

"Leggo that iron, or I'll drill you!" snarled the robber who first had covered the younger Ranger. By now every one of the five had whirled about, their weapons leveled at McNulty's head.

Sergeant Loring's gnarled hands gripped the edge of the window seat; his body bent forward.

"Better drop it, son!" he said huskily, knowing how near death the lad stood at that moment.

Private McNulty was staring wildly, his gun hand still shaking. A quavering voice came from his lips:

"I've got to arrest you—all—as a Texas Ranger!"

Mocking laughter greeted him. Then the foremost of the robbers let out a howl.

"Throw up yore hands!" he commanded.

McNulty seemed to have lost all sense of hearing. "I've got to arrest you." His voice was a whine.

Sergeant Loring's blue eyes swiveled in their sockets. This was not a case of Ranger nerve, but nerves. He thought he saw the lad's legs wobble.

"Throw up yore hands, kid!" It was stubble-bearded Burt Egan himself who snapped the words, following them with a lurid oath.

A quiver racked the slim frame of Private McNulty. Old Man Loring bit his leathery lip; he saw the lad's face was ashen; also there was no doubt his knees were shaking now.

Never had Loring seen a man so smitten with sheer physical fright. Frozen in his tracks, the raw recruit stood there, eyes bulging, mouth wide open. In spite of the young Ranger's peril, the old campaigner swore fervently under his breath, utterly disgusted. Texas Rangers were not made of that kind of material! And Loring had sponsored this youth, counting on the grit of Stet McNulty to see the kid through. What a spectacle! When Private McNulty's stiffness left him after an awesome interval, he again trembled from head to foot—looked as though he would reel and topple over.

"Boys," he managed to say, licking his dry lips, "I arrest you, as a Ranger."

ONCE more Burt Egan shrilled a command to throw up hands. The only answer was a shudder that shook the Ranger's shoulders, ran like a convulsion into his weak knees.

Sergeant Loring jumped to his feet.

"Don't kill him, boys," he barked huskily. "He's too scared—too scared to obey you."

An outlaw gun blazed near his head, drove him down to the window seat.

"Not scared!" gasped the kid Ranger, with a twitch at his bloodless lips. In a pitiful, thin voice he pleaded with the outlaws: "I must arrest you. I am a Texas Ranger."

He was standing like a ghost there, the old sergeant thought—like a dead man who had been propped up. Except that no cadaver would show such evidence of quivering fright.

"Grab his gun," snapped Egan suddenly, gesturing to the foremost desperado.

"I arrest——" Private McNulty's tongue was thick, his mouth too dry to finish the sentence; the words faint, almost a whisper.

Sergeant Loring turned his face away, fearing to see him collapse and sink to the floor. When he looked again at the pitiful spectacle, he saw the legs of the lad swaying, rocking, but the kid's shaking gun was raised a trifle higher—upon the person of Burt Egan.

For a long moment, the desperadoes stared at the tyro before them. One of the band guffawed. Burt Egan did not. He tried to outstare the kid, fingered his uplifted pistol nervously.

"Aw, hell!" blurted Egan. He took two quick steps forward, glared again into the Ranger's ghastly face. That wavering gun of McNulty remained pointed in his direction.

Old Man Loring's face was slanted downward, but his eyes were raised toward the son of Stet McNulty. Never would he forget this scene. Perhaps it was some ancestral taint that made Stet's boy a weakling in the face of danger. Sergeant Loring couldn't understand it.

On the part of outlaws such as these, cold contempt and derision was the usual response to such a spectacle. But something strange happened now. Burt Egan, desperado, after glaring a minute more in to the white face of the frightened Ranger, stepped forward and handed over his gun.

Sergeant Loring's hands let go the edge of the bench, and a blast of held breath was expelled from his lungs. Astounded as he was, he knew the explanation. Nothing did the Western bad man fear more than the armed greenhorn—the foolhardiness of the inexperienced. A raw recruit like this fright-stricken youth might squeeze the trigger in sheer nervousness.

"Jig's up, fellers," said Egan. "Give the bonehead baby calf yore pistols."

It was done, in spite of growls of dissent from two of the outlaws, whom the leader of the gang promptly subdued with a ferocious snarl.

"We got to kill him or take the robbery rap. You ain't honin' to swing for murderin' a Ranger, are you?"

Private McNulty laid the pistols of the outlaws one by one on the bench behind him. Then he collapsed. His legs gave way, and he let himself back on the window

seat. Breathing hard, he sat there in utter exhaustion.

Meanwhile Sergeant Loring had taken command of the situation, gathering up the guns of the robbers and his own single-action Colt.

"Your prisoners, son," he said gently addressing McNulty.

The Ranger's pallid face held a smile. "You take them," he said faintly. "You lock them up, dad." He laid back his head against the window, like a man overcome with nausea.

Turning the money over to the bank cashier, Sergeant Loring marched the Egan gang to the town lockup, leaving Private McNulty slumped on the leather-covered bench in the bank window.

IN the reconditioned headquarters office of Company B, the veteran sergeant of Rangers sat at the corner desk late that same afternoon. Living over again the remarkable scene in the Bank of Angelo, he glanced up as Captain Barrows entered the room and seated himself at the adjoining desk. Just in from the corral, the captain had not yet asked for his sergeant's report. Old Man Loring dreaded making that report. Not that he sought an alibi for himself—his record of long service made that unnecessary.

What worried him was the case of the new recruit who had actually captured the Egan gang, covered himself with glory, and put the name of Company B in the headlines of the afternoon papers. It would be hard to make a true report to Captain Barrows about that scene in the bank. If a man in the service lacks nerve; if he breaks in the face of outlawry, his place is not with Company B. Physical cowardice is the one unforgivable

sin in the code of the Frontier Battalion.

After smoking his pipe for a long while in silence, Sergeant Loring hammered out the ashes, tipped back in his chair, and waited for his superior to speak.

Captain Barrows was reading the afternoon paper. Though he rarely smiled, the outthrust, muscled jaw receded perceptibly, and a glow of pleasure warmed the severe countenance. Refreshing as the cool water that dripped from the olla in the window were the words that overspread the top of the front page: "Lone Ranger captures notorious Egan gang."

Captain Barrows emitted a satisfied grunt. There was a beam of white light in the dark eyes that raced down the column telling how young Ranger McNulty, new to the service, had taken the quintet of desperadoes without firing a shot, after the gang had disarmed the Old Man of Iron, Sergeant Jack Loring.

Laying down the newspaper, Captain Barrows sat erect in his chair, his square shoulders back. Out of the corner of his eye Old Man Loring saw his chest swell to full proportions. Without turning his head, the captain addressed the man in the corner:

"Bring in Private McNulty, Sergeant Loring."

"Yes, sir."

The rawboned Ranger rose quickly, advanced to the door and out.

Captain Barrows, too, left his chair, to turn the shutters through which the late afternoon sun was slanting hotly into the office. His step was elastic, his athletic figure drawn to its full six feet—there was pride in his bearing. Through the slats of the wooden shutters he saw

the men of Company B gathered in a group about McNulty in the horse corral across the street. A slow smile crept into the taut lips.

After adjusting the shutter, the captain moved back to his chair, nodding his leonine head as though accepting the plaudits of the citizenry for the latest achievements of one of his fighting Rangers.

Erect once more behind his desk, he glanced through the open door. McNulty was leaving the group. A tiny sand funnel spiraled up restlessly in the pathway of the tall youth who had started across at the sergeant's hail.

As the young Ranger entered the office, Captain Barrows motioned to the wall bench.

"Sit down, McNulty, and tell us how it happened."

SERGEANT LORING had returned to his place in the corner. His wrinkled features were a bit drawn; he felt keenly for the young Ranger in this ordeal, wondered whether the lad would have the moral courage to make a clean breast of things.

Private McNulty removed his new gray Stetson hat, seated himself. Plainly he was awkward and shy in the presence of the company commander.

"Well, sir, there's not much to tell," he began. "I followed Sergeant Loring into the bank." His forehead was etched with worry lines, his voice lacked exuberance. His bearing was hardly that of a hero come to receive the commendation of his noted captain.

"You see, sir," he went on, "when I stepped out of the corral, some men pointed to the bank and said the gang was in there."

"You knew Sergeant Loring had gone in?"

"Well, sir, not at the time." The lad's gaze wavered as he met the eyes of the old campaigner in the corner.

"You knew the character of those desperadoes—men who would not hesitate to take your life?" prompted Captain Barrows.

"I'd heard, yes, sir. But there was nothing to do but go in. Somehow they didn't start gunning for me. I just talked them into surrendering."

"Talked them into it," droned Barrows, his eyes twinkling. "Explain all that took place—everything."

"Well, sir, soon as I entered, I found they had the drop on me. They all held pistols pointed in my direction. Then I noticed they had the sergeant seated at a window bench, disarmed, and one of them had him covered." He did not look at the man in the corner. "I knew then I couldn't quit, no matter what they did to me."

"Go on. What next?" insisted Barrows brusquely.

"Well, sir, I just said, 'I've got to arrest you, as a Ranger.' A couple of them laughed—told me if I didn't drop my gun, I'd be shot. Then Burt Egan, the leader, ordered me to put up my hands. I was pretty scared, but didn't obey. I kept saying they were under arrest, and they kept hollering for me to raise my hands. I wouldn't do it—just kept telling them they were under arrest. Well, sir, this Egan came forward finally and surrendered, and the others followed. That's all there was to it, sir."

"Thanks, McNulty. You may go. Please come back in ten minutes."

As the Ranger left the room, Captain Barrows's fingers drummed softly on the desk top, beating time

to McNulty's tread. Waiting until the private's boot sounds had melted away in the sand of the street, Barrows turned to the old peace officer.

"Anything to add, Sergeant Loring?"

Lost in reverie, his mind's eye seeing vividly once again the whole strange exploit, the veteran looked up on hearing the question.

"No, sir." His blue eyes were gentle. "That about tells it."

"Nothing to add at all?"

"I reckon not."

Captain Barrows cleared his throat, patted his perspiring neck with his handkerchief. "Sorry the paper mentioned you had been captured by that gang," he said sincerely. "How did they outwit you?"

"They saw me first." A mirthless smile crossed the weather-baked lips. "Maybe I knew their reputation too well to take a chance."

"You verify McNulty's report, then?"

"I verify McNulty's report," Loring assented.

PRESENTLY the young private returned to the office, as instructed. This time Captain Barrows rose to meet him, extending his heart for a hearty clasp.

"It took cold nerve to do what you did, McNulty," he said, with feeling. "You hadn't forgotten my admonition to all Rangers to make arrests quietly and coolly without gun play whenever possible. That is important just now, with foes of the administration charging the Frontier Battalion with reckless killing of law violators. You have shown extraordinary courage and restraint—have brought great honor to your company. I am privileged

to designate one of my men for a lieutenant's commission. It is a pleasure to select you, McNulty."

Ranger McNulty returned the prolonged pressure of Captain Barrows's hand, awkwardly voiced his thanks. To be a lieutenant after such short service was an honor that did not often befall a Ranger. With a lump in his throat, he walked out toward his companions in the corral.

"A remarkable piece of work," said the captain, turning to Sergeant Loring. "An extraordinary display of cold nerve. You were right, sergeant, when you vouched for that lad's sand. By George, I've got something to say to the boys about it!" Seizing the large white hat that rested on his desk, he swept it onto his head and strode out toward the troopers across the way.

Sergeant Loring remained on duty in the office. Wistfully he gazed beyond the men of his company, through the lazily drifting cotton of the alamos toward the distant shimmering waters of the Rio Grande, scene of events that would have won him a lieutenantcy, too, had rewards been meted out in the old days. Gray in the service now, he held no rancor toward the youth who had gained the honor that had been his own life's dream.

Young blood—new blood. This was their day. The green years had passed for him. Many floods had swept the great river since Loring was a raw recruit; too often the alamos had shed their silken down. It was just as well. He had lived for the service, and this boy private with a face like a girl's had shown a certain courage in daring to enter that bank at all. If his physical stamina gave way in the presence of those desperadoes, then that was something beyond the lad's control.

Time might correct that. Certainly no good would come of discrediting the new Ranger's achievement. The service must be considered—the reputation of Company B. And Stet McNulty would be proud of his son.

Old Man Loring was satisfied, and a warm, sweet feeling surged through his being as he looked through the open door at the captain addressing the Rangers about McNulty. He, too, was sharing in those plaudits. Daydreaming as he was, he did not notice at first the private who laid on his desk a slip of paper. "For Captain Barrows," the Ranger announced, and went out.

Filling his pipe, Sergeant Loring leaned back in his chair. Mechanically he took up the folded piece of paper. Because it was his duty to glance at such communications and pass along to his chief such as needed attention, he ran his eyes over the penciled words:

CAP BARROWS: Don't get cocky about your Rangers corraling our bunch. Your hog luck, cap, that's all—sending my kid brother in there. He was sure surprised and one scared hombre. If it wasn't for that, there would've been some tall shooting. Better keep that brother stuff out of the trial, cap, for the sake of the kid.

BURT EGAN MCNULTY.

"From the jail," mused Sergeant Loring, his teeth locked on the unlighted pipe. "Egan—his brother!"

The Old Man of Iron stared vacantly into space—into the Bank of Angelo during the holdup. "McNulty had the stuff, after all—sand—cold nerve. The captain was right."

He sat thinking. Stet McNulty's older son an outlaw—going under an assumed name! No wonder the kid had had the shakes in facing his

blood kin in such a situation; no wonder he had slumped onto the window seat when it was all over. Sick at heart he had been then—sick physically, too, when he had faced his outlaw brother with guns.

The sound of Captain Barrows's voice drifted indistinguishably from the corral, a turgid note amidst the cadences of a mocking bird in the

alamos. Holding the note in his up-lifted fingers, Sergeant Loring struck a match, touched it to the paper containing Egan's message, and lighted his pipe.

He was thinking of the father of the boys as well as the young Ranger himself. Then, too, Captain Barrows might not understand that kind of nerve.

HE'S GOING TO DIG GOLD

H C. BARNES, owner of a small café in Houston, Texas, is equipping himself to dig for gold bars estimated by him to be worth five million dollars and which he believes were buried by the Spaniards in the sands of Spring Creek Valley, thirty miles northwest of Houston.

As Barnes told the story, the map which is the key to the supposed buried treasure was given to him by a Mexican in 1899.

The Mexican said he received it from his grandfather, a Spanish officer, who hid the gold when his forces encountered danger along the old road from Nacogdoches to San Antonio near what is now Rose Hill.

"This, of course, is not a cinch," Barnes said. "I have no way of knowing definitely that the gold is there."

"I was an orderly in the old Houston infirmary," Barnes began his story, "when a Mexican workman on the railroad was brought in. His leg had been cut off by a train. I felt sorry for the poor fellow and was attentive to him. The doctor told him he could not live and asked for the name and address of his relatives.

"The Mexican had no relatives and asked that I be called in. He gave me one hundred and sixty dollars in cash and this map which he said he received from his grandfather. The map had on it in Spanish the notation that four hundred and twenty-three bars of gold, each weighing twenty-five pounds, were buried on the site designated.

"This Mexican spoke perfect English and appeared to be educated. I believe he had run out of money and was here working as a laborer to raise more money for his gold-hunting expedition.

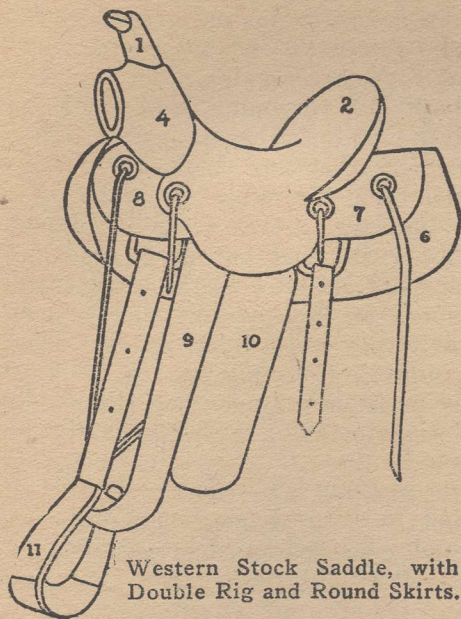
"According to the map, the gold was buried near a horseshoe lake. On a peninsula extending into the lake was a big pine tree. The site of the buried treasure was marked on the map as so many feet toward the sun from the pine tree.

"For more than a year Doctor Joe Stewart, who treated the fellow, and I searched for such a lake, but could not find it. A short time ago a friend of mine from Rose Hill area was in my restaurant and I asked him where I could find some bullfrogs. He told me there were plenty in a lake near his home. I asked some questions and found from his description that the lake tallied with the one marked on my map. I went out there with him, and, sure enough, it was the lake I had been looking for.

"The lake covers about ten acres. The pine tree was chopped down ten or fifteen years ago but the stump is still there. It was a big pine—about four feet in diameter."

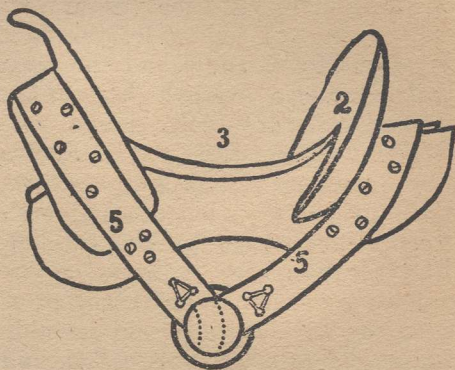
SADDLES

By WALT KING



Western Stock Saddle, with Double Rig and Round Skirts.

- 1—Horn. 2—Cantle. 3—Bars. 4—Fork.
- 5—Rigging. 6—Skirts. 7—Back Housing.
- 8—Front Housing. 9—Stirrup Leathers.
- 10—Fenders or Rosaderos. 11—Stirrup.



Saddletree shown with Single Rig attached, before Leather has been put on.

WHOA! Have you ever stopped to think about the beginning of some certain thing? Certainly you have. But have you ever thought when and how the first riding saddle was used?

Thousands of saddles are in use over the country to-day, and a good many are used only for pleasure, but few people know how many are an absolute necessity. In different sections of the country, especially in the Eastern States, many think that a saddle is no longer necessary because the automobile has, seemingly, come to take its place. This is not the case, however, as you will learn farther along in this article.

Let us begin with the time America was discovered. The Eng-

lish had their horses with fine carriages and saddle; the Romans their horses with finger trappings, the Arabians, the Spaniards, and Jews had their beasts of burden, and each had a saddle of some sort on which to ride. True, many rode bareback, but always did some of them have their saddles.

The above may be subjected to some discussion, but we do know that the English had their flat-type saddles, which were used, for convenience in transportation and for pleasure. This type of saddle is possibly the first to come to America, but which was improved upon for the needs of the early stock raisers.

