No. 4, Vol. 30 TWICE-A-MONTH 15 CENTS

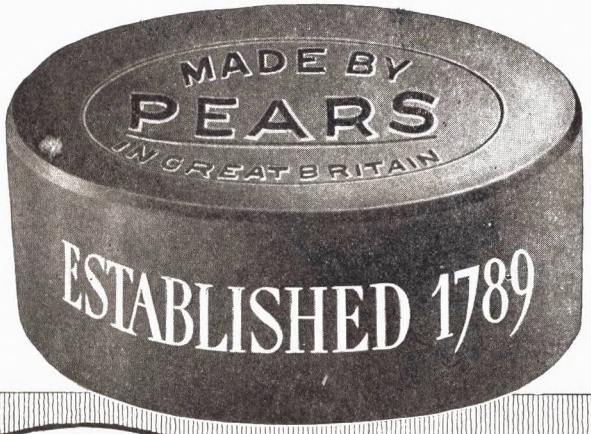
The Popular Magazine

FIRST DEC. NUMBER OUT-NOV. 7, 1913

ON THE MEXICAN BORDER

Good Old "Pears"

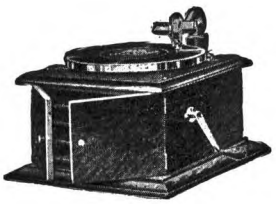
Par Excellence, the Soap for the Complexion. Indeed a veritable *Soap de Luxe.* So long ago as 1789 PEARS was supreme, and to-day, after 124 years of trial, the public still regard it as



Matchless for the Complexion

THE GREAT ENGLISH COMPLEXION SOAP

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



Victor-Victrola IV, $15
Oak

Victor-Victrola VIII, $40
Mahogany or oak

Will there be a Victrola in your home this Christmas?

You can search the whole world over and not find another gift that will bring so much pleasure to every member of the family.

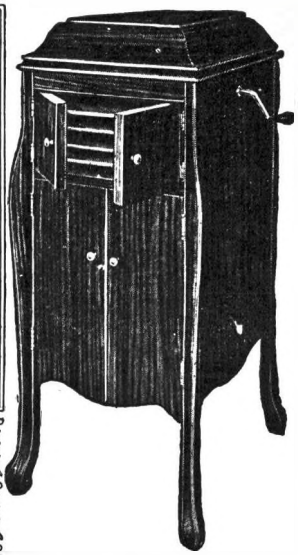
Any Victor dealer in any city in the world will gladly play any music you wish to hear and demonstrate to you the wonderful Victor-Victrola.

$15 $25 $40 $50 $75 $100 $150 $200

Victor Talking Machine Co.
Camden, N. J., U. S. A.

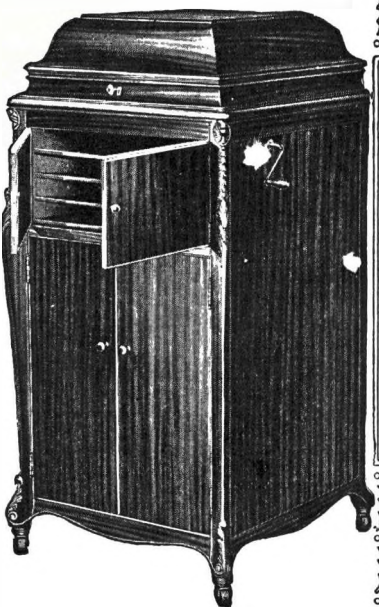
Berliner Gramophone Co., Montreal, Canadian Distributors

Always use Victor Machines with Victor Records and Victor Needles—*the combination*. There is no other way to get the unequaled Victor tone.



Victor-Victrola X, $75
Mahogany or oak

New Victor Records demonstrated at all dealers on the 28th of each month



Victor-Victrola XVI, $200
Mahogany or quartered oak

Don't Grope for Words

Give Grenville Kleiser (former Yale Instructor) 15 minutes daily and

He Will Give You a Mastery of Words

There are no old-fashioned wearisome rules of grammar to memorize. By an entirely new plan you absorb and immediately apply the fruits of years of teaching experience which are comprest into twenty intimate home lessons.