The first improved saddle was probably what is now known as the

"Kentucky Spring Saddle." This saddle, unlike the English saddle, had a horn at the front and a slight cantle at the back.

In order that the readers can follow and understand the different terms, a chart and drawings have been made.

THE Kentucky saddle was possibly the foundation for the first Texas range saddle, although many old-time Texans may deny this. At any rate, the first Western stock saddle had the horn in front and a much higher cantle, similar to the Kentucky saddle.

The first Western stock saddles were made of wood and rawhide, the outside not being covered with leather such as the present saddles. Rawhide was used entirely for the outside covering, whereas, the present ones have a wood and rawhide frame, or "tree," as it is called, and then covered with leather to the liking of the cowboy.

Some of the first Western stock saddles were used at Port La Baca (pronounced Port La Vaca), Texas, which, when translated, means "Port of the Cows." Port La Baca was located where the city of Galveston now stands, and in the early days thousands of cattle were sent out through this port. At this time, we are told, steers brought two dollars per head, and later when the price raised to five dollars per head, the cattlemen were making good money. This is quite a contrast with to-day's prices, even though they are low. But we are getting away from our subject.

In the large cities to-day many people do not know from where they get their beef-steaks, and fewer of them know the manner in which these steers are brought to market. The saddle plays a big part in this

and is subjected to unbelievable punishment.

The cattle, to begin with, are wild and they graze on ranges having hundreds, and some the sands of acres, without fencing, except around the outer edge. Some of these ranges are in mountainous districts, and the cattle are in every conceivable corner or ravine. It is the cowboys' job to round these cattle up into one of the numerous crude corrals that are built at various points on the range.

This means that a number of cowboys will start out on a round-up and not get back to the home ranch house for weeks at a time. Each day they ride their saddles from sunup until sundown, so it is of utmost importance that the saddle be comfortable. Also, the tree in the saddle must be shaped correctly on the under side so that the saddle will not hurt the horses' backs, during such constant and heavy riding.

After all the cattle that are wanted are rounded up, the cowboys drive them to the nearest railroad station, or to their destination, sometimes as far as two hundred miles. They travel from ten to fifteen miles a day, the speed depending upon the country that is being covered.

Until the saddletrees were perfected to their present state, saddle makers had a difficult time in making their saddles so that they would not hurt the horses' backs. However, this trouble is almost entirely overcome by modern methods in making the trees. The bars, or bottom portion of the trees are now being made by automatic lathes that shape both bars exactly alike, whereas in the past these parts were made by hand, and occasionally there was a slight variation which would cause the saddle to hurt the horses' backs.

THE next point to consider was strength. Sometimes a wild steer becomes unruly or a yearling must be branded, so the cowboy must take his lariat rope and catch the animal. Imagine a thousand-pound steer tied on one end of a rope and a thousand-pound horse on the other end of this same rope pulling in opposite directions and you will realize the strength that must be built into a stock saddle. Sometimes the horse and the steer are running in the opposite directions, and when the slack of the rope is taken up, there is a heavy impact—and the saddle must stand this, too.

At this point it might be mentioned that an average lariat rope runs from thirty to fifty feet in length, the length depending on whether the rider ties or “dallies” his rope. In most cases the rope is tied onto the horn of the saddle, and the steer is roped or “lassoed” with the loose end. The man who uses his rope in this manner is known as a “tie” man and he usually works on the open plains or ranges.

The other man, who is known as a “*dalla-welta*” man, wraps the rope around the horn of the saddle after he has caught his steer. “*Dalla welta*” in Spanish means “turn around.” The man using his rope in this manner requires one forty-five to fifty feet in length, and sometimes as long as sixty feet. Some of the ropes used by the *dalla-welta* men are made of plaited rawhide, known as a *reata*. The shorter ropes are used by the tie man, the length generally used being thirty feet.

The method of roping without tying the rope or *reata* to the horn of the saddle is entirely different from the other. The cowboy makes a large loop which he twirls in the

air and loops over the steer, usually its horns, after which he slows down his horse and wraps the loose end around the horn about two times. As the slack is taken up by the steer traveling a little faster than the horse, the cowboy lets the rope slide through his hand so that there will not be a sudden jerk. By this time the horse has stopped, and the cowboy holds onto the rope without letting it slip any farther, and the steer is stopped. Men using this method of roping usually work in mountainous regions.

In the case of the man tying his rope fast onto the horn before starting, many times the sudden taking up of the slack in the rope causes a terrific jar which sometimes jerks the steer or horse down.

On account of having to wrap the rope around the saddle horn several times, the *dalla-welta* man usually has his saddle made with a horn about four inches in height. The tie man uses a lower horn, usually two and one half inches to three inches in height.

Saddle horns are generally made of steel and bolted onto the wooden fork of the saddletree before the rawhide is put on. When the rawhide is put over the tree and horn, it is strong enough to withstand almost any kind of punishment. Some saddle horns are made of solid nickel or brass and sometimes silver. These types of horns are used by the tie man, as the *dalla-welta* man could not use them on account of their being too slick—he could not keep his rope wrapped around them as it would slip off.

The fork onto which the horn is bolted varies in width from ten to eighteen inches; the more popular width being fourteen inches. About fifteen years ago there were several

extreme cases whereby forks were made as wide as twenty-two inches. However, this can be called a fad, as it is very uncommon for any of the present-day saddles to be made with forks wider than sixteen inches.

AN incident that was told by a stockman who has a large range in northwestern Arizona, will show why the wider forks are not so popular. At that time this man had a very special saddle made to conform to his own particular ideas, which included an eighteen-inch fork. Soon after he got this saddle, he had occasion to round up a steer late one afternoon, and in order to do this, it was necessary for him to go down a steep incline, when suddenly his horse tripped and, in falling, rolled on him, rendering him unconscious.

The natural tendency of every one is self-preservation, and when his horse started falling, he gripped his legs tightly to the forks of the saddle and stayed in it. Had he been riding a saddle with a narrow fork, it would not have been possible for him to have stayed in it, but would have been thrown clear so that the horse could not roll on him. True, it may have bruised him badly, but as it happened, it was the impact of the horse falling on him, that rendered him unconscious.

When the horse showed up at the ranch-house corral without its rider, the folk knew that something had happened so they immediately started a search. Just as it was getting dark, they found him, still unconscious, and lucky that they did, because that very night they had a severe snowstorm, and had they not found him when they did, he would probably have frozen to death. The very next trip to town

was made especially to trade this saddle in on one with a narrow fork, and to-day, fifteen years later, he still rides that saddle. "No more wide forks for me," he says.

Many saddlemakers guarantee their saddletrees not to break, even though a horse should fall over backward on it. If a tree must be replaced by the saddlemaker, free of charge, his profits on that particular saddle is entirely wiped out, so naturally the saddletrees are made as strong as is possible. Many styles of saddles are made; in fact, most saddles are now being made to the individual likes of the purchaser, like a tailor-made suit of clothes. In the flat countries and for roping in shows or rodeos, the saddles are ordered with low cantles, measuring in height from two to three and one half inches. In the mountainous country the cantles are ordered to measure four to five inches in height, the majority being five inches.

After the saddletree has been selected, it is turned over to a saddlemaker to be completed.

First a groundwork of leather for the seat is put in and shaped to give the rider the utmost comfort. In the center of the groundwork is a galvanized plate for making the seat solid over the open space between the bars.

Next, the rigging, with which the saddle is fastened onto the animal, is put onto the tree, with screws and nails. This rigging must be made very strong, and the leather used in it is cut from the very best part of the leather. The rings are usually made of solid nickel or bronze, although iron rings were used years ago, and are still being used on the cheaper saddles. The iron ring is apt to pull out of shape, which makes the two first mentioned preferable.

NOW, there are two styles of rigging known as "double" and "single." There are several different patented riggings, but they are classed as one of the above. By "double rig" it is meant that two cinches or girths are required, and by "single rig" it is meant that one cinch or girth is required.

The double rig is used mostly in the Southwest and the single rig in the Northwest, although, on account of the wandering cowboys, you will find them scattered in all places. Many heated arguments have taken place over whether the double rig or single is the best, but this subject alone, if gone into, would take much time and space, so we must let it pass.

After the rigging is put on, the horn is leather-covered, providing that it is not a nickel, brass, or silver horn. The fork cover comes next, it being fastened down with paste, then nailed and screwed onto the tree.

The leather on the back of the cantle is next. Usually the cowboy has his brand or initials carved and stamped on this piece, which makes it visible from the back, even though a person were seated in the saddle.

Next comes the seat which is pasted down onto the groundwork and smoothed or slicked out with a hard wooden stick. Then a cantle binding is sewed on with linen thread, by hand, which holds the seat and leather in place. At the time that the groundwork is put on the tree, a piece of leather about an inch wide is tacked around the edge of the cantle with about one half inch extending over the edge. When the binding is sewed on, the thread goes through the back cantle leather, the seat, and through this narrow strip which acts as an anchor.

Then come the skirts. They are made round in shape, or square, as

desired by the cowboy. In Texas and Oklahoma most of the saddles have square skirts, but in the other States they are divided, the majority being round skirts. In Arizona and New Mexico lowlands, where it gets quite warm, the cowboys prefer the round skirts on account of them not being so hot for the horses; in fact, the tendency throughout the entire cattle country in America is toward the round-skirted saddle. They are preferable not only because of not making it so hot for the horse, but because this style of saddle is lighter in weight, thereby making it easier for the rider to put on the horse.

However, when a man wants a saddle for show purposes, he usually selects one with square skirts, as this type will show off to better advantage.

The skirts on all good stock saddles are lined with sheepskin, which has been tanned with the wool on. The length of the wool varies from one half to three quarters of an inch in length and serves not only as a pad but as a prevention for saddle blankets slipping out from underneath the saddle.

Next the back housing is put on so as to cover the top of the saddletree bars and keep the rain or dirt from getting onto the tree. The front housing is put on at the same time as the back and serves as a protection for the tree.

Now the stirrup leathers with fenders, or *rosaderos*, are put onto the saddle. The stirrup leathers run over the bar of the tree on each side, in the majority of cases, but there are several patented stirrup leathers where they do not. One of these, where the stirrup leathers run through a special ring instead of over the saddletree bar, is known as "the swing-easy rig," and is put on by a well-known saddlery house in the

West. Then last, but not least, in the making of the saddle comes the "tying up," as the saddlemaker calls it. By this is meant the putting in of the leather strings that hold the saddle together. These strings are usually one half inch in width and they go through the leather on top, the saddletree, and through the saddle skirts. The holes through which these strings go are drilled in with a steel bit.

When the strings are tightened and fastened on the upper side, they hold the skirts up tight against the bars of the tree; thereby, the strings, while small, are of utmost importance.

Now the saddle is all made and it is given a coat of pure neat's-foot oil which is a preservative of leather. All that is necessary now is to put on the stirrups, cinches, and latigo straps—and away we go.

In Next Week's Issue of Street & Smith's

WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE

Men Hunters

By ROBERT J. HORTON

Mel Davitt had quit outlaw chasing to settle down as a rancher. But when a notorious desperado was hired to "get" him, the former range sleuth was forced to buckle on his guns and ride the danger trail once more.

The Last Trail North

By ROBERT ORMOND CASE

The story of old Jeb Sims, veteran rider for the Flying Pitchfork, and his last trail drive north with blooded beef.

Also Features by

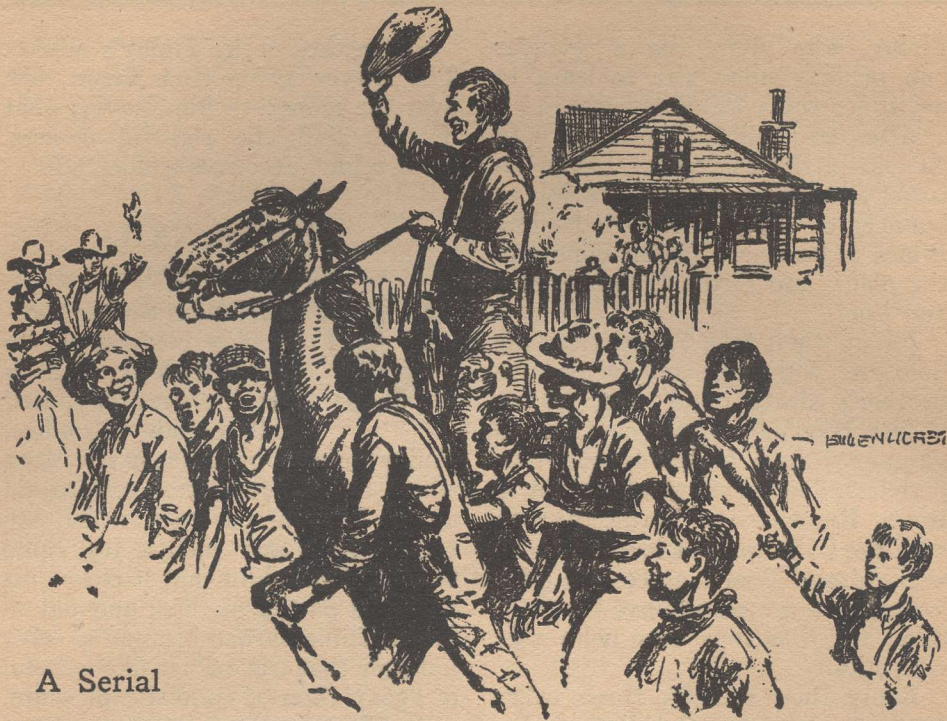
Max Brand

Seth Ranger

And Others

15c A COPY

AT ALL NEWS STANDS



A Serial

GUN GIFT

By MAX BRAND

EMBITTERED by the loss of his right hand, Daniel Finlay, who practices law in the town of White Water, finds pleasure in being a secret trouble maker. He sees a fine opportunity for mischief when Mary Wilson, a pretty young girl, happens to be noticed by Bob Witherell, a handsome gunman whom Finlay has successfully defended on the charge of robbing a stagecoach. Witherell's brother is the notorious desperado, the Solitaire, and Witherell himself is the leader of a group of reckless spirits.

The lawyer tells Witherell that Mary Wilson is engaged to John Saxon, a hard-working young fellow who has a small place in the moun-

tains where he has a nice start on a herd. And, by praising Saxon, Finlay sets Witherell's mind against that honest young man.

As a result, Witherell shames Saxon before the people of White Water by making him dance to the tune of a six-gun; then Witherell and his men burn Saxon's place and rustle his herd. When accused of these crimes, Witherell beats Saxon badly in a fist fight.

Saxon complains to Sheriff Phil Walker, but the sheriff does nothing, saying there is insufficient evidence against Witherell. The bank refuses to lend Saxon money to make a new start, and he despairs. About to commit suicide, he is stopped by

Finlay, who gives him a revolver and prevails upon him to learn to use it for the sake of revenge.

After two months' practice with the .45 in the wilderness, Saxon returns to town and secures a job as bouncer at Lefty Malone's Rolling Bones Saloon. Witherell comes to the place, and Saxon kills him in a gun duel.

Finlay then tells Saxon that the Solitaire will seek to avenge his brother's death, and that Saxon should become a more experienced gunman before he meets the desperado. The lawyer sends Saxon to Boots Russell, who formerly rode with the Solitaire, but has fallen out with him. Boots agrees to join forces with Saxon against the Solitaire and the four men who ride with him.

Boots then recruits three other hard young men, Del Bryan, Joe Pike, and Tad Cullen; also Arthur William Creston, a huge Negro, who cooks for the group. They locate the Solitaire's hang-out at a deserted ranch. In a gun battle, the Solitaire beats Saxon to the draw, and a bullet furrows Saxon's scalp. But two of the Solitaire's men are killed, and one wounded, and the Solitaire is forced to flee with the survivors. Left behind is the loot of many robberies, amounting to one hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars in cash, and seventy-five thousand dollars in jewels. Saxon, as chief of the group, takes one third of the cash, and allows the others to divide the remainder of the treasure.

Accompanied by Creston, Saxon returns to White Water at night. Leaving Creston with the horses, Saxon calls on Mary Wilson, tells her what he has done, and asks her to marry him. But she says he should return all the money to the Solitaire's victims.

Saxon then seeks Finlay's advice. The lawyer insists that Saxon turn over the money to him, saying that he will find the rightful owners. With reluctance, Saxon does this.

CHAPTER XXII.

FINLAY'S SCHEME.

WHEN John Saxon, thoroughly pledged not to see even Mary Wilson on the next day, had left the lawyer's office, Finlay turned back from the door which he had just shut and stared at the heap of currency which lay on his desk, and such a joy came bursting up in him that it closed his eyes and parted his lips, and out of his straining throat brought a faint murmur that was rather like a moan of agony than of exquisite pleasure.

And he thought, as he stood there, that the greatest of all sins is to fail to take from the fool what his folly abandons. That money, he said to himself, was surely abandoned, and therefore he, Daniel Finlay, would be committing the unpardonable sin if a penny of it ever got back to the too trusting possession of John Saxon.

Not only did the lawyer see that the money should be his, but he perceived, instantly, how he could cancel the claim of Saxon to the cash. He could not very well do it by legal means, but he could use the powerful agent death to remove Saxon from this earth and all the goods of it whatever.

He himself did not care to execute the task, but he knew at once what hand he would employ. He would employ the most fatal hand in the world, and yet, instead of receiving a favor, he would seem to be conferring one!

When Finlay perceived this, an-

other burst of joy flooded his soul and body. It left him trembling, but calm and determined.

The money, in the first place, he had to dispose of with care, but he knew exactly what to do in all such cases. He had merely to descend into his deep, narrow cellar, and there he pulled out from the brick-foundation wall a pair of loose bricks which opened the mouth of a small cavity. Into that cavity he reached and fondled with a knowing touch a tarpaulin bag which was already inside the hole. It contained the savings of his guilty life of work; it contained the very heart of Daniel Finlay. As for this new accession of wealth, he simply wrapped it in a handkerchief and pushed the parcel inside. It filled the total space. The bricks then were pushed in, and they made the wall, to all appearances, perfectly compact and strong again.

After this he went up the stairs, got his hat, put out the light in his front room, and retreated to the shed behind his house. He kept there one tough little mustang which flourished like a goat even on the meager rations which Finlay gave to it. This horse he saddled, led down the back lane, mounted, and then jogged across the town to the last house on its western edge, a little shanty set apart from the rest of the village by a broad pasture field.

In front of that house he halted the mustang and called cautiously: "Molly! Oh, Molly!"

He repeated the call. He rode closer and banged on the front door, and then listened to the brief echo go booming through the little place.

After a moment a window screeched up, and a pale form leaned out on the sill.

"Well?" said a girl's voice.

"Hello, Molly," said Finlay.

"Hello, Daniel Devil," said Molly. "What you want?"

"I haven't come from Boots, if that's what you mean," said the lawyer.

"Boots? That poor dummy?" said Molly. "What about him?"

"He's still alive, in spite of your friend," said Finlay.

"In spite of my friend? Why, if the Solitaire really wanted to wipe out that little snake, he'd do it in a minute."

"He'd better start wanting now!" answered Finlay.

He dismounted and stood at the window.

"Don't come too near me," said the girl. "I smell sulphur and brimstone when you're too near. What got you out at this time of the night?"

SHE was the one person in the world who had seen through the lawyer. Perhaps it was because there was enough evil in her own nature to enable her to recognize the same qualities in Finlay. At any rate, the wall was down, the door open between them. Yet they reserved for one another a peculiar respect, and if she called him Daniel Devil, it was not in the presence of other people, not even in that of the Solitaire. Finlay, in return, had many times been useful to her, and would be so again. The call of kind worked between them, so to speak, and he felt for her something that was almost an affection. He drew back a little as she spoke, and then said:

"Molly, I'm not here to gossip. I want to know where I can find the Solitaire."

"If I knew, would I be fool enough to tell you?" asked Molly.

"Molly, Molly! Not trust old

Daniel Finlay?" he asked in mock reproach.

She laughed heartily at this.

"I'd rather trust the devil, and you know it," she said. "But go on, Finlay. What's eating you? What makes you think that you can play an ace of trumps like the Solitaire in your dirty business?"

"I'll tell you something about the Solitaire," said he. "He's nursing a sore head and a sour stomach just now."

"You'd know, would you?" asked the girl.

"He's been cleaned, Molly," said Finlay. "He's been trimmed of every penny."

"You *are* the devil, or you couldn't know that this soon," she told him.

"Of course I'm the devil," said Finlay.

He made a cigarette deftly, in spite of the darkness, and lighted a match for it. The flare of the flame showed him the pretty, swarthy face of Molly, with eyes almost too big and lustrous. She was resting her chin on one small fist, and her eyes watched Finlay with a wide-open boldness. Shame had no place in her.

"If you're the devil, whistle for your cousin, and the Solitaire will appear," said the girl.

"What's the matter between you and the Solitaire?" he asked. "Are you sour with him?"

"He hasn't had enough time to get tired of me yet," she answered. "And now that he's flat for a while, he'll be true and good. It's when a man's flush that he gets tired of a girl quick."

"Tell me where to find the Solitaire," said Finlay. "If you don't, he'll be through with you. I've got things to tell him that he has to hear."

"Maybe you have; maybe your friend the sheriff has a lot more. What a dummy you must think I am, Danny!"

"Suppose," said Finlay, seeing that he would have to contribute a bit of concrete information, "that I'm able to put the Solitaire in the way to laying hands on the fellow who made him run like a scared dog?"

"Hold on! You mean to say that the Solitaire ran like a dog?" demanded Molly.

"He didn't tell you that? He didn't tell you that two of his men were killed, either, I suppose?"

"Yes, he told me that. Danny, maybe I can trust you, after all."

"Try me," said Finlay.

"Wait out there, then."

She withdrew from the window. After a time he heard the rear door of the house open, and then a thin whistle cut the night. It was answered, after a moment, from among the trees, where the forest rolled down the mountainside close to the house.

THE expectation of Finlay grew and grew, and he was not surprised when a dark figure appeared silently from among the tree trunks, not ten strides from him. At the same time, the girl called from the front door:

"It's Finlay, the lawyer. He says that he has something worth saying. Come in if you want to!"

Prepared as he had been by the whistled signals, still Finlay was amazed that the much hunted outlaw should dare to hide himself so near to the town.

The figure beside the trees came rapidly up to Finlay.

"You're Daniel Finlay, all right," said the Solitaire. "What do you want with me, Finlay?"

"I want to do you a good turn."
 "How big a turn, and what's your price?"

"I'm not selling. I'm giving."

The Solitaire laughed.

"I like to hear men talk like that," he declared. "It shows that they think I'm still pretty young. Go ahead, Finlay."

"I've heard about the bad time you've had. I've heard about two of your men being killed."

"Pretty little Molly has been talking, eh?"

"Not a word. She's a better girl than you think. Also, I've heard how you were run off the ground at the fight. I got that from young Saxon."

"Ah?" said the Solitaire, his musical voice running up the scale a little. "Is Saxon around town?"

"Lying low. Sneaking around by night for fear he might be snapped up by the great Solitaire, like a mouse by an owl. But he's talking pretty big about the way he ran you in front of him into the woods and you didn't dare to turn back and fight."

"It doesn't matter," said the Solitaire. "He had to die, anyway. I might as well have another good reason for killing him."

"Perhaps," said the lawyer. "And I suppose that you want to finish off the job in short order?"

"The sooner the better, of course. If people have started talking—I might as well make an example of young Saxon."

Saxon was not, in fact, much younger than the Solitaire, but what a difference between their worlds of experience, thought the lawyer. He added aloud:

"The fact is, Saxon is going to be at a place I could name to you at a certain time to-morrow night."

"If that's the fact," said the Soli-

taire, "I'll pay for the news, but I won't pay in advance."

"In fact," said Daniel Finlay, thinking of fifty-eight thousand dollars, "you won't pay a penny on any account. I'll donate the news to you."

"Why?" asked the Solitaire. "I've never given a damn for you, nor you for me, the little we know of each other."

"We may come to know each other better," declared Finlay. "And I'm wise enough to know that every man needs a friend in any sort of a pinch. My pinch may come later, and then I'll send you word."

"Very well," said the Solitaire. "You warned me once before about Saxon, and your warning panned out the first time. Tell me why you hate Saxon, will you?"

The voice of Molly suddenly spoke behind them, saying: "Why does the devil hate everything that's outside of hell?"

"That's an answer," declared the Solitaire. "But get back inside that house and out of hearing, Molly. You know I won't have eavesdroppers."

"Why not?" asked Molly. "All I'm likely to get out of you for a long time is information!"

Finlay expected an explosion of wrath from the outlaw. Instead, the Solitaire merely laughed.

"There's no one like her," he said. "She's tough enough to break the teeth of a saw."

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN THE DARK.

WHITE WATER slept, and the night was clear and still when big John Saxon stepped down the street toward the house of Daniel Finlay. He was angry because he felt it better to ar-

rive in the town at this hour of the night. No matter what rumors might be going the rounds about him, did it not remain clear that he had not offended the law—as yet? He expected from Finlay, this night, the answer which would make him free of conscience altogether. And yet he regretted, in a way, having left his money in the hands of Finlay. He regretted it, but his respect for the lawyer was greater than any desire on his part to have it back in his pocket.

He was troubled now because he had told the Wilsons that he intended to come to see them this day—and up to this hour they might still be waiting.

This made him lengthen his stride a good bit, and, coming toward the house of Finlay, he saw that nothing lived or moved except one spark as of a lighted cigarette which faintly glowed on the veranda of the next house. That would be old "Sandy" Paston, sitting out for his midnight smoke; the old boy was always a bad sleeper, and all his day's work in the blacksmith shop could not close his eyes readily at night.

He was rather sorry that even Sandy Paston should be around, but after all, he would be able to get into the house of Finlay without much trouble, and unrecognized.

This was his thought as he turned quickly through the gate and up the steps to the shallow veranda of Finlay's house. But as his hand reached out to knock, he saw the cigarette smoker on the adjoining veranda step off it, and then, deliberately, over the low picket fence that divided the two houses. He looked bigger, in the dimness of the starlight, than the outline of the blacksmith should have loomed.

Then that voice spoke which, for

these days, had never been entirely out of the ears of Saxon. It had rung like a death knell in his memory, and now it rose like a ghost from the ground and spoke to him again.

"All right, Saxon," it said. "Step down here and we'll finish things off."

It was a nightmare fear that rushed over Saxon. He wanted to flee, but something told him it would be like a clumsy mountain grouse trying to escape in the open air from the pounce of a swift hawk. There was only one way for him, and that was forward. A strange yell rang in his ears. It was his own shout, unrecognizable, as he flung himself past the lighted square of the front window of Daniel Finlay and, reaching the edge of the veranda, hurled himself in a mighty leap straight at his enemy.

He saw the gleam of the gun in the hand of the Solitaire. His own Colt was out more slowly. A bullet slashed the air beside his face. His own gun exploded—jammed—and as he leaped, he hurled it before him at that lofty target.

The Solitaire lightly dodged the flying weight, but he could not quite dodge the bulk of Saxon as he leaped after his gun. A second explosion of the Solitaire's Colt seemed to flare in the very face of Saxon as his shoulder struck the chest of the outlaw, and they both crashed to the ground.

Saxon had only one thought in his desperation.

Strange to say, it was not that he had escaped from two bullets which had been fired at him, and not that he had reduced the battle to handwork, but that in this dim light he would not see the bright, hypnotic eyes of the Solitaire.

THE hands of the outlaw were, in fact, empty. In the fall, he had lost his Colt. He had other guns about him, no doubt, but that did not matter; there would be no time to draw them, for the hands of Saxon were at work.

He tried for a full nelson, got it, and found the strangle hold suddenly slipped. He grappled with the body of Witherell. It was like grappling with a great cat made slippery with waves of contracting muscles. The form of the Solitaire escaped him, and he leaped to his feet barely in time to see his enemy erect before him, and the wink of steel coming into his hand.

Saxon hit for the head with all his might. Perhaps that penetrating light that springs from despair itself guided the blow home. He felt it strike heavily against the jaw of the Solitaire, and saw the man go down. The gun exploded as it struck the ground. Saxon kicked at it and knocked it away, then he dived at the prostrate form.

Lights were streaking the night. Shouts and exclamations rattled through the air. People were trampling out over their porches, drawn by the sound of guns. And he, John Saxon, was striving there with the great Solitaire on even terms!

He tried, as he dropped, to drive his elbow into the face of the outlaw. But the target slipped away from him, and he failed. He tried again, grappling the other with his left arm, to draw them so close together that Witherell would not have a chance to free a hand.

In spite of his effort, Witherell managed to jam up a fist under Saxon's chin, and the blow knocked sparks through his brain. Again and again that shortened trip hammer shocked against his consciousness.

He had to get away from it. He

threw back his head, and instantly an arm crooked around his neck in a strangle hold.

Despair again helped him. He rose to his feet, with the twisting, straining weight of the murderer clinging to him. And the strong flare of a lantern's light fell upon them both.

"The Solitaire!" shouted the voice of the blacksmith, only yards away. "The Solitaire! Get him, boys!"

A faint, snarling cry came from the lips of the Solitaire as he heard that voice. One wrench and he was gone out of the numbed grasp of John Saxon.

Saxon lurched after him. He had the nightmare feeling that if he could lay hands on the elusive ghost, it would be better to die outright now than to have to dream of another encounter with this monster.

So, rushing after him, he got his hand on the coat of the Solitaire as the latter reached the front fence. The coat came away in his hand like a skin easily shed, and the Solitaire sprinted straight around the corner of the building.

Three men who were running across the street fired at him as he fled. He dodged like a snipe. Perhaps one of the bullets had hurt him. Then he was out of sight.

Saxon, running in pursuit, from the rear of the house had a fleeting glimpse of a shadowy man leaping on a shadowy horse, and both images instantly disappeared among the shrubbery of the black lot. The drumming of the hoofbeats swung rapidly away.

He was gone.

"Get that man!" the voice of the sheriff was crying. "Get the other one! The Solitaire's gone, and you might as well follow a fish in the river as try to catch him in the dark. But get the other one!"

MANY hands fell upon John Saxon. He stood stupidly, breathing hard. The dazed mist was leaving his mind. He could feel across his chin the battering received from the fists of the outlaw. And the coat of the Solitaire was still in his hand!

A lantern's light flashed in his face.

"John Saxon!" called some one. "Hey, it's John Saxon!"

Then another was shouting: "It's Saxon! He's killed one Witherell, and now he's gunning for another in the dark. What a man!"

They brought John Saxon up past the side of the house. The sheriff got to him.

"Saxon!" said the sheriff. "I never thought—this is damned strange—"

A calm voice was saying somewhere in the background: "This is what, my friends? Midnight murder again, in our town?"

That was Daniel Finlay, and at the sound of his words, Saxon was relieved and comforted. There was at least one honest man in the world, and that man, in a sense, was on his side, he felt. It gave him an odd feeling of security, even against such an enemy as the Solitaire.

More lanterns were gathered about him. He saw astonished and half-frightened faces as he pushed forward into the yard of the lawyer's house. And there, searching the ground, he quickly found and picked up three guns. One was his own trusted Colt, and the other two were similar weapons, but with the triggers and the sights filed away—the real hair triggers with which the Solitaire had fanned his way to a murderous fame.

So he stood there with the captured coat hanging over his arm and his hands filled with the weapons.

The sheriff, gruff and brutal as he could be on occasion, was slapping him on the shoulder.

"Saxon," he said, "I know you have some hard feelings about me, but I take off my hat to any hombre that'll go mousing at night when the mouse is the Solitaire! Where are the nerves in you, man? Haven't you any fear of the devil and the dark?"

And all of them, in fact, were staring amazed at John Saxon as they stood around.

"He's given the Solitaire the run," said a voice in the background. Was not that the voice of Daniel Finlay? "He's killed one of the murdering Witherells, and he's made the other scamper like a whipped dog! Gentlemen, I propose a cheer for a hero and a fellow townsman—John Saxon!"

Why, they split the sky with that cheer. And here was Lefty Malone, grabbing Saxon by the arm and shaking him and calling:

"Come over to the old Rollin' Bones, son. I'm goin' to open it up, and the drinks are on the house as long as you're inside it. Come on, everybody, and we'll drink the sun up!"

Only a part of the mind of John Saxon comprehended what he heard. The rest of his wits were back there in the immediate past, struggling with the destroying hands of the Solitaire. The outlaw had beaten him with guns and beaten him again hand to hand. In every possible respect, he was superior to John Saxon.

What, therefore, would the future be like?

There would have to be another encounter, and then the luck which had saved Saxon twice would surely run out, and nature and the better man would take their course.

Finlay was beside him, saying:

"Come in with me, my son. Or do you want to fill your brain with whisky fumes—to forget something that has passed?"

"I'll come with you," said Saxon. "You're the one that I want to see."

So he turned his back on the crowd and walked into the house, with Lefty Malone shouting in the street:

"Boys, I'm openin' up for you all, anyway. We got the best man on the range in this town, and we're goin' to drink to him to-night!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

A JOURNEY PLANNED.

INSIDE the house, Daniel Finlay looked over his guest for a moment with a sense of horror and of hatred combined. He had laid the trap, and he had brought the quarry to it. He had provided on the spot the terrible destroyer, the great Solitaire, and yet this big young man had managed to escape destruction again!

There was the grim possibility, it seemed, that Saxon was actually the better man of the two, and on the other hand, a thing that carried the bitterness of death to Daniel Finlay, nearly sixty thousand dollars that might become his own would now have to be shifted back into the possession of this fellow.

There might be some shifts and dodges, however, by which he could avoid that issue. If there were luck in the air, he might manage to turn John Saxon into a different train of thought. Because one thing was certain—that the gull still suspected nothing, and looked upon Finlay as his friend.

Finlay said: "This is a frightful thing to me, John. This is a thing that strikes me to the heart."

He stood in the middle of the floor and considered the bandaged head of Saxon. The struggle had opened the wound somewhat, and the red of blood was staining the bandage. Finlay made one of those handless gestures of his which always served to open the hearts of his fellow men.

He went on: "I ask you to come to my house, John, and in my very yard——"

Here he paused, seemingly overcome.

"Why, you couldn't help that, Mr. Finlay," said Saxon. "The Solitaire is a devil who knows how to read the minds of men, I suppose. But how he could have known that I was to come here, I don't know. I'd swear that nobody in the world knew that except you and me."

Saxon began to shake his head, and the heart of the lawyer quaked. Saxon, in fact, had reduced the thing to an absurdity. There was no doubt that he had only to go one step forward to perceive that only from the lawyer himself could the Solitaire have learned of the meeting place and the hour for it.

Finlay said, a little hastily: "A fellow like the Solitaire has all the patience of a sailing buzzard or of a hunting cat. For the sake of his fill of blood, he would be willing to wait for a long time, of course, and I suppose he knew—or perhaps he might have guessed—that he would find you coming, sooner or later, either to the house of Wilson, or to my house, John. Because, as a matter of fact, I've talked a little bit too much about you. I can see that now. I should not have mentioned you. But I've been unable to keep silence. For the truth is, John, that I've admired your courage, and your ability to pick yourself up from the

bottom of despair and show yourself the hero—I've admired that so much that I've had to talk a little about you. Enough, perhaps, so that people might suspect that we are friends, and therefore the Solitaire posted himself beside my house in the hope of seeing you enter it.

"Aye, that's it," said John Saxon. "It's a good thing to me," he added simply, "that I have a friend like you, Mr. Finlay. I don't know, but sometimes I feel as though I'd be going straight to the devil if it weren't that I have you to lean on and give me advice."

"Do you?" said Finlay, looking down and drawing a stealthy, but a very deep, breath. "Is that what you feel?"

And in his heart he said: "I'm winning again—and I'll make a worse fool of him than ever. I've got him in my hands, and I'll squeeze the blood and the dollars out of him! I can be sure of that!"

"I feel it," Saxon was saying. "The fact is, Mr. Finlay, that there's something to be said for a free life, of the kind that I've been having for a few days. When I started for your place to-night, I was sorry that I'd turned over that money to you. Mind you, I don't mean that I'm really sorry—not now—but for a while, I wanted it for myself. It seemed almost as though I'd earned it with blood and the chance I took. But now that I'm with you, I can open my eyes and see things more clearly. You know how it is? A good friend helps a fellow to come out of the dark and see things right."

"I hope so. With all my heart I hope so," said the hypocrite. "And when I think that a crippled old man, withdrawn from the world, can have influence over a man of

courage and force and youth like yours, John, I'm amazed and bewildered a little, and very grateful!"

He was hunting about in his mind for the next step that he would take to assure for himself the possession of the money that had been intrusted to him by Saxon.

Saxon was saying: "There's still the Solitaire. He's still ahead of me, and he's a big hurdle, Mr. Finlay. Except for him, I feel right now that I'd go to work punching cows by the month for regular pay. It was a sort of a shock to have that devil rise out of the dark to-night and speak to me!"

He shook his head.

"You've faced him and you've beaten him twice," said the lawyer, "and, of course, you have no fear of him now!"

"I've faced him two times, and two times I've had luck," said Saxon. "You know what happened the first time. And to-night, I simply happened to surprise him by what I did. My gun jammed, and I had to throw myself at him, and he didn't expect that, you see. But when we were wrestling around, he was a better man than I am, Mr. Finlay. I hate to admit it. I thought, a little time ago, that I could stand up to any man in the world with bare hands. I've had a life of work behind me, hard work to build up the muscles. I've trained myself like a regular ring fighter. But in spite of all that, the Solitaire is a stronger and a faster man than I am. He would have killed me—he was strangling me at the very moment that somebody recognized his face and shouted—and then he ran. I had such good luck that I even managed to get away from him the two guns that he was wearing. But it was all luck,

luck, luck—and the next time that I run into him my luck will run out!”