If you will devote 15 minutes daily to this original Course you will quickly and surely learn to

Enlarge Your Stock of Words—

Use the Right Word in the Right Place—

Write Tactful, Forceful Letters, Advertisements, Stories, Sermons, Treatises, etc.—

Become an Engaging Conversationalist—

Enter Good Society—

Be a Man of Culture, Power, and Influence in Your Community.

JOHN BURROUGHS, famous Naturalist and Writer: "I see valuable and helpful hints in these lessons. Any young man or woman who has an undeveloped literary talent ought to profit greatly by this Course."

It matters not what you are doing in the world, a knowledge of good English is *absolutely necessary* if you would achieve the *biggest success*. "Good English is good business"—and it will *pay* you better than any other accomplishment.

Let us send you by mail full particulars of this great Course. Doing so does not obligate you in anyway, therefore please

SIGN AND MAIL THIS COUPON *NOW*

FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY, Dept. 874 New York.
Please send full information regarding Grenville Kleiser's Correspondence Course in Good English.

Name.....

Local Address .....
Street and No. or, R. F. D.

Post Office.....

Date ..... *State*.....

You Can Enter the Government Service

The Government is a good paymaster, and opportunities for Government positions are growing every day.

The Parcel Post is one department where more and more help is needed.

Any American over 18, is eligible for a position.

The International Correspondence Schools have prepared over a thousand applicants to pass the Civil Service examinations. They can help you get one.

Write for the free I. C. S. Civil Service Book, and learn how the I. C. S. can give you the knowledge necessary to qualify for a Government position.

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS,
Box 855 B **Scranton, Pa.**

9,059-Word Business Book Free

Simply send us a postal and ask for our free illustrated 9,059-word Business Booklet which tells how priceless Business Experience, squeezed from the lives of 112 big, broad, brainy business men, may be made yours—yours to boost your salary, to increase your profits. This free book deals with

—How to manage a business
—How to sell goods
—How to get money by mail
—How to buy at rock-bottom
—How to collect money
—How to stop cost leaks
—How to train and handle men
—How to get and hold a position
—How to advertise a business
—How to devise office methods

Sending for this free book binds you to nothing, involves you in no obligation; yet it may be the means of starting you on a broader career. Surely you will not deny yourself this privilege, when it involves only the risk of a postal—a penny! Simply say "Send on your 9,059-word Booklet". Send to

SYSTEM, Dept. 38, Wabash Ave. and Madison St., Chicago

Stop Forgetting!

Good memory is absolutely essential to success, for *memory is power*. Be successful—*Stop Forgetting!* Begin your *real* training at once.

The Dickson Method of Memory Training

makes you *"Forget Proof."* develops concentration, will, self-confidence, quick thought, ready speech. Write today for my free book, "How to Remember" —faces, names, studies, also how to secure *FREE*, a copy of my $2.00 DeLuxe book, "How to Speak in Public." Address

Dickson Memory School, 960 Auditorium Bldg., Chicago.

LEARN TO WRITE ADVERTISEMENTS **EARN $25 to $100 A WEEK**

We can positively show you by mail How to Increase Your Salary. Book mailed free. **PAGE-DAVIS CO., 12171 Page Building, Chicago, Ill. ,or 150 Nassau Street, New York**

LEARN JEWELERS' ENGRAVING

A high salaried and easily learned trade, taught thoroughly by mail. We will teach the beginner better engraving than he can gain in years of rigid apprenticeship. We will also improve the skill of any engraver. Send for our catalog. **The Engraving School, 12171 Page Bldg., Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.**

YOU CAN WRITE A SHORT STORY. Beginners learn thoroughly under our perfect method; many sell their stories before completing the course. We help those who want to sell their stories. Write for particulars. **School of Short-Story Writing, Dept. 12171 Page Building, Chicago**

BE AN ILLUSTRATOR. by mail how to draw for magazines and newspapers. Send for Catalog.

Learn to draw. We will teach you
School of Illustration, 71 Page Bldg. Chicago, Ill.

Sunshine Lamp 300 Candle Power FREE!

To Try in Your Own Home

Turns night into day. Gives better light than gas, electricity or 18 ordinary lamps at one-tenth the cost. For Homes, Stores, Halls, Churches. A child can carry it. Makes its own light from common gasoline. Absolutely SAFE.