FINLAY, as he listened to this speech, felt in his heart a vast delight. The honesty and the humility of Saxon meant nothing to him. He had not the slightest feeling for anything connected with this trusting fellow, except the fifty-eight thousand dollars that had come from him. He had begun to despair of finding an agent that could make the money safe to his own hands. If the Solitaire failed, it surely seemed that all other men must fail, also. But now he heard the Solitaire vindicated, and from the lips of the apparent conqueror himself!

A new device was instantly born into that fertile brain of his.

“There will be no next time, my friend,” said the lawyer. “If you are wise, there will be no next time. You’ll leave the country and avoid the danger.”

“Leave the country?” said John Saxon in sudden pain. “But how can I do that? It’s home to me. It’s more to me—the face of the mountains, even—than the faces of friends or family, or anything like that. I love it, Mr. Finlay, and I can’t leave it.”

“Not forever,” replied the lawyer. “Of course, I don’t mean that. But the fact is that a trip away would do you good, and also probably save your neck. The Solitaire won’t follow you far. And after a short time you can return, because you know that a man like the Solitaire can’t last long. He’s reached nearly the end of his rope, and before long he’ll receive his dose of lead.”

“I’ve got no means to leave,” argued Saxon. He thought of Mary Wilson and added desperately: “I can’t leave. Everything that means

anything to me is right around this place!”

“Your girl?” said the lawyer with a smile. “Ah, she’ll wait for you—perhaps. And as for money to travel with and live on—honest money—I want to ask you what reward you think that the Lumber & Mining Bank in Stillman will offer you when you bring back to them a part of the money that was stolen out of their vault?”

“The Lumber & Mining Bank?” exclaimed Saxon. “But they’re a lot of skinflints and bloodsuckers. I’d rather give back the stuff to any one except to them!”

“The law,” said Daniel Finlay rather sternly, “is no selector of persons, and you will find in this life, John, that it is not what you want to do, but what you ought to do, that gives to your life its honest savor that will enable you, in the end, to go down to the grave with a full and an unshaken heart!”

He was rather proud of this impromptu speech, in spite of a certain amount of confusion in it.

Saxon said: “I’m shaken up, Mr. Finlay. I’ll do what you say.”

“Very well,” said Finlay. “Let it be to-morrow. Let it be to-morrow that you start down for the town of Stillman to make that honorable restitution. And that act, my lad, will establish you as an honorable man, a man above suspicion, all the days of your life. Such a reputation is a great deal better than a crown of gold and diamonds.”

He added, inspired: “I’ll go with you, John. I’ll ride all the way with you!”

“Will you?” said Saxon. “Well—not to-morrow. The next day, Mr. Finlay, if you don’t mind. I have something to do. I have to see Mary Wilson—and there are other things to do—then—then I’ll go

along with you. But I wish the money honestly belonged to any other bank than the Lumber & Mining at Stillman! They're famous for sucking the blood out of people! However, it's the way you say. I'm tired of trying to think things out for myself. You can take charge of everything, if you don't mind!"

"With the greatest pleasure in the world!" said Finlay.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE BARGAIN.

IT was not an hour later, on this night, that Finlay dismounted from his horse before the house of Molly, on the edge of the town. And this time he found a light in the front window facing toward the mountain.

When he rapped on the door, he clearly heard the voice of the Solitaire, bell-like, ominous, and he was amazed.

"Go see who that is!" commanded the Solitaire.

"Edward, don't be a fool!" gasped the girl. "You'll be heard."

"Let me be heard and be damned! I'm damned already with bad luck, and I don't care what happens," said the Solitaire.

The door was pulled open a crack by Molly.

"Hello, here's Daniel the Devil!" said Molly. And over her shoulder she asked: "How about it?"

"Bring him in—bring anybody in," said the Solitaire.

Daniel Finlay stepped into the shack and saw the front room furnished in a pleasant Mexican style, with sheepskins on the floor, and a couch that was an Indian willow bed, piled with Indian blankets.

At the central round table sat the Solitaire himself with dust still on his clothes, and a streak of blood

drying on one side of his face. He looked at the lawyer with a sullen and challenging sneer.

"I couldn't bring it off, eh?" he said. "And you're here to ask me why? Well, I'll tell you one thing: I'm just about as glad that I failed, because why should I play my hand into your schemes? Will you tell me why I should?"

He pushed back his chair a little and stared angrily at Finlay, who merely responded:

"That's forgotten. That's in the past. I've a new idea for you, Solitaire!"

He waved toward the girl.

"Send her out and I'll tell you what," said Finlay.

She had on a dressing gown of tan wool with a bright Indian design worked over it in red and blue. Her hair was tousled. Her face sadly lacked the paint she usually wore, but her big eyes were as bright and as bold as ever.

"I'll stay here, thanks," said Molly. "Even the Solitaire isn't quite bright enough to read your mind, Daniel. But I'm the little girl for that."

Finlay stared at her with both hate and admiration in his eyes.

"I don't know that I want to talk to you anyway, Finlay," said the outlaw. "Molly, give me another drink."

She poured whisky into his glass and offered another to the lawyer. He drank it off, with a single gesture of greeting to her and to the Solitaire.

"I'm here to stay, Daniel," she said, resting her arms on the back of a chair. "So blaze away if you have anything to say."

"I've offered you Saxon once," said the lawyer. "I'm going to offer him to you again."

"In your front yard, eh, with

plenty of neighbors ready to jump down my back, like a lot of hell-cats? Thanks, I don't want any more of your schemes!"

Finlay nodded, his eye cold and bright.

"You've had enough, have you?" he demanded. "I'm not surprised. He's made you run twice, and I suppose that's enough to shake any man's nerve."

The Solitaire leaped to his feet with an oath.

"What do you mean by that?" he snarled. "I was choking the life out of him when the other fools broke in on us!"

"Go back and say that in White Water," said Finlay calmly. "They're spending the night cheering John Saxon and drinking to him in the Rolling Bones. Go back and tell the boys there what you were doing to Saxon, and they'll laugh in your face."

THE Solitaire made a long, cat-like stride forward, with a gesture as though he would drive his fist into the lawyer's face. But he checked himself, confronted by the sneering smile of Finlay.

The latter went on: "You're half mad with disgust, and no wonder, because you've been beaten twice by luck, and no matter what the other people in White Water think, John Saxon was honest enough to tell me that you're a better man than he is."

"Did he say that?" exclaimed the Solitaire, suddenly shining again.

And the girl, with a frown, muttered: "Did he say that? Then he's a pretty good hombre! It takes a real man to refuse to be a hero when the boys are giving him a cheer."

She turned to the Solitaire.

"Edward," she said, "mind what I tell you. This fellow Saxon has something to him, if he can talk like

that. I know what I'm saying. A man without brag is always mighty dangerous when it comes to a fight!"

"Keep your mouth shut till I ask you to open it," replied the Solitaire.

"Bah!" The girl sneered. "You've had another licking, and now you take it out on me. But you're going to find out that I'm not a rag to wipe your boots on. You'll treat me right, or you'll wish you had!"

Said the Solitaire softly: "I'm going to have the choking of you one of these days!"

"You lie!" she answered. "You'll be dead of the poison I give you first!"

"Molly, be still. You'd best," cautioned Finlay, regarding the white, rigid face of the Solitaire. For there was dark murder in his eyes.

"He's pretty, ain't he?" demanded Molly of Finlay. "Take a look at that hombre and tell me if he's pretty or not, will you? With the blood on his face and the dirt on his mouth and the whisky in his heart! Oh, he's a pretty boy, all right!"

The hands of the Solitaire worked, but there was a fearless devil in the girl.

"Go back to your little sneak of a Boots," said the Solitaire. "He'll still fall for you, I suppose!"

"Laugh at him, like a fool," said Molly, "but he'll have the killing of you one of these days, I'm thinking."

"All right," said the Solitaire, pouring out more whisky and downing it. "I *am* a fool to try to talk you down. Finlay, this is no night to talk to me. I can't talk. I'm half crazy. They say that he gave me the run, do they?"

"He's got your guns. He's even got your coat," said the lawyer calmly.

The Solitaire beat his fists against his own face. He groaned deeply.

"Look at the poor sucker," said Molly, with a still and judicial eye. "He takes it pretty hard, doesn't he? But maybe he'll think that this was easy—when Saxon gets through with him the second time."

THE Solitaire, absolutely maddened, leaped at her and gripped her by the hair. She stood as still as a stone, without changing face, without one shadow of fear in her eyes. And the grasp of the Solitaire turned into a caressing stroke.

"I'm afraid of *you*, Molly, and that's the truth," said he.

"Keep it like that and we'll get on," said the girl calmly. "Now you go ahead and speak your piece, Finlay; I'll see that the big boy listens to it right through."

Daniel Finlay said at last: "Two days from now I'm riding to Stillman with John Saxon. I'm starting from town just after sunup. We're riding the old Stillman Pass because it's a shorter cut than the other. You understand? Also, it goes through wilder country."

"You cold-hearted devil!" said the girl to Finlay. "I know that pass myself. The best place for a murder that I ever heard of! Even Indians couldn't think up a road with more murder corners on it. You see his idea, Solitaire?"

The Solitaire, rather subdued after his last clash with Molly, sat down in a chair and rested his big, handsome chin on his fist.

"Finlay, what do you get out of this?"

"Hard cash," answered Finlay instantly.

It was difficult for him to confess this, but he had made up his mind on the way to the shack that he had

better be as frank as possible with the great outlaw.

"How much hard cash?" asked the outlaw.

"Fifty-eight thousand dollars. That's Saxon's share of the money that he took away from you."

The way this was phrased made the lips of the Solitaire twitch and curl. Then he said: "He's a fool if he didn't take a bigger split than that."

"He doesn't care about the money. The power is all that he wants," said Finlay.

"Is it?" asked Molly. "Then he sounds better and better to me. He sounds like a real man, Daniel. Is he?"

"He's a thick-wit," said the lawyer. "And the poor fool is tempted to live outside the law just now. He could make a fortune out of it, of course. But he won't do that. No, he won't do that at all. Because Daniel Finlay is persuading him that it's better, for the time being, to be an honest man."

"You're persuading him to be a dead man!" snapped the girl.

"Listen!" said the Solitaire. "Listen to her, will you? She likes this fellow Saxon pretty well, doesn't she?"

"And why shouldn't she?" asked Molly. "He sounds like a right man to me. Maybe he *is* a right man. I've never met one, and I'd like to see his mug. What does he look like, Daniel?"

"Big. Big and blond and handsome," said the lawyer. "Yes, you'd like him, Molly, but you haven't a chance there. He's picked out his girl."

"He's got her, has he?" Molly sneered. "He's one of the one-woman-in-the-world-till-death-does-him-part kind, eh?"

"He's exactly that," agreed the lawyer.

"Well," said Molly, "a whole flock of those hombres have been parted from their women, at that. Who is she?"

"Be quiet," interrupted the Solitaire. "Now you talk up, Finlay. You want nearly sixty thousand iron men out of this, and that's a lot of the stuff to pay over for the hide of one thickhead like this fellow Saxon."

"He may be a thickhead," said the lawyer, "but what a lot he means to you, that golden-headed little boy!"

The Solitaire appreciated this enough to laugh.

"I don't know. You may be double-crossing me, Finlay."

"Ask Molly," said Finlay. "She knows me, I dare say, a little bit better than you do."

Molly walked up to Finlay and looked straight into his eyes. Then she nodded.

"He means it," she said. "When I give him the acid test, like this, I can always tell when he's on the level and he means it. Besides, it's the sort of thing that he'd like, anyway. Murder, and another fellow to do the dirty work, while he enjoys the sight of the blood—and collects the hard cash afterward!"

"You like him a lot, don't you?" asked the Solitaire.

"Sure, I like him," said Molly. "Because he's all together in one piece. That's why I like him. There ain't a bone in his body except meanness, and there ain't a thought in his head except poison. I like to see 'em that way. That's one reason that I like you, Solitaire. I like my men all good or all bad. And you're a real sort of a murdering devil, Solitaire."

This speech slid off the shoulders

of both men, perhaps because they were both attacked with an equal violence and were able to look at one another and smile.

"Let that all go," said Finlay. "Are you satisfied?"

"We'll split that cash two ways," said the Solitaire.

"We'll split it only one way, and that way is all mine. You get the fun," said Finlay.

"Well," said the Solitaire, "I'm pretty busted just now, but I sort of think this job is worth a big commission. Do we shake on it?"

"Yes," said the lawyer, holding out his left hand.

"No, thanks," said the Solitaire. "I'll take the right one, even if it's only a stump!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE CROWD.

SAXON, from the edge of the woods, looked down on White Water. It was not a big town, but it was his central world, and now he was as important to the townsmen as they were to him. He had to look back a vast distance to the time when he had been simply a small rancher on the verge of the place, coming in now and again to buy a few things at the store, and twice a year driving in a small batch of cattle. He had been busy then turning beef into cash and cash back into beef again, making small cows into big ones, as it were, by that margin of labor and care which he personally supplied. His steps up and forward had been so small, so short, that the progress was like that of a snail. No wonder that his years of effort had been wiped out at a stroke! But now he was wanted down there in the town; people were ready to open their hands and their hearts for him.

Of course, it would be dangerous to enter the place. Every time he showed himself in White Water, he would be showing himself, in a sense, to the eyes of the Solitaire. However, he felt the temptation growing up in him irresistibly.

"I'm riding down," he said.

Arthur William Creston, standing just a trifle behind his chief, said gloomily: "Yeah, and a lot of fish like to come up into the sun, but that's when the kingfisher gets 'em."

He pointed down at the town and added: "No matter if you don't see him, the Solitaire is seein' you!"

"Some people," murmured Saxon, "say that he spends most of his time near White Water. That doesn't seem possible."

"Boss," answered Creston, "that hombre just begins where we leave off understanding. But don't you go down into that town in the daylight. Ain't you met up with trouble enough there by night?"

"I have to see some one," said Saxon. He thought of Mary Wilson, and his heart poured out to her. "I'm going down now."

He mounted and rode down the slope with the sun flashing on the proud neck and shoulders of his horse.

When he got near the town, instead of taking the shortest cut behind the houses and so coming right up to the Wilson place, he entered at the foot of the long, winding main street. And he did not canter his horse. He let it dogtrot comfortably, and though the eyes of Saxon were fixed straight before him, you may be sure that he was well aware of everything that happened to right and left of him. For one thing, a rifle might peer at him at any moment. But what he hoped for was the thing that happened.

There was a ripple of noise, a bab-

bling of excitement, then a dozen youngsters spilled straight at him out of houses, out of vacant lots. Windows went up with a slam, screen doors flew wide with a bang. Women stood in doorways, calling out and waving, or they leaned into the sun and laughed and shouted. Men came out, more than a step or two. They waved their hats at John Saxon. They kept laughing, and he knew the reason for their happiness. If one honest man could beat a rogue like the Solitaire, then it made all other honest men seem stronger, more competent, able to meet all others on any plane whatever. It removed from vice and crime its dangerous premium; it made the bee as formidable as the wasp.

He could understand what was in their minds, but he could not help wondering if it were true that he was still honest! Could the leader of Boots and Cullen and the rest really be considered an honest man? He banished that doubt as quickly as he could, and fell to waving cheerfully to faces that he recognized. He spotted a good many men who had laughed at him when Bob Withere'll had made him dance and run on this same main street. But he could forgive them. Had they perhaps laughed and mocked an honest man, and were they now applauding a rogue? When a man abandons all else in order to make of himself a cutting edge—what is his metal good for, then, except to make trouble for others?

The tumult grew every moment. They kept on singing out his name, high and low, men and women and children saying, "Saxon, Saxon, Saxon!" over and over. One would have thought that they loved him; instead, they were glorying in the thing they thought he had done.

"If I were honest," he told himself, "I'd explain the whole truth to them. Am I honest?"

Something closed up his throat and stopped thought, speech.

FROM the window of the Wilson house, Mrs. Wilson leaned to find out the cause of the uproar. Her daughter stood behind her at the same window, girt with a white apron, a dish towel in her hand. Then, around the farthest corner, they saw Saxon coming. His fine horse shone in the morning sun. Just then he took off his hat and waved to a friend, turning in the saddle, and the fresh white bandage around his head gleamed, in the eyes of Mary Wilson, far brighter than a crown of silver or of gold. There was a dragging troop of children about him. Some of them clung to his stirrups; others thronged in front of his horse, which constantly seemed about to strike them down; and they kept turning up their faces and shouting for their hero, and laughing, and dancing, and calling out pleasant things to John Saxon.

"Look at him!" said Mary Wilson. "Oh, mother, look at him!"

Mrs. Wilson looked at her daughter, instead. She was a tall woman with a face which had once been small and pretty, but which was now largely obscured by a pair of spectacles. She retained a habit of squinting through her glasses, and in this way went through life sticking out her chin. When she lost her looks, she promptly discovered a good many other reasons for putting a value on herself. Like her body, her mind was hard and angular.

She said now: "John Saxon is coming to see you, Mary."

"Do you think he is?" asked Mary, brightening all at once.

The mother's heart ached with a sudden joy and a sudden pity.

"What else would he be parading up the main street of the town for?" asked Mrs. Wilson. "Of course, he's coming to see you, and sounding horns all the way!"

"Oh, how can you say that?" asked the girl. "There's nothing of the show-off about John. Dear old John, he's the most modest man in the world."

"He never had anything to show off before except his good looks," said the mother. "But now he'll let them make a noise over him! He couldn't come up the lane and through the back yard. No, he couldn't do that. If he did, who would see him? I tell you what, Mary, a little bit of success gives a man a taste for noise. In six months, John Saxon may be running for a political job! He's been changed!"

"He'll never change!" cried Mary. "He's good, and honest, and simple, and kind, and you know it!"

"He's good, and honest, and simple, and kind, is he?" said Mrs. Wilson. "Well, he'll be good, and honest, and dead, unless he gets out of this part of the country before long! The Solitaire will have him murdered. You can bet your bottom dollar on that."

The girl took hold of her mother's arm and looked up at her silently.

"Don't be a great, staring baby," said Mrs. Wilson, trying to frown, and succeeding pretty well. "If you think that he's so honest and simple, you ask him, and you'll find out that there are a lot of things that he likes better than he likes you just now!"

"Do you think so?" asked the girl sadly.

"Don't wilt and sag like a wet rag," commanded the mother.

"Stand up and use your gumption. A man that handles soot soon has black hands. And John Saxon has been handling soot. Birds of a feather——"

"He's risked his life twice to get the best of a thief!" cried the girl.

Mrs. Wilson smiled bitterly, as though from a secret knowledge which life had distilled for her, and for her alone.

"There's no proof of the pudding like the eating of it," she declared. "You think that John would do anything in the world for you, I suppose?"

"I think he would," said the girl gravely.

"Then you just tell him that you're dying of fear. You just tell him that you want him to leave White Water and get out of this country, and never come back until the Solitaire is gone—or until he's made a place so that you can come to him."

"Oh, he'd do it in a moment," said the daughter.

"Aye, and would he, though?" challenged Mrs. Wilson. "You try him, and then you'll know!"

"I shall! I shall!" said Mary Wilson. There was a good deal of her mother in her. She had some of those same flashes of grim and sudden insight into the wrongness of men and events.

AND that was why, when the babel reached the house, and then footfalls sounded on the steps, and then a hand knocked at the door—that was why she opened the way for John Saxon with only half of her usual radiance of smiling.

As he closed the door, he was leaning to kiss her, but she stood back a little.

She said: "John, my heart was in my throat as I watched you up the

street. I kept waiting to hear a gunshot. John, I was sick with fear! And I know what you must do. You've got to leave White Water. You've got to go far away, where you'll be safe from the Solitaire and his murderers! Tell me that you'll go!"

His face clouded at once. She said to herself, turning cold with pride and shame and anger, remembering the words of her mother, that it was true that he cared for many other things more than he cared for her.

"I'd like to get out of it, but I can't," said John Saxon.

"Why can't you?" asked the girl.

"I just can't. You know how it is. I can't run away."

"For your own sake—and for my sake—and for our two lives!" cried Mary. "Is it because you think the crowd will say you're afraid of the Solitaire? Do you care one whit what they say, compared with how I love you and need you, John?"

"That isn't just the way to put it," considered Saxon, rather bewildered.

"It's the *only* way to put it!" exclaimed Mary Wilson. "John, John, John, it's the only way! Don't tell me that you care more about the yelling of a mob than you care about me!"

"Wait!" breathed Saxon. "You're not putting it the right way. I've got a job that I have to finish. I have to do my work——"

"Oh, yes, do your honest work! Go to your work, John," pleaded the girl—and yet there was as much command as entreaty in her voice. "Do your rightful work, and let me come to help the moment we can get married. But give up this wild, horrible life. Why should you be the sheriff? Go away from White Water! Please go, John. I'm begging

you. I'll go on my knees to beg you!"

He restrained her. She would actually have dropped to her knees. And yet all was not humility and love in her. She had a lot of that stiff-necked American pride working in her blood, and the warning of her mother rang a bell, whose strokes were all against her brain.

"You see," said Saxon, "it's this way. I'm as afraid of the Solitaire as anybody needs to be. But just the same, I can't very well run away. You know, people expect me to do something. They don't expect me to run away."

"People? People? People?" she cried. "Are you telling me about *people*? But, John, I'm telling you about ourselves—our own lives. Are you going to throw them away, and all our chances of happiness, just because you like to be followed down a street by a crowd?"

The injustice of this stung him, but the justice of it stung him far more. The only way he could defend himself was by losing his temper, therefore. And he was all the more outraged because he had expected from Mary the sweetest part of his welcome.

"You've no right to say that!" he told her. "Mary, you're talking sort of queer this morning. I'm going away and let you cool off a bit."

"Go on, then!" said the girl bitterly. "I expected it, too! Go on out into the street and let them shout and yell for you some more. You'd rather have that! You'd a lot rather have that than my love!"

"That's not——" began John Saxon. Then he shouted suddenly: "Mary, what's the matter with you? What are you trying to do? Drive me crazy, or something?"

"I'm asking you to act like an honest, sensible man, and you say

I'm trying to drive you crazy!" wailed Mary Wilson.

"I only——"

"It's true! You *have* changed!" she insisted. "You're not the same man you used to be!"

"Who says I've changed?" demanded Saxon.

"Everybody says so!"

"Who is everybody?" he raged.

"Everybody says that you don't care for anything now except guns and gun fighting!"

"If I could get 'everybody' by the throat——"

"That's just it!" said the girl woe-fully. "The John Saxon I knew never would have thought of taking *any one* by the throat!"

"I'm going to leave," panted Saxon. "I can't stand it. I'm going crazy."

He was out the front door, and it had thudded behind him before she could gather her wits. She ran after him then, but when her hand was on the knob of the door, her mother's dry voice sounded behind her.

"I told you what would happen!" said Mrs. Wilson. "Don't go bawling after him like a little fool! When a girl starts throwing herself at a man, it's a sign for the man to trample her underfoot. Well I know!"

Mary Wilson looked wildly around her, dropped into a chair, and began to weep.

CHAPTER XXVII.

HIS MEN.

ALL that big John Saxon knew was that he wanted to kill something. He did not know what. He hardly cared what, so long as it would fill his hands. He had a vague feeling that women needed a lot of killing. They were too small. They didn't fill the

hands. All they filled was the eye—and the ear! There was something unfair about women. They wouldn't talk man to man. They wouldn't see things. Mary Wilson herself—there was something too bright about her; she saw through too much; nobody had a right to say what she had said about him liking the cheering of the crowd, and besides, she would only talk on her own side of an argument.

But as Saxon rode out of the town and up the slope, like the flashes of sun on the grass, unforgotten moments gleamed on his mind, and the sweetness of the past was making his heart ache. He told himself that this was the end, that perhaps he would never see her again. And then self-pity stung his eyes with tears, and after that he jerked up his head, for he was remembering the bright happiness of other times in her face. The golden reality of all the other days outweighed, suddenly, this tarnished and leaden moment. "She's only a silly girl," he told himself. "But, by thunder, she needs a spanking!" And that made him almost laugh when he came into the woods and found Creston.

"I follered down a little ways," said Creston, "and I heard them screeching. Chief, they sure do think a lot of you!"

This wistfulness Saxon answered by slapping the wide, muscular shoulder of the Negro.

"You're going to get out of the dark one of these days," he said. "You wait and see, Arthur. I'm going to fix things for you so that you can go back to punching cows. Now we've got to go back to that shack and find Boots and the rest. Come on, and let's get there!"

They cut off into the trail, therefore, and it was not long before they were in hailing distance of the shack.

The thundering voice of Creston boomed before them, but it brought out only Tad Cullen and Boots from the little old cabin.

"Where's Pike, and where's Del Bryan?" asked Saxon quickly. "Off shooting somewhere?"

"No, more likely off being shot at," said Boots. "No, about this time they're getting ready to take the train, I guess."

"What train?" asked Saxon.

"The train from Stillman to the capital. They got a bigger and a better jail up there to fit Pike and Bryan into."

Saxon, dismounting, threw the reins and dropped his hands on his hips.

"What are you talking about?" he demanded.

"Aw, nothing much," said Boots. "Those dummies went down to Stillman to stage their party, and they began to spend money so fast that their hands got hot. They sure lighted up that little old town, and the first thing you know, a deputy sheriff got dog-gone curious. He got so curious that he pulled some friends together, and they grabbed old Pike and Del. And they found a stack of cash and a lot of sparklers. And the worst of it was that some of the money of the Stillman bank had been wrote down—the numbers, I mean. So it was easy to figger that Pike and Del belonged to the gang that had robbed the bank. So they slammed 'em into the lockup and took their stuff—and there you are! It was a good haul for the bank, and a good haul for that deputy sheriff. Willis is his name, and he's a hard man! I've seen him! He'll be sticking the pair of 'em on the train this afternoon, and he'll have 'em in the jail at the big town by the morning. That's all there is to the story, chief."

BIG John Saxon began to walk up and down, up and down, gloomily. He liked Pike and Del Bryan, as men, about as little as ever he had liked humans before, but they had upon him now a special claim. They were his men.

"So that's that," said Cullen. "There ain't no use cryin' about that milk. It's all spilt."

"We'll pick it up again," answered John Saxon. "We'll pick up that spilt milk, or else we'll be spilled ourselves."

Cullen whistled. "Hey!" he said. "Is that the way it goes, then? All right, boss. You name the drinks, and we'll swaller them, and help pay, too."

Boots merely said: "It ain't what a man wants to do; it's what he *can* do!"

"Wait a minute," broke in Cullen. "They made some trouble for you. Why do you care about 'em, Saxon?"

"They belong to us, and we belong to them," said the chief. "That's all there is to that. I've got to go and think it out."

He walked into the woods and sat on a stump that was cushioned by thick and spongy decay. He buried his face in his hands so that he would shut out from his sight the big brown trunks of the trees and the specklings of yellow sunlight that slid through to the brown pine needles that covered the ground. For he wanted to use the eye of the mind now.

With it he glanced back over the map of the country. He knew perfectly well all of the surroundings of Stillman. He knew how the railroad ran through the windings of the valleys toward the State capital. He could name the stations along the way. And the whole picture

brightened and broadened in every detail as he considered it.

He went back and called Boots into consultation.

"What'll they do with Pike and Del Bryon on the train?" he asked.

"Well, she's a big train," said Boots. "There'll be a Pullman aboard her. And in that Pullman there'll be a drawing-room. They'll have Pike handcuffed to one guard, and they'll have old Del handcuffed to another, and the deputy sheriff, he'll be along, likely, to look things over and ride herd in general. They might have more men along, too. Because they'll figger that Del and Pike belong to the gang of the Solitaire, and they'll be looking for trouble along the way. The Solitaire fights for his men when they're in trouble—the same as you do, chief."

He looked at Saxon with an odd blending of humor and of awe in his eye. Creston and Cullen, in the near distance, were also watching their chief attentively. Now and then Creston murmured something to his companion, and Cullen would nod agreement without ever shifting his gaze from the face of the leader.

A great sense of pride and of power swelled higher and higher in the breast of Saxon. He had beaten chance several times. He would now make chance serve him. And Pike and Del Bryan, venomous as they were, would have to be set free.

Gradually his plan grew in his mind, developed, came to a sunlight clearness.

Then he thought back to the words of Mary Wilson, and he could not help a sinking of his heart. For, after all, she had spoken a good deal of truth.

Perhaps, before long, he would be able to settle down, and then it might be much wiser to let her rule the roost. But in the meantime,

there were two tasks before him—the Solitaire, and the delivery of these two men. To save two thieves and to destroy another—no wonder Mary Wilson had spoken as she did!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ON THE FAIRMONT EXPRESS.

TOWNS in the West take on their names sometimes with the utmost seriousness, boosters and citizens debating long and loud before they select some sparkling title; but again, and this is the rule along the range, there is the most casual approach. A junk dealer at a crossroads is sufficient to christen the place "Ragtown," and a desert village where rain never fell may be grimly called "Crystal Springs." As for the town of Tunnel, it lay at the mouth of a great six-mile excavation a good distance south and west of Stillman, where the railroad curved away into intense darkness.

The eastbound express was overdue; therefore the Fairmont Express pulled onto the siding and waited impatiently.

It was twilight, thickened by heavy rain that obscured the windows of the cars with a thousand little intertwisting rivulets. The steam of the interior also condensed in a pale fog that helped to make the train murky for the passengers. And that whistling of the wind, that roaring of the rain, kept every soul inside the coaches. No one was getting off, and there were only two parties boarding the train.

These were two pairs of men, and it was apparent that they were tenderfeet on an outing with their guides. One was a huge, blond fellow with a curl in his hair, carrying a shotgun in its case, while his guide, a fellow with all the limps and twists

of one who has been pitched a hundred times from the backs of fighting mustangs, carried a pair of good jointed fishing rods. He was dressed like any cow-puncher off the range; his big companion wore rough tweeds that made his shoulders seem larger and heavier. This couple went down the length of the Pullman and got seats just in front of the slanting door of the drawing-room.

The second sportsman was as well bronzed as the big man, but he wore a blue serge suit that was absurdly out of place, considering the sporting trip which he was making. Well, he had been out in the woods long enough to grow thoroughly brown, and it was strange that he should not have learned better sense. However, he would undoubtedly change before he had been long off the train. With him he had a huge Negro who carried all the baggage—there was not much of it—and who came in last of the four.

The second sportsman was a slender, lithe man, with buck teeth that kept him smiling. He went into a compartment that had been reserved for "Mr. Cooper"; and his huge Negro servant entered behind him.

The eastbound had just gone thundering by; the Fairmont Express had barely begun to make groaning headway up the grade into the tunnel, when the bell of "Mr. Cooper's" compartment rang, and the colored porter, "Bunny" Tucker, came at once. He brought up his best smile as he entered the compartment, knowing very well that the first smile is what makes the lasting impression, and is remembered even unto the moment of the tip.

As he came in, he saw the gigantic Negro standing at respectful attention, as it were, and Bunny Tucker

stepped by him to inquire of the gentleman what was wanted.

"All right, Arthur!" said the man with the bucktoothed smile.

And Bunny Tucker was caught from behind by one shoulder and his throat.

"Mr. Cooper" pulled out a shining Colt. Bunny Tucker saw that the sights had been filed from that weapon, and the trigger was gone, also. Boots, alias "Mr. Cooper," handled it with the most graceful and casual ease, his thumb resting lightly on the hammer.

"Arthur, get out of that coat," he ordered.

THE gigantic Negro, with a grin, stepped back from the porter, who stood enchanted by the sight of the gun, and, throwing off his overcoat, appeared in an immaculate white coat as a Pullman porter. He leaned and rubbed his wide, black shoes to a polish.

"In that drawing-room next to us," said Boots, "there's how many gents?"

Bunny Tucker worked his mouth vainly. His throat was too dry, and no sound would issue from it.

"Look!" said Boots. He counted out a hundred dollars in tens. "You get this wad, and you keep your mouth shut. All you know is that you were grabbed and tied. We'll gag you, too; the sort of a gag you can spit out when you want to, but you're goin' to be mighty stupid if you get rid of that gag and start yellin' before we're out of this here train. Here." He put the money into Bunny's coat. "How many men are in that drawing-room?"

"Mr. Cooper," said Bunny, "I ain't takin' no bribe, but if I didn't tell you, you could open the door and look. You'd see two poor fellers that are goin' to prison, and two

deputies hitched to 'em; and then there's Deputy Sheriff Willis that made the capture, and he's in there with two guns all the time."

"Does he carry the keys for those handcuffs?" asked Boots.

"Yes, sir. He's got on a deerskin vest. He's all dressed up. And in the lower vest pocket on the right-hand side there's a big swelling, and that swelling is all keys, sir."

"That's enough," said Boots. "What's your name?"

"Bunny, sir. Bunny Tucker."

"Tie him, Arthur," said Boots, and then helped to do the job. True to his word, he tied Bunny Tucker firmly, but the gag was a mere inconvenience in the mouth, not a jaw-stretching impediment that threatened strangulation. And Bunny Tucker lay still, counting up to a hundred over and over again.

If people searched him and found that hundred dollars in his pocket, he would say that he had been shooting craps just before he got on board for this trip! In the meantime, he smiled a little around his gag. Bunny Tucker did not like officers of the law. He never had since a quick-handed policeman, in by-gone days, had fairly cracked his night stick across Bunny's head. Bunny's feelings had been hurt as much as his head, and his pride kept him from forgetting. Now he lay very still in the compartment and heard Boots command the Negro giant to "jimmy those lights."

"Then go into the car and tell everybody that the lights will come on in a minute," said Boots. "Then open the door of the drawing-room and tell them the same thing. The chief'll be right at your back when you go inside. Have you got that flash ready in your pocket?"

"Yes, sir," said the big man.

"Go ahead, then," said Boots.

Arthur William Creston left the compartment, but returned in a moment to say:

"If I fool with them lights, they'll go out on the whole dog-gone train, I'm afraid."

"Let 'em go," answered Boots. "Move fast, because we need to make our minutes count, brother!"

Creston went out again, and a minute or two later the lights flashed out, even the dim, reddish ceiling light. An instant murmur went like a groan through the train, very faintly audible under the echoing roar of the wheels through the tunnel.

BOOTHS was out of the compartment at once, in time to see the dim, vast bulk of Creston blocking the aisle. He could barely make out the silhouette. The whole car was dimmer than night.

"Just a minute, gentlemen!" called Creston. "There's goin' to be more lights in just a minute."

At this, the protest of many voices died out, and Creston opened the door of the drawing-room.

"Goin' to be lights on in just a minute," said Creston. "I'll just take a look and see if——"

He started through the narrow doorway.

"Keep out, porter!" ordered a decisive voice.

A flashlight snapped on and splashed white brilliance into the face of Creston and all over his great white coat.

"You're not our porter," said the man behind the flashlight. "Back up, and stay backed!"

"Yes, sir," said Creston. "I was just goin' to tell you that I'm the new porter for this car, sir. Bunny is shifted at Tunnel?"

"Is he?" answered the other dryly. "Well, get out and close that door."

"Just a minute, porter," said big John Saxon, stepping to the door. "I can show you gentlemen how to get the light from the reserve batteries, if you wish."

"Who are you?" asked the man behind the steady flashlight.

"I'm the general manager—traffic manager," said John Saxon.

Cullen was behind him, and so was Boots. He felt as though two trained tigers were supporting him. He had only to control their savage fighting strength, not urge it on.

"All right," said the man behind the light. "This is an outrage—the lights goin' off on a train like this."

"It is," said Saxon. "Unexpected and astonishing. Flash your pocket torch, porter."

The powerful glare of Creston's pocket torch instantly overwhelmed the other flashlight, and Saxon saw a man with a long, narrow face and eyes set so close together that they seemed to be rubbing the sides of his nose. He sat on the couch. The two seats by the window were occupied by Pike and Del Bryan. And the eyes of Del Bryan, as they turned up to the face of Saxon, opposite him, widened suddenly like the round eyes of a fish, and banished all expression from his face.

"I hate to trouble you gentlemen," said Saxon, "but if you budge half an inch, I'll have to start dripping lead all over you."

He had a pair of big guns in his hands as he spoke. Then he added: "Come in, boys!"

But Boots and Cullen were already through the door.

As that door closed behind them, they turned on their own flashes. And in that flood of light, like a madman, Deputy Sheriff Willis made his move.

He got out his gun, and he might have died while doing it, but Saxon

simply ran the length of the barrel of his Colt along the side of Willis's head, and the deputy slumped like a sack to the floor.

Boots went at him with rapid hands, merely saying: "I know where the keys are, chief!"

And the other two guards? That flare of light had taken the heart out of them, and the fall of their chief held them quite unnerved as Creston and Cullen tied them hand and foot together. By that time Boots had found the keys, and still the train was roaring through the tunnel as the manacles that held Pike and Del Bryan to their guards were snapped open.

A moment later the train was running smoothly beyond the tunnel's farther mouth, and through the window, dimly, they could see the thin pricking of the stars. The emergency alarm caused that train to stop like a mustang on planted, stiffened legs.