COSTS 1 CENT A NIGHT

We want one person in each locality to whom we can refer new customers. Take advantage of our SPECIAL FREE TRIAL OFFER. **Agents Wanted.**

SUNSHINE SAFETY LAMP CO.
602 Factory Bldg. Kansas City, Mo.

Mostly Sniffles

"Life," says O. Henry, "is made up of sobs, sniffles and smiles—mostly sniffles."

YOU remember that story in Texas — where he tells — "Santa was lyin' in bed pretty sick." "I've heard you ridin' across the grass for hours, Webb," she says. "You saw the sign?" she whispers. "The minute I hit camp," says I. "'Twas marked on the bag of potatoes and onions." "They're always together in life," says she soft-like. "They go well together," I says, "in a stew." "I mean hearts and crosses," says Santa. "Our sign—to love and to suffer—that's what they mean."

The Balzac of the United States

O. Henry

The Dickens of America

It is work like this that has caused the world to place O. Henry first in American letters—a classic already—peer of Dickens and Balzac, Hugo and Maupassant, Kipling and Thackeray. Before it is too late, send the coupon without money for O. Henry's 274 short stories and his long novel. Send the coupon for 179 stories and the long novel by Kipling free.

$125 Original Price

O. Henry—Prince of Entertainers—Master of the Unexpected Ending—Bohemian by instinct Nomad by nature—American to the finger tips—it is no wonder that the first edition of his work sold for $125 a set. It is no wonder that scholars and plain people and foreign nations and all America call him great—it is no wonder that press of national demand has forced us to extend this offer once more—when we intended to close it last month.

The American World Meets in "O. Henry's" Pages and Gets to Know Itself Better.

He tells why himself in simple fashion. "They say I know New York well. Just change 23rd Street in one of my New York stories to Main Street, rub out the Flatiron Building, and put in the Town Hall, then the story will fit just as truly elsewhere. So long as a story is true to life, the mere change of local color will set it in the East, West, South or North. The characters in the 'Arabian Nights' parade up and down Broadway at midday, or on Main Street in any town."

This low-priced offer with the Kipling FREE was made to introduce O. Henry to the American public—but when 60,000 people rushed at once to get this complete edition at the low price—we knew that O. Henry needed no introducing—the American public already knew and loved him. So this offer must close at once. Act promptly and get your set—now—while you can, and get the Kipling FREE.

Send Coupon Without Money for 18 Volumes Free on Approval

It brings both sets—the Kipling and the O. Henry — all charges prepaid — on approval. **O. Henry** in 12 volumes, complete, bound in green silk cloth, gold tops and backs, full of illustrations—the **Kipling** in 6 volumes bound in red silk cloth, gold tops and backs.

If you don't love the world better when you've read them,—send all the 18 volumes back. Otherwise 25 cents a week pays for the O. Henry. The Kipling is FREE. Send the coupon today, while the offer is still good.

REVIEW OF REVIEWS CO., 30 Irving Place, NEW YORK

Pop. 12-13

Review of Reviews
30 Irving Place, New York

Send me, on approval, charges paid by you, O. Henry's works in 12 volumes, gold tops. Also the 6-volume set of Kipling, bound in cloth. If I keep the books, I will remit $1 per month for 15 months for the O. Henry set only and retain the Kipling set without charge. Otherwise I will, within ten days, return both sets at your expense.

Name .....

Address .....

Occupation .....

The beautiful three-quarter leather edition of O. Henry costs only a few cents more a volume and has proved a favorite binding. For this luxurious binding, change payments to $1.50 a month for 13 months.

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING SECTION

Rate, $1.25 a line, or $2.61¼ a line, which includes AINSLEE'S and SMITH'S Magazines, making a total of 4,000,000 readers—the cheapest and best Classified Advertising medium on the market. Next issue of POPULAR closes Nov. 11th.

Agents & Help Wanted

FREE ILLUSTRATED BOOK tells of about 300,000 protected positions in U. S. service. Thousands of vacancies every year. There is a big chance here for you, sure and generous pay, lifetime employment. Just ask for booklet S 11. No obligation. Earl Hopkins, Washington, D. C.

GOVERNMENT positions pay big money. Get prepared for "exams" by former U. S. Civil Service Examiner. Free booklet. Patterson Civil Service School, Box Y, Rochester, N. Y.

AGENTS: Kerosene (Coal Oil