Two minutes later, six men were mounting six good horses that had been tethered in the brush near the railroad. They heard the clamoring of the passengers fade out behind them as they headed back toward White Water.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A WARNING.

IT was the morning after that, when the pink was hardly out of the sky, that Mary Wilson faced the sharp edge of the wind of the dawn as she pulled open the gate and turned her father's two mustangs from the corral into the little pasture behind the house. She was closing the gate and thrusting the bar home when she saw a woman riding out of the woods, a girl with such a carriage that the heart of

Mary Wilson lifted as if at a challenge. And then, when the girl came nearer, she felt something between pity and relief, because she recognized Molly. They had been in school together. They had been close friends in the old days. In fact, it did not seem to Mary such a very long time since she and Molly had walked to the school together, holding hands, smiling at one another foolishly, as little girls will do, skipping and laughing on a sudden mutual impulse.

Afterward, Molly had gone on with her head just as high and her ways just as reckless as on those days when she had defied the teacher before all the class. The time came when the two saw one another no more. There was a good deal of friendship in the eyes which Mary turned on her old companion. There was a good deal of cruelty, also, in the way she looked for changes in her appearance.

There were not many to be seen. Perhaps Molly was doing her lips a little too red, so that her face seemed a trifle pale; and perhaps her eyes were a shade too hard and fixed. She looked at every one as though she were prepared against tricks, amused and on guard beforehand. When she came up now, she waved her hand and sang out cheerfully. Then she swung down from the horse with the strong grace of a boy and stood outside the fence. She was dressed like a cowboy, but the shirt was the finest silk, and around her little pseudo-sombrero there was a sparkling band of Mexican wheelwork in gold. And her spurs were gold, and the butt of her quirt glistened with jewels.

"Come in, Molly," Mary invited. "Your ma might see me," said Molly. "Would Mrs. Wilson stick out her chin if she saw me talking

inside the fence with her precious pet?"

In the judgment of Mary, as on a fine balance, anger and compassion weighed against one another, and then compassion proved the weightier. She went up closer to the fence and looked with kindness into the hard, bright eyes of the other girl.

"You're as much of a baby as ever, Mary," said Molly. "But I see that you've gone and got yourself a man."

"You mean John Saxon?" said Mary.

"How many more have you got—that are real?" asked Molly. "I saw that hombre sashaying up the street yesterday, with the kids hanging onto his spurs and the crowd shouting for him. He looked real to me. Like a dog-gone king, he looked to me, with that white bandage around his head. And he only seemed to know partly what the other fellows were thinking. He looked mighty real to me, Mary. How many more have you got like him?"

Mary said nothing. She was wondering if, in fact, she still had John Saxon. Ever since the previous morning she had been wondering. Her mother, of course, was a very wise woman. Her mother always said so, in fact; but now Mary was beginning to doubt more than a little.

Molly went on: "I watched him go into your house, but I watched him come out again, too. He came out pretty fast. If a man came away from me, stepping big like that, like he was going to go rope the pet bull and take him to the butcher—why, I'd be kind of worried, Mary. How about you?"

Suddenly Mary confessed: "Yes, I was worried."

"Great Scott," exclaimed Molly, "then why not do something about it?"

"I don't know," said Mary. "I didn't know what to do."

"Bah!" snapped Molly.

"Why do you talk to me like this?" asked Mary.

"Because I want to find out something. What's this big hombre to you? Is he just the town hero, or is he your own John?"

"He's my own——" began Mary. But she stopped herself there.

"If he's your own, why don't you keep an eye on him?" asked Molly.

"Why do you give him the run so that he comes out of your place biting nails and looking for more air? There's a lot of bright girls around that are willing to be comforters. Don't you know that?"

Mary looked with horror at her old friend.

"Yeah, and maybe I might be on the list one day," said Molly. "I don't know. But you step out of the running and give me a fair shot at your own John, and maybe I'll ring the bell. I don't know."

"Molly, what's making you talk like this?" she asked.

"It beats me. I don't quite know what I've got in my head. But we used to be pretty thick—and I thought that maybe I could do you a good turn. Understand? If you really are all wrapped up in this fellow, maybe I could do you a turn. How much do you care for him, Mary?"

"I care for him. I care a lot," said Mary.

"More than you care what people say?"

Mary said nothing.

"Now, look!" exclaimed Molly. "Would you cut loose from everything—would you let the family go right, and would you go through hell

and high water for the sake of your own John? Would you be shamed and pointed at, and laughed at, and mocked and sneered at, for his sake?"

"I hope so," said Mary very faintly.

"You give me a pain," said Molly. "All of you gals give me a pain, mostly. There's no more woman in you than there is in a family picture on the dining-room wall. You get a man because you've got a pretty little mug, and after you've got him you let him rip the first time there's trouble. That's what you'd do for your own John. Am I right?"

"No," said Mary. "I think I'd try to be—a woman, Molly."

"Wait a minute. Your own John loves you, does he? He grabs hold of you with his eyes when you walk into the room, and he looks like he's eating and drinking when he's talking to you? Is that the way it is with him?"

Mary thought. She was very honest. And then she could say: "Yes, he's that way."

"Then why do you give him the run when he comes to see you?" snapped Molly.

"I don't. The other morning I was wrong. I said a lot of foolish things. I'm sorry about that."

"I hope you are," said Molly savagely. "I've got a man, and a real man. But I'm no more to him than an extra good horse or a fine suit of clothes. And you—you've got the real thing both ways, and nothing ahead of you to trouble about except the style of your wedding dress, and you—you turn him adrift, do you? You little fool!"

"What do you mean by turning him adrift? I haven't turned him adrift! Molly, what's happening?"

"He's about to start on his way to be murdered," said Molly with a

bitter calm. "Don't gag like that, like a little putty-faced baby. Go to Dan Finlay's house, and if you get hold of your own John, get down on your knees and hang onto him, and hold him back, and don't let him ride out with Daniel Finlay today!"

"Molly, Molly! What does it mean?"

"What does it mean? Don't wonder what it means! Go get your man stopped. I'll be somewhere around when you come back. But if you're half a woman, you'll have your tongue torn out before you'll ever tell a soul that the warning came out of me!"

MARY WILSON went around the corner of the house like a running colt. Down the street she went in a flash, and then up the steps onto the veranda of Daniel Finlay's house. She rapped at the door, and thought she heard a cessation of dim voices inside the house. No one came. She rapped again, more loudly, and the heavy, empty echoes came knocking back against her brain.

"Mr. Finlay!" she shouted.

"Hello, there," called the blacksmith from next door. "You askin' for Finlay? He went off at the crack of day with John Saxon. He went off more'n a half hour ago!"

Somehow she got back to her house. She was running, but her knees were numb, and her whole soul was starved for the lack of air. She could not breathe. Her heart had swelled so that there was no room in her body for the breath of life.

But she had to find Molly—if only Molly had not gone! Molly would know *where* Finlay and John Saxon had gone together. She might know—otherwise—

She saw Molly sitting on top of the back fence, whittling a stick like a boy.

"It's a bust, eh?" said Molly, looking up calmly from her whittling. "They've already gone?"

"They've gone—half an hour ago!" gasped Mary. "Where have they gone, Molly. Where? Why? Who would ever dream of—"

"Half an hour ago, eh?" said Molly, lifting her practical head and looking away toward the ragged parting of the mountains that fenced in Stillman Pass. "Well, you've got a good-looking horse in that pasture, Mary. You used to be able to ride pretty well. Pile a saddle onto that horse and come with me. You hear?"

"Where, Molly? Where?" cried Mary Wilson.

"Oh, stop your questions!" shouted Molly in a sudden fury. "Do you want to save him—or am I going to ride by myself? I've

seen him only once—really—but I won't let him die. I'll *fight* for him. What will you do, you little pretty fool? Will you stand there and blubber 'Where? Where?' or will you jump a saddle onto that horse and come where I show you the way?"

All those insults had no power on Mary Wilson, strange to say. They could not stir her anger, but they could scatter the numbness and the darkness from her mind. Suddenly she was alert and alive.

And while she raced to "jump" the heavy saddle on the back of the bay gelding in the pasture, Molly sat by, already on her horse, disdainful to help, watching with a curious sneer and sympathy commingled. Could they overtake two riders who had such a long head start? Well, it depended. When she looked up, she could see swift clouds beating up like a sea on the mountains around the Stillman Pass.

To be continued in next week's issue.

TO HONOR FOUR INDIANS

CONSTRUCTION of a four-crypt sarcophagus to hold the remains of four chiefs who signed the Drumm Creek Treaty of 1868 is planned by Osage Indians of Oklahoma. The treaty provided for removal of the Osages to what is now Oklahoma. The chiefs honored are Wah-Tah-Hin-Kah, Joe Pah-Ne-No-Pah-Sre, Che-To-Pah, and Pawhuska.

BUYS CALF FOR LONESOME COW

GEORGE MURPHY, whose new milch cow was accused by a neighbor in Dallas, Texas, of disturbing the early morning quiet by bawling, was explaining to the court how he planned to keep his milk supply quieter:

"Judge, she was just brought in from the country and I guess she must be lonesome. So I bought a calf to keep her company and I think she will be all right now."

COWBOY LINGO

By RAMON F. ADAMS

(Continued from last week's issue)

RIDING.

Mounting a horse, the method of riding, and the horse's manner of bucking all have their slang terms.

Preparatory to mounting a bad horse, an assistant of the rider usually "ears down" a horse to distract its attention, or else it is previously "blinded" by the tying of a cloth over its eyes. To mount a horse is to "fork," "hairpin," or "step across" it.

When a horse lowers its head between its legs preparatory to start bucking, it is said to have "bogged his head," "stuck his bill in the ground," or "swallowed his head." When it starts to buck, it is said that the animal "boiled over," "broke in two," "came apart," "folded up," "kettled," "shoots its back," "slats its sails," "unwinds," "hopped for mamma," or "wrinkled his spine."

A horse which bucks with ability is said to be a "beast with a bellyful of bed springs." One which bucks half-heartedly with arched back and stiffened legs is said to "crow hop," "cat back," or "goat."

Many horses have their own style of bucking. "Bucking on a dime" is said when the horse does its bucking in one spot. "Bucking straight away" consists of long jumps straight ahead without any twists or rearings; an easy horse to ride. A "high roller" is a horse that leaps high into the air when bucking; also called "high poler." "Pitching fence-cornered" is said when the

horse leaves the ground while headed in one direction and lands in another. "Sunfishing" is a term used when a horse twists its body into a crescent, when it seems to try to touch the ground with first one shoulder and then the other, letting the sunlight hit its belly. "Swapping ends" is a movement peculiar to a bronc where it quickly reverses its position, while making a complete half circle in the air. "Walkin' beamin'" is the seesaw effect of a bucking horse, wherein it lands alternately on its front and hind feet. A "fall back" is when the horse rears on its hind legs, loses its balance and falls backward; such a horse is also called a "cinch binder"; the "throw back" is when the horse hurls itself backward intentionally, and is the trick of a "killer." A "spinner" is a horse which goes up and whirls backward instead of up and forward, and the "pinwheel" is when a horse leaps forward in an upward jump, and turns, feet in air, and lands on its back. Such a horse is very rare. A "pile driver" is a horse that bucks stiff-legged and "high he goes an' hard he hits."

Using the spurs in the act of riding comes in for many slang terms, also. "Scratching" is the act of keeping the feet moving in a kicking motion in riding bucking horses, and one of the acts necessary to win at any real bucking contest. "Raking," synonymous to "scratching," is generally applied when the rider gives his legs a free sweep, rolling

the rowels of his spurs along the horse's side from shoulder to rump, and is one of the highest accomplishments coveted by the broncho-buster. "Bicycling" is the act of scratching with first one foot and then the other in the manner of riding a bicycle. "Coasting on the spurs" is riding with the spurs hooked in the cinch or under the horse's shoulder blades, and not tolerated in contests; "screwing down" is the act of sinking the spurs into the cinch and failing to move the feet in a kicking motion as provided by rodeo rules. The cowboy is said to "curry him out" when he "rakes" with his spurs; "reefing" is also a term used. "Throwing the steel" is using the spurs freely, and the spur marks upon a horse's hide are called "hundred an' elevens"; while a cowboy riding without spurs is said to be "slick-heeled," and one riding without locked spurs or tied stirrups is said to "ride slick." "Fanning," used as a riding term, means to slap the horse with the rider's hat. "Blowing a stirrup" is losing it, which disqualifies the rider in rodeo riding.

"Riding the shows" is competing for prize money at rodeos. "Riding safe" is sitting close to the saddle, legs tightly clinched against the horse's side, and spurs set firmly in the cinch, while "seeing daylight" is a term applied when a rider leaves his seat with each jump of the horse, so that spectators can see between rider and saddle. "Riding straight up" consists in the rider sitting straight up in the saddle hold-

ing one hand on the reins and the other in the air. "Sitting close to the plaster" is keeping a close and firm seat in the saddle. "Riding with a slick saddle" is to ride a bronc without a "saddle roll," without "hobbled stirrups," and without "grabbin' the apple"; a real buster scorns to use any device which gives him the advantage over the horse. "Riding it out" is staying with a bad horse until it is conquered. "Monkey style" is a riding term which involves the rider's seizing the horn of the saddle by one or both hands, pushing himself sideways out of the saddle and standing in one stirrup, with his knee on that side flexed, and his other leg at its midway point between hip and knee resting horizontally across the saddle's seat. His flexed knee joint and his two hip joints, thus collectively absorb the shock of the bucking horse.

To take the wire edge off a horse, or ride him long enough to take the meanness out of him, is to "top off," "uncork," "unrooster," "set the hair," or "work over."

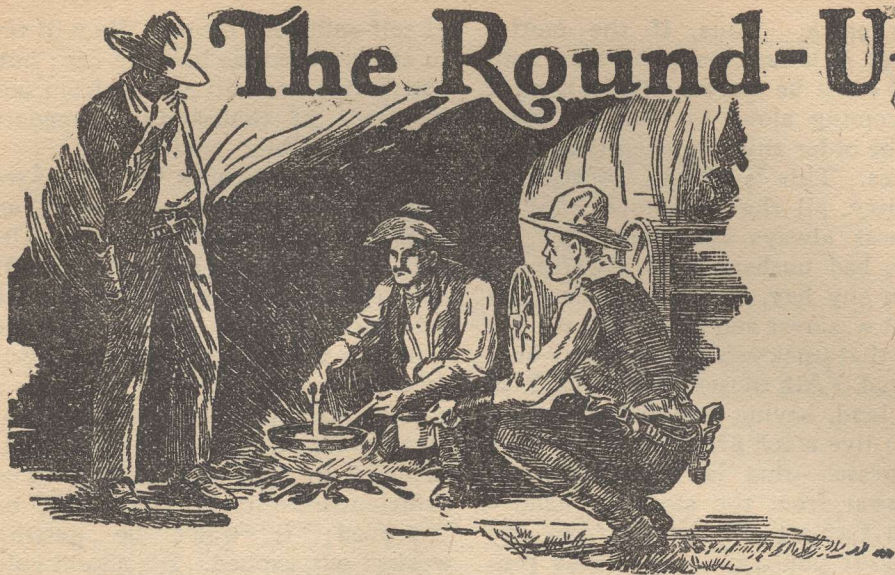
To catch hold of the saddle horn during the riding of a bucking horse is known by such terms as "choke the horn," "claw leather," "grabbin' the nubbin," "grabbin' the post," "pullin' leather," "reachin' for the apple," "shakin' hands with grandma," "squeezing the biscuit," "squeezing Lizzie," "safety first," and many others.

Ordinary riding is known as "rackin'," but "snappin' broncs" means breaking horses.

To be continued in next week's issue.

A Complete Novel, "MEN HUNTERS," by ROBERT J. HORTON,
in Next Week's Issue.

The Round-Up



FOLKS, there are very few things in life that we can be plumb certain of. But there is one thing that we are certain of, and that's that these be troublous times.

That the times are troublous is a fact writ large and clear so all who run, crawl, or skip can read. No question about it. Now there is something that our minds do not doubt for a moment. It's not a fact; more, we should say, a moral certainty. It's this: The American people are not going to lie down and take it. They're going to fight, struggle, strain, and use every bit of ingenuity and courage they possess to get out of these troublous times.

How to go about it is a matter of much conflicting argument and suggestion. One of the means of getting out of the difficulty, which seems sound to us, is to go back to the land which, as we all know and have said here many times, is the fountainhead of all wealth in this country.

When we say go back to the land, we do not mean, certainly at this

point in our troubles, to go back with any intention of what is known as "making money." A vast number of farms and ranches throughout the country have long ceased to be self-sufficient, sufficient unto themselves. There was a time in this country when practically every farm or ranch was sufficient unto itself. Had it blown out to the sea and become an island, the inhabitants of that farm would have been able to get along. It is true they would have run out of staples, such as coffee, sugar, and eventually out of machinery, but they would have been able to survive, live.

Then came the farm of money crops, the farm run by machinery and run by horses, which was conducted to make money, take off a crop or crops, and turn these crops into cash. In many instances, particularly in the East, lots of farmers didn't raise fodder for their own stock. Along with carpenters and other mechanics, farmers became specialists.

But to get back to the sufficient-unto-itself farm. Such a farm must support its own stock and raise its

own stock. Thus, if the motive power is horses, some of these animals must be mares, and foals must be coming along to take the place of the older animals when their turn comes. This is true as to cattle, to poultry, all the live stock, in fact. It was always considered, by the way, bad husbandry to sell from a farm any hay, straw, or grain, save what was over and above that needed for the stock which the farm supported. All those who go back to the land, having established a farm with live stock arranged as we have suggested—that is, with plans for renewal from the stock in hand—such farmers get money from any stock or poultry, or what they produce, over and above what the stock needs and what the family of the farmer needs.

When he gets such a farm turning nicely within itself, the farmer can then slowly branch out, but if he wants to play safe, he'll never abandon the first principle, which is that the farm must be kept sufficient unto itself as much as possible. The moment that he starts gambling, he's on dangerous ground. There are some people who say that life's a gamble, and that everything is a gamble. Well, we don't mean it in that sense. But there is such a thing as out-and-out gambling on a farm, on a race track.

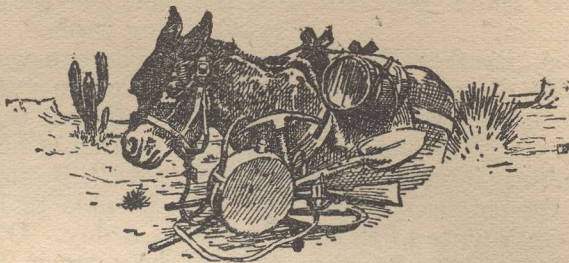
There are many, many readers of this magazine who can help others who are in dire need, not so much of immediate cash, but of an opportunity to establish themselves in such a manner that they can feel safe, independent, and in a position to care for their families. We are sure that you will offer advice and counsel to any of those who ask for it. Right here at this Round-up we will be very glad to have any one ask questions on this subject

of self-sufficient farms. We will try to answer them as best we can; but, better still, we will solicit from our hundreds of thousands of readers suggestions and advice.

You must not think from what we have said that there is never an opportunity for a sufficient-unto-itself farm to make any money. Of course, the man who plays extra safe hasn't got the chance of the man who takes bigger chances. But something will be taking place on a well-conducted farm which has not taken place on thousands upon thousands of farms in this country. The sufficient-unto-itself farm will be improved; it won't be getting worked out, sapped. It's an old rule of farming, just like it's an old rule of many things in life, that you can't take something off a farm without putting it back again. And what we did in this country, to a tremendous extent, was take a lot out of the ground and not put anything back. We don't say that tractors weren't a great advantage on a farm. They were. But remember one thing: tractors don't fertilize the farm. They don't put anything back. Stock does put something back. One of the reasons there are so many so-called abandoned farms in the United States is that these farms were badly managed, sucked dry, and not replenished so that they could go on, producing even better than they had ever produced.

If there is any country in the world that has a fine agricultural-advice system for its citizens, it is this country of ours. Throughout our land are experimental stations, and from Washington pamphlets on any subject having to do with agriculture will be sent to you promptly, and free of cost.

Let's go into this subject, and do what we can to help.



MINES AND MINING

By J. A. THOMPSON

This department is intended to be of real help to readers. If there is anything you want to know about mining or prospecting, a letter inclosing a stamped and self-addressed envelope sent to J. A. Thompson, care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y., will bring a prompt authoritative personal reply.

Letters unaccompanied by a return envelope will be answered in this department in the order in which they are received. But as space is limited, please keep such letters as brief as possible.

OUT in the State of Washington where the tall timber runs to eleven-foot butts, and the country is a veritable outdoor man's paradise, there is gold to be gleaned from many of the creeks and mountain streams. Jim Daly, of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, is headed out that way this spring and he asks us for the names of some of those gold-bearing streams.

"Although I'm city-bred, I have always enjoyed the outdoors and longed to go prospecting. I am making the jump this spring and am headed for the State of Washington. Can you give me the names of some creeks out there that are *known* to carry gold?"

Jim, we dipped into the mail bag just before we sat down to answer your query, and the first thing we found was a letter from an old friend of ours, E. H. Hilton, of Tacoma,

Washington. Hilton took the words out of our mouth, so we'll let him tell it.

"Thanks for the reliable information about New Mexico you gave me some time ago. Owing to an accident, I was unable to get down there.

"Anyhow, in case any of the boys might be interested, I am sending you a list of localities in Washington that I know personally to carry pay. Most of them, however, can only be worked when the water is low. Ferry County—Columbia River, Republic River (around Eureka). Grant County—Trinidad. Snohomish County—Granite Falls. Stevens County—Meyers Falls (Columbia River bars). Whatcom County—Slate Creek. Whitman County—Riparia district (Snake River).

"If any Western Story readers wish prospecting information on Washington or Oregon, I'll be glad

to help them if I can. I have a twenty-acre placer claim in Oregon that I made a bit on."

Thanks to you, Brother Hilton. That's mighty fine of you to make that offer, and we hope those twenty acres will prove your big bonanza.

All you hombres interested in Washington or Oregon prospecting are hereby invited to write to E. H. Hilton. Send your letters to the Mines And Mining Department, care of this magazine, and they will be forwarded to him promptly.

James D., of Portland, Maine, wants to know about water rights. "Am I entitled to use water that may be on a mineral claim?" he asks.

Indeed you are. You are entitled to use any water naturally flowing on, or across, your claim, for mining or domestic purposes.

"Is gold heavier than lead, and if so, about how much?" queries Harold D., of Patterson, New Jersey.

It is, Harold. The specific gravity of lead is approximately 11.5, and that of pure gold 19.2, which means that lead is eleven and a fraction times heavier than water, gold a little more than nineteen times as heavy. Comparing the two metals, pure gold is not quite twice as heavy as pure lead. Lead, however, is the heaviest of the so-called "common" metals.

Bolton K. Nolls, of Evansville, Indiana, is mighty curious to know how much pay dirt a regular gold pan holds, and about how much gravel per day can be washed by a man with a pan.

"How much dirt does a gold pan hold, anyhow?" asks Nolls. "When a fellow really can swing one, how much yardage per day can he handle?"

The usual load for a gold pan is approximately twenty pounds of sand and gravel. The weight varies,

of course, depending on how full you fill the pan, and the nature of the gravel being washed.

A man who can wash about two thirds of a cubic yard of dirt per day with sufficient care not to lose a sizable portion of his values is doing pretty well, Bolton. Some men claim to be able to handle a hundred pans a day. Others say only fifty. The average for an experienced panner is probably somewhere in between.

"Can you tell me anything about the Gold Dust placer district in New Mexico?" asks John Barnes, of Hammond, Indiana.

Gold Dust lies in the Las Animas district near Hillsboro in Sierra County. The placers of the entire district are undoubtedly derived from the wearing down of parts of the gold veins at Hillsboro. It is desert country. Dry placer mining with jigs, dry-washers, and such machines as the ingenuity of the individual prospector can devise. And pretty slim pickings at that.

Last time we were through Gold Dust a handful of dilapidated shacks and an empty and lonely gas pump marked the settlement. That, however, was before the great revival of gold mining interest sent the new Argonauts of '32 and '33 cruising around to all the half-forgotten gold camps of the West. Probably find some prospectors dry-washing there now. The desert sands undoubtedly hold a total amount of gold incredibly large. But it is scattered mighty thinly over a lot of terrain. Most of the ground is low-grade.

A lot of money and work have been put in around Gold Dust, too, sampling the ground and so forth in an effort to find sizable areas, or large tracts suitable for working on a big scale.

The HOLLOW TREE



Conducted by
HELEN RIVERS

It is a natural impulse and it is a good impulse to desire to wander and to roam. Not too much, of course. But the desire to go places and see things should be and is in all of us—in all of us who amount to anything, at least, for traveling educates us, and changing our geographic location often is of great benefit to health, mind, and economic well-being. A wise man once said, "A rolling stone gathers no moss," but a wiser man, we think, added, "but a standing pool stagnates."

If you are one who would travel, it is a mighty good thing to have man's best asset along the way, and at your destination. We mean, of course, friends.

If you would like a friend or friends in a certain section, write to Miss Helen Rivers, who conducts this department, and she will put you in touch with readers who want to correspond with folks in your part of the world.

It must be understood that Miss Rivers will undertake to exchange letters only between men and men, boys and boys, women and women, girls and girls. Letters will be forwarded direct when correspondents so wish; otherwise they will be answered here. Be sure to inclose forwarding postage when sending letters through The Hollow Tree.

Address: Helen Rivers, care The Hollow Tree, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N.Y.

NORTHWARD, from the Walker Lake country to Winnemucca, there is a fine stretch of mineral country in the west of Nevada. "Old Prospector A. J." can tell you folks about the new placer-gold strike near Wabuska, and about other prospects in the Nevada West.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

Maybe some of you folks would be interested to hear of my prospecting trips during the past year. Leaving camp, out of Winnemucca, which is in northwestern Nevada, I went to Reno, where I spent a few days trying to find a prospect worth looking up, with the idea of working it on

a small scale. I learned of a quicksilver property near Mina, in Mineral County, and started to look it up. I left the Lincoln Highway at Fernley and proceeded on the main highway toward Tonopah. I passed through Fallon, a beautiful little city surrounded by a farming district that is well known because of its raising the best melons in the West. And I agree with those who make such a claim, as I sampled some of the melons from Fallon. I traveled along a well-graded highway, but with loose gravel bed which made rather slow going compared with the fine highway I had left. I soon reached the end of the loose gravel as I neared the Walker Lake, after passing through the Indian reservation at Schurz, where the Indians have a trading post and some beautiful farms.

Going a little farther toward Walker

Lake, I soon found a stretch of fine graveled and oiled roads skirting the Walker Lake for thirty-five miles, and at the far end of the lake there is a government army post. This Walker Lake is perhaps the oldest fresh-water lake in the United States and, according to geologists, is due for eruptions soon. In fact, it was having mild eruptions at that time, and one that was quite severe last summer. While on my trip I felt several small tremors.

From the army post it is but a short distance to the little city of Hawthorne, which is the county seat of Mineral County. On through Hawthorne, I soon reached the place where I was to leave the highway and take to the mountains. Wandering up through the canyons, I finally reached the place I was looking for, eleven miles from Mina. There I established camp, and for four months I drove tunnels, sank shafts, and did all kinds of test work to determine if there was enough good ore on the property to justify working. I put in tubes at a cost of seven hundred dollars, and ran through about four tons of the ore per day for about forty days. Then I found it would not pay to work the ore on a small basis and I quit, made a trip to Tonopah, just to say I'd been there, and then back toward Mina, to Summit Springs, to look for something worth working. I found several likely prospects and among them was one of turquoise. This rare mineral was new to me, and I did not recognize its value at first, and did not follow it up enough to know how extensive it was. However, there seemed to be quite a lot of it. After putting in several days in this district, where I felt several little earthquakes, I found a prospect that looks favorable, and I expect to go back there in the early spring to do a little developing on this prospect where I located two claims.

I also made a trip down to a new placer strike near Wabuska, where there was a lot of developing work being done. This kind of developing work requires a lot of capital in this case. I was told they would spend three hundred thousand dollars before they would be ready to operate. However, if the ground is as rich as the first tests showed, they will make that back in three or four months. These placers are found in old river channels that have been covered over these many years, and are only found by chance when some one has courage enough to start digging and keeps digging until he finds gold.

One could write a story about this lit-

tle town of Winnemucca and the outlying districts, where I am at present. Winnemucca is one of the ghost towns of the West, once with a population of twenty-five hundred. Now only a few small houses remain; but, because of the rise in the value of the ores, all the old mining



You folks who are interested in Nevada's mineral prospects just speak up pronto to Old Prospector A. J., an old-timer of the West. And don't forget to wear your friend-maker membership badges, folks.

Twenty-five cents in coin or stamps sent to The Hollow Tree Department, Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y., will bring you either the pin style or the button for the coat lapel. In ordering, be sure to state which you wish.

camps are building up. Should the price of silver go to one dollar per ounce, Nevada will boom, as there are several good silver mines lying idle because of the low price of the metal.

Folks, I'll be glad to hear from any of you. I hope some day you all strike it rich.

OLD PROSPECTOR A. J.

Care of The Tree.

This North Carolina miss is waiting for you folks to say "Howdy."

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I want to find some Pen Pals in Oklahoma, Texas, and Wyoming. I am a young girl of twenty. I play and sing with the uke, banjo, and guitar.

HELEN WADSON.

Box 172, Dover, North Carolina.

An Indiana boy is looking for some Scout pals.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

I am a Boy Scout, fifteen years old, and I would like to get in touch with some Boy Scouts in California. I would also like to hear from boys any place.

J. E. EBERHART.

836 First Street, Huntington, Indiana.

MISSING

This department is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may

come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking. Forward all your communications to Missing Department, Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

HOLT, REUBEN M.—He is my father and has been missing for four years. His eyes are light-blue. He is light-complexioned and had blond hair which is probably gray by now. Is five feet eleven inches tall and weighed one hundred and ninety pounds. Would be sixty years of age. Any one able to furnish any information concerning this man, please communicate with his daughter, Nancy J. Carpenter, Tribby, Florida.

PASZKIEWICZ, JOHN.—Why don't you write to your old friend Lu-Lu? Any one knowing his present whereabouts, please notify Louis Bilowski, Eden, Manitoba, Canada.

WEST, JOHN EDWARD.—He would be about sixty years of age and has reddish-brown hair and gray eyes. Is five feet five inches tall. He is pure German. Has not been seen or heard of since he left his home in Oregon, Missouri. His children would like some word of him. Their ages range from twenty-three to thirty-three, and their names are James Callen, Velma Mildred Lane, Floyd M. West, and Zella May Flewelling. If any of the readers know this man, kindly address Mrs. Zella May Flewelling, care of C. F. Farmer, Stanley, New Mexico.

CURNUTTE, BENNETT.—Frequently called Red. Is between thirty-six and seven years of age. Is a native of Virginia. Has curly brown hair and brown eyes. His chin is deeply cleft. Has been missing since just after the World War ended. Celebrated Armistice Day in New York City with several pals, two of whom were Hinky Dinky Carberry and Snake-eye Fields. Saw seven years' service in the Philippines. Was a barber while in service. He is a talented musician and may be playing in an orchestra. He was in Portland, Oregon, when last heard from and spoke of going to South America. Has friends in Oakland, California. His father is very ill, and his one desire is to hear from his long-lost son. No financial aid is required. Are the children married. Kindly send any news of him to A. K. M., care of Western Story Magazine.

FISHER, JAMES.—Who lived at Hidden Timber, South Dakota, in 1927 and 1928. Yess isn't so well. He would like to hear from you and talk over old times down on the Pioneer Credit. You should see this, write. Any one knowing him, please bring this notice to his attention. Hattie M. Vance, Route 3, Box 170, Coyote Pass, Hemet, California.

COWEN, MRS. MADGE.—Of Hidden Timber, South Dakota. Have lost your address. Write to me, or let me hear from you through Bess Radford. Hattie M. Vance, Route 3, Box 170, Coyote Pass, Hemet, California.

YOCUM, SISTERS and BROTHER.—Who were inmates of the Johnstown Children's Home in November, 1917. I am your sister and I have been trying to find you. On November 14, 1917, I was taken from the home in adoption. Please, if any of you see this, get in touch with me. Mrs. Dorothy Y. Myers, Bownansdale, York County, Pennsylvania.

DAVIS, CHICK.—Who was an enlisted man in the United States army and stationed at the Philippines during 1931. Any one knowing his whereabouts, or who can furnish information which will enable the writer to establish his correct identity, please communicate with Richard McMahon, Attorney, 230 Park Avenue, New York City.

CRAMER, ALVA GLOVER.—He left his home on September 20, 1913, and has never been heard from since. If alive he would be fifty-two years old. His niece is anxious to locate him as his father is dead and his mother is in very poor health. Address Ruth E. Cramer, 234 Grant Street, Houston, Pennsylvania.

THOMPSON, JOE.—Four years ago he was in Chicago, Illinois. Has not been heard from since. His mother would be happy for any news of him. Address Mrs. Lizzie Kyle, R. F. D. 1, Branchland, West Virginia.

STAPP, ERNEST.—When last heard from he was in Akron, Ohio. That was in 1923. He is now thirty-six years of age. Is six feet tall and weighs one hundred and seventy pounds. Has blue eyes and black hair. Any one knowing his whereabouts, please communicate with his sister, Miss Elizabeth Stepp, 102 Dilling Street, Kings Mountain, North Carolina.

PROUDFEET, ROBERT L.—He is thought to be somewhere in Wyoming or Colorado. Will he, or any one knowing him, kindly send his address to Edward G. Coolidge, Route 1, Eureka, California.

STARCEL, MR. and MRS. M. E. and SON, J. E.—Their last known address was 909 Alliston Street, N. W., Washington, D. C. Please write to your old nurse and friend. Any one knowing their present whereabouts, please write to Virginia, care of Western Story Magazine.

COMFER, ALLEN C.—Who was a member of Company D, Thirtieth United States Infantry, stationed at the Presidio, San Francisco, California, in 1924. Your old buddy would like to hear from you. Roy Duncan, 4825 Auburn Road, Huntington, West Virginia.

SWEET, RAYMOND.—He is my half brother, and I have not seen him for five years. The last I knew of him he was in Redcliff, Alberta, Canada. Any one knowing the whereabouts of this young man, please address Mrs. Audrey Loveall, Ferdig, Montana.

WAY, CLIFFORD.—He emigrated to Canada about 1884. When last heard of he was in Ontario. Would be about sixty years of age. His sister Laura is asking news of him. Please send any word regarding him to Mrs. L. Bird, 98 Marksbury Road, St. Johns Lane, Bedminster, Bristol, England.

ASHBURN, EDDIE.—In June, 1933, he was heard from in Arizona. No word has come from him since that time. He is probably still somewhere around there. Would be about thirty-two years of age. Is five feet nine or ten inches tall and weighed one hundred and forty-five pounds. No little fame. Any information will be gratefully received by his brother, Kenneth Ashburn, Route 2, Scottsboro, Alabama.

DAVIS, ROSIE.—She was last heard from at Gladewater, Texas, in 1904. Was sent to a Catholic convent in St. Louis, Missouri, by Mr. and Mrs. Shoptain, of Crowtherville, Missouri. Any one knowing her present whereabouts, kindly notify her sister, Marie Williard, Gladewater, Texas.

ALEXSON, NELLIE.—Who was in Fargo, North Dakota, in 1910. Would like to hear from her, or any one who knows where she is now living. Address Mrs. Emery Lytle, 318 Third Street South, Brainerd, Minnesota.

LEWIS, W. J.—He is a native of Morristown, Wales. In 1897 and 1898 he worked in a tin-plate factory in Anderson, Indiana. Soon after that he married and left there, saying he was going to Seattle, Washington. I have heard from a minister that he was employed in Berkeley, California. Letters sent to him there have been returned to me. Would like any much to hear from him, or any one knowing his present address. Thomas J. Reese, Beech Bottom, West Virginia.

BOZO.—Thanks for the card, but you gave me no address to answer you. Am still in D. Love, you still and miss you terribly. Come as soon as you possibly can, for the yucca will bloom soon again. Write "Tel. Post."

TURPIN, MRS. MYRTLE and BUDDIE.—The latter are her son and daughter. Myrtle would be about twenty-two years old, and the boy is a year or so younger. Their home was in Midland, Texas, but they had just come from Arizona when I met them. I think they came from Yuma, but I am not positive. In 1930 I met them at 1241 West Fifth Street, where we lived at the time. I am planning on going to Arizona and want to look them up. I have written to the postmasters in both Arizona and Texas, but they are not known in any of the places to which I wrote, so I am asking the readers to help me locate them. Kindly address Claire E. Hopkins, 1414 Tenth Avenue, Seattle, Washington.

HOMSEY, GEORGE.—He was born in Little Current, Ontario, Canada. Is five feet eight inches tall. Has black hair and brown eyes. Over left eyelid is a scar. Would be twenty-six years of age. His home was in Sudbury, Ontario. His mother is very anxious to hear from him, and she would be most grateful for any information concerning him. Address Mrs. A. J. Homsey, 66 Borgia Street, Sudbury, Ontario, Canada.

CUNNINGHAM, OPAL and RALPH.—The children of Alice Green and Uriah Cunningham. The father was killed in a dynamite explosion in Tacoma, Washington, in 1909 or 1910. When last heard from their mother was in Olympia, Washington. They are my cousins, and I would be glad for any news of them. Kindly address Miss Leona Cunningham, 303 West Sycamore Street, Vincennes, Indiana.



WHERE TO GO and How to GET THERE

By JOHN NORTH

We aim in this department to give practical help to readers. The service offered includes accurate information about the West, its ranches, mines, homestead lands, mountains and plains, as well as the facts about any features of Western life. We will tell you also how to reach the particular place in which you are interested. Don't hesitate to write to us, for we are always glad to assist you to the best of our ability.

Address all communications to John North, care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

THE Land of the Midnight Sun makes a strong appeal to Westerners, and hardly a week passes that we do not receive several letters from readers who plan to journey up to that Territory. Some of these hombres are seeking gold, others are trappers or fishermen, while still others are prospective homesteaders. Jake H., of Portland, Oregon, does not say what his intentions are, but he craves

some facts about a certain Alaska town.

"Being a foot-loose male, with a mighty devouring desire for some real adventure and pioneer living, I'm bound for Alaska in the near future, Mr. North. Can you hand out any facts about the town of Wrangell? I plan to stop there for a spell, and would sort of like to know what I'll be up against. Is there any trapping carried on in that section?"

We'll say, first of all, that you will be up against a mighty thrilling experience, Jake, for Wrangell is a plumb fascinating spot. Situated at the mouth of the Stikine River on Etolin Bay, this town, which has a population of fifteen hundred, is one of the oldest communities in south-eastern Alaska. As soon as you arrive, you'll be taken by the sight of the numerous totem poles. And speaking of such things, be sure to visit the original home of Chief Shakes, which is still intact, for here you will see a fine display of ancient Indian relics.

Wrangell also supports several thriving industries, including a sawmill, which cuts large quantities of Sitka spruce used in airplane construction, and several salmon, crab, and shrimp canneries.

Yes, indeed, there is considerable trapping and hunting carried on in the country back of Wrangell. In fact, a quarter of a million dollars' worth of furs passes through this port annually. This big-game country may be explored in comfort on river boats, which operate on the Stikine River for about one hundred and fifty miles to Telegraph Creek, in British Columbia. Navigation on the river opens around April twenty-fifth. The round trip to Telegraph Creek may be made in three days. Big game abounds in this district, and hunters seldom return without a full bag.

Well, we all like to get what we go after, whether it is a grizzly or a gold nugget. The latter is the quest that is luring John A., of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, westward.

"All this talk of panning for gold in the West has got me sort of excited on the subject, Mr. North, so I'm naturally turning to you for a few tips as to where to go. Some folks recommend the Mother Lode country of California; others suggest the Grants Pass section of Ore-

gon, while still others say to make tracks to the banks of the Salmon in Idaho. Isn't there an old-timer among your readers who has had some personal experience prospecting through these sections and is kind-hearted enough to hand out some tips to a greenhorn?"

When we received this letter from John A., we just naturally

thought of our old friend, "Prospector Slim," and so we sat right down and sent him an S O S. This is his answer, and we think you'll all agree that he not only knows his West, but that he has a mighty kind heart as well.

"I received your letter, Mr. North, while I was on the Mother Lode at Sonora, central California, pocket hunting with a mining engineer from New York. As I am booked to go on the desert next month with a chap who is now in Honolulu, I had to come home to get ready. My immediate job is to

SPECIAL NOTICE

A LITTLE CABIN IN THE WOODS

Wouldn't you like a cosy little cabin of your own, hidden away in the tall woods? Perhaps you know of some ideal spot by the side of a tumbling mountain stream or nestled against a friendly green hill, where you have pitched a tent in the past and would now like to build a shack for permanent use? If so, the editor of this department is the man to help you. For simple directions for building a log cabin write John North, care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

go out and try and round up my burros, which are roaming around somewhere near Mojave, and that's some job.

"In the meantime, I'm mighty glad to hand that greenhorn, John A., a few tips about prospecting. Really all sections are good mining for different kinds of mining. It's hard to say which is best, although I have been at this game for thirty years and have covered the map from Cape Horn to Alaska, and should know a thing or two. If John A. wants to snipe in a creek or river, central California, on the Feather, American, or Yuba, is best for a novice.

"John A. must realize, however, that mining is a trade, like anything else, and that it takes years of experience to learn it. For lode mining, the Mother Lode section is good; also for pocket work. Pocket mining takes years of experience, however, and one learns something new every time he goes out. One needs to be a geologist to be a good pocket man. Now you say how about the Grants Pass section, John A. Well, it's O. K. for pockets and hard-rock men, but no good for a novice. Not much placer left there that's easy to get out. Curry County offers some inducements, but it's hard to prospect on account of being covered with so much underbrush. In fact, all Oregon is hard going for a greenhorn; too many trees and brush. Idaho, on the Salmon or Clearwater, is better country for a beginner.

"Now, Mr. North, I'm always mighty glad to answer letters on the mining sections of the West and can also give routes telling folks how to reach them. So, if any of your readers want any information, they can just write to me in care of you, en-

closing a self-addressed envelope for a reply."

We'll say that shows a mighty generous spirit! So send in your letters to Prospector Slim, all of you would-be miners, and we'll forward them pronto.

It seems that adventurers and prospectors are always with us, and now, with spring inviting everybody outdoors, there is a goodly number of campers. Don P., of Detroit, Michigan, wants some tips about the camping possibilities in a certain part of Canada.

"I plan to spend several months camping this spring and summer, Mr. North, and am trying to locate some attractive spots. Being very keen about the water, I'm looking for a site along a lake or stream of some sort. The Blue Water country of Canada has been recommended to me as an ideal section. Can you tell me where it is? I'd also like some tips about the proper outfit to take along."

If you will get out a map and trace the south shore of Lake Huron from Sarnia to Georgian Bay, you will be looking at the Blue Water country of Ontario, Don. This is a very happy title for this section, for the bluest of waters lap the winding shores of Lake Huron. The Canadian National Railway trains tap this attractive vacation region at half a score of points, and each terminus opens up a widespread playground along the matchless beaches that mark this shore.

We haven't space here to print a list of the proper equipment for a camping trip, so we are mailing this information to Don. If other campers would like a copy of our free printed directions telling how to outfit for a camping trip, it will be sent to them upon request.

GUNS AND GUNNERS

By CHARLES E. CHAPEL

Lieutenant, U. S. Marine Corps



The foremost authorities on ballistics and the principal firearms manufacturers are cooperating to make this department a success. We shall be glad to answer any letters regarding firearms if accompanied by a stamped and addressed envelope. Address your letters to Lieutenant Charles E. Chapel, care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

THE identification of antique arms follows no known rules. An old flintlock pistol bearing the motto, "*Ich dien*," might be mistakenly accepted as the product of some early German principedom if the owner did not know that this is the motto of the Prince of Wales and appears on the pistol with the royal crest. The words are German, and mean "I serve," but here is an excellent example of the perils of pursuing collecting as a hobby.

Age has little to do with the value of a weapon. There are in existence Indian war clubs five hundred years old that are not worth as much as some bows and arrows made less than a century ago. The Paterson Colts are nearly worth their weight

in gold while many blunderbusses of early colonial days hardly bring enough when put up at auction to pay the auctioneer.

Condition obviously plays an important part in valuation; a mass of rust holds little charm for the collector who loves to display his acquisitions, but the big, practical factor in the sale of museum pieces is neither age nor condition, nor is it always scarcity; it is the desire of the purchaser and his ability to pay any amount to obtain his wants. This holds true with stamps, coins, furniture, dishes, paintings, rugs, and weapons. If you readers seek information about your forefather's firearms, we can give it, but value is only a hazy conjecture at the best.

Springfield shoulder arms.

H. F. JOHNSON, Mount Vernon, New York: To tell the whole fascinating story of the military rifles of the United States would take too long for this department, but the nearest big library should have books by Claud E. Fuller, called "Springfield Shoulder Arms," and "The Breechloader in the Service." These will trace the development of army rifles from the birth of the republic to our own day. Charles Winthrop Sawyer's three volumes have much of this material, but they are hard to find in the average library.

Barrel finish.

P. A. FINLEY, Knoxville, Tennessee: Bluing barrels is accomplished by oxidation of the surface by heat. Browning is oxidation by acids. Oil blacking and blazing-off are done by heating the parts, dipping in oil, and then burning off the oil left after draining. This leaves a carbonaceous deposit.

Stocks.

L. D. WINTERS, Meridan, Connecticut: The best stocks are of walnut, selected for its straight grain, and delivered square-cut and roughly to form. Ordinarily three years is the seasoning period. A revolving iron dummy having the shape of the stock is the guide for the lathe that turns out the stocks.

Valuable pamphlets for gun fans.

The United States government printing office in Washington, D. C., supplies valuable pamphlets on a number of subjects to citizens who forward the proper amount to the Superintendent of Public Documents, in that office. Among those pamphlets are some that relate to guns and gunners. We cannot be responsible for any changes in governmental rules for the distribution of this material, but believe that the purchaser will be pleased.

The two which will suit the most gun fans will be: "Basic Field Manual, Volume III, Part I, Chapter I, Rifle Marksmanship," printed March 1, 1932, price twenty-five cents; and "Basic Field Manual, Volume III, Part I, Chapter III, Automatic Pistol Marksmanship," printed April 5, 1932, price fifteen cents. These are new, pocket-size, revised pamphlets which supersede the old "Training Regulations," which we recommended to our readers before the advent of the new editions. Practically everything in these booklets has been discussed in these pages at one time or another, but they do afford the best handy references on marksmanship of the .30-caliber rifle and the .45-caliber automatic pistol, and the principles which apply to those weapons can be used in shooting other calibers and models.

Peters's and Colt's have resumed sending free booklets to our readers. If you have not received these interesting pamphlets, write us now, and we will put your name on the mailing list.

The government supply of Krag and Russian rifles is exhausted, but the U. S. Rifle (Enfield), Model 1917, Caliber .30, is sold to *citizens of the United States* for \$8.85, under certain restrictions which will be explained to readers who send us a stamped and addressed envelope.



HUNDREDS Have ALREADY Won Big Cash Rewards
Would YOU, TOO, Like to
WIN
\$2,500
or Buick Sedan and \$1,000



Now Hundreds More Prizes Being Given ANYBODY MAY WIN

This is our sensational new way to advertise—giving away big cash prizes—besides thousands in EXTRA cash rewards. Not a cent of your money needed now or ever to win \$2,500.

Can YOU Find 4 Dogs in Picture Above?

Tell me quick! Some are upside down. Some look straight at you. Hundreds have won big cash rewards in other campaigns conducted by men in this firm. Here are a few. Mrs. Kate Needham, a housewife in Oregon won \$4,705. Ira Burroughs, past 70 years old in a little Texas town won \$2,770. Anna Jacobson in a small New York town won over \$5,000. Sister M. Crecence in Arkansas won \$1,490. Now comes your chance. You are GUARANTEED to win a cash reward if you take an active part. Not a lottery. No luck needed. Hurry—get started quick by finding 4 dogs. Not a cent of your money needed to buy anything. Big cash rewards are being won every day. In addition to giving Buick I will pay

\$1,000.00 EXTRA
for Promptness

to First Prize winner. Not only one person, but hundreds will be rewarded. In case of ties, duplicate prizes will be given. All the money to pay prizes is in the Bankers Trust Co. at Des Moines. I invite you to look us up through any bank in Des Moines, any credit agency, business house, magazine, newspaper, railroad.

\$10,000.00 REWARD will be paid to any worthy charity if anyone can prove that we do not really give away all these thousands of dollars in cash prizes—or that all this prize money is not on deposit in the bank.

WRITE QUICK

Send no money. Mark dogs found, clip picture, mail quick—or write on penny post-card how many dogs you find. For replying I will tell you how you may also win big EXTRA cash rewards and \$2,500 too. Answer NOW! Tell me which you would prefer to win—\$2,500 all cash or Buick and \$1,000.

Merrold Johnson, Mgr. Dept. 41, Des Moines, Iowa.

Classified Advertising

Patents and Lawyers

PATENTS—Reasonable terms. Free Book and advice. L. F. Randolph, Dept. 513, Washington, D. C.

Detectives Wanted—Instructions

DETECTIVES EARN BIG MONEY. Great demand. Excellent opportunity. Experience unnecessary. Particulars free. Write George Wagoner, 2640-P Broadway, New York.

Mushroom Growing

\$5 TO \$50 WEEKLY. Grow fancy "White Queen" Mushrooms in cellar or shed. Free Mushroom Book tells how. American Mushroom Industries Ltd., Dept. 526, Toronto, Ont.

Song Writers

FAME AND FORTUNE have been made from songs through talking pictures, radio, phonograph, music publishers. "Hit" writers revise, arrange, compose music to lyrics, lyrics to your music. We submit to studios and publishers. Free report. Booklet free. Universal Song Service, 676 Meyer Bldg., Hollywood, Calif.

Business Instructions

NEW WRITERS! Cash for material for publication. Complete instructions furnished. Write National Press Association, S-3806 Beverly, Los Angeles, Calif.

Finger Print Protection

"SMITH'S FINGER PRINT INSTRUCTIONS". By Willis D. Smith. Book contains 39 pages, 25 illustrations. Learn to take, read, and compare finger prints; how to use finger, foot, and palm prints to protect your interests. Sent prepaid for 25c in coin. National Protective Registry, Sapulpa, Okla.

Story Ideas

STORIES FOR TALKING PICTURES—MAGAZINES bring lucrative returns. We accept stories any form for FREE READING & REPORT. Experienced writers criticize, copyright & revise in professional form. Our Sales Service selling consistent percentage stories to Magazines & Hollywood Studios. Send for FREE BOOKLET. UNIVERSAL SCENARIO CO., 453 Meyer Bldg., Hollywood, Calif.

Typewriters

TYPEWRITER BARGAINS—Genuine late model Underwoods, Royals, Remingtons, L. C. Smiths refinished \$100 office models at 60% saving. Fully guaranteed—10 day trial—easy terms—10c a day. Free catalog. International Typewriter Exchange Dept. C312 231 West Monroe St., Chicago.



GEE... I'd sure like to have real **HE-MAN** muscles!

So would I, but it takes a long while



CHARLES ATLAS

Holder of the title "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man" won in open competition in the only national and international contest held during the past 15 years.

"Bunk!"
—says
CHARLES ATLAS

"I'll Prove in the first 7 days YOU can have a Body like Mine!"

[No other Physical Instructor in the World has ever DARED to make the offer he makes in this announcement.]

DON'T get the idea that it takes a lot of time and hard work for you to get smashing strength and powerful muscular development! And don't fool yourself into thinking that you need dumb-bells, stretchers or any other such contraptions!

Both these ideas are all bunk—and I have PROVED it. All I need is 7 days to prove what I can do for you! And I don't need any apparatus either. In fact, I have no sympathy with apparatus at all—don't believe in it. It is artificial—and it may strain your heart or other vital organs for life!

NATURAL Methods Are All I Need

On this page you will see an actual photo of how I look to-



day. This picture has not been changed in any way. No muscles have been "painted on." This photograph is the camera's honest proof of what I have done for MY body. I myself am ready to prove what my secret of Dynamic Tension can do for YOURS!

To look at me now you wouldn't recognize me as the same man I was a few years ago. Then I was a physical wreck, a 97-pound weakling—flat chested, spindly legs, arms and legs like pipestems.

I was worried—and I had a right to be. I decided to study

myself, to do something about my body. Then I made a discovery. I found a new way to build myself up. A way that was simple, natural, quick and sure! "Dynamic Tension" is what I called it. I put this secret to work. And in a short time I had the kind of body you see here—the body which has twice won the title of "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

This Secret Has Helped Thousands

Thousands of other fellows now know this secret, too—and know from their own personal experience what Dynamic Tension has done for them. When they turned to me for advice, they were just as frail and puny as I once was. Now they are life-sized examples of what a man can and ought to be—with mighty energy, tireless endurance, and muscles that stand out like bridge-cables all over their bodies.

I have written an in'creasing booklet, filled with pictures, which tells my story—and theirs. I would like to send you a copy of it entirely free.

Let Me Send You My Free Book

I'd like you to know what Dynamic Tension has done for me—what it has done for others—and what it can do for you! This little coupon will bring you my free book, which tells all about it. There is no cost or obligation of any kind—and no one will call upon you.

I just want to put into your hands proof that I can do for you what I have done for so many thousands of others: give you broad, powerful shoulders, biceps that bulge with smashing strength, a chest which stands out solid, and muscular, and an evenly-developed body that will make others look like dwarfs next to you.

Will you gamble a stamp to win a

body like mine? Then mail this coupon TODAY! CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 38-D, 133 East 23rd St., N. Y. C.

CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 38-D
133 East 23rd Street, New York City

I want the proof that your system of Dynamic Tension will make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscle development. Send me your free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength."

Name
(Please print or write plainly)
Address
City State

WHO'D BELIEVE THEY CALLED ME SKINNY 4 MONTHS AGO!



Posed by professional models

Special QUICK WAY TO PUT POUNDS ON FAST!

Astonishing gains with new double tonic. Richest imported brewers' ale yeast now concentrated 7 times and combined with iron. Gives 5 to 15 lbs. in a few weeks

NOW there's no need to have people calling you "skinny" and losing all your chances of making and keeping friends. Here's a new, easy treatment that is giving thousands solid, healthy flesh and attractive curves—in just a few weeks.

As you know, doctors for years have prescribed yeast to build up health for rundown men and women. But now with this new discovery you can get far greater tonic results than with ordinary yeast—regain health, and in addition put on pounds of solid flesh—and in a far shorter time.

Not only are thousands quickly gaining beauty-bringing pounds, but also clear, radiant skin, freedom from indigestion and constipation, new pep.

Concentrated 7 times

This amazing new product, Ironized Yeast, is made from specially cultured brewers' ale yeast, imported from Europe

—the richest yeast known—which by a new process is concentrated 7 times—made 7 times more powerful.

But that is not all! This marvelous health-building yeast is then ironized with 3 kinds of strengthening iron.

Day after day, as you take Ironized Yeast, watch ugly, gawky angles fill out, flat chest develop and skinny limbs round out attractively. And with this will come a radiantly clear skin, new health—you're an entirely new person.

Results guaranteed

No matter how skinny and weak you may be, this marvelous new Ironized Yeast should build you up in a few short weeks as it has thousands of others. If you are not delighted with the results of the very first package, your money instantly refunded.

Special FREE offer!

To start you building up your health *right away*, we make this absolutely FREE offer. Purchase a package of Ironized Yeast at once, cut out the seal on the box and mail it to us with a clipping of this paragraph. We will send you a fascinating new book on health, "New Facts About Your Body", by a well-known authority. Remember, results are guaranteed with the very first package—or money refunded. At all druggists. Ironized Yeast Co., Dept. 502, Atlanta, Ga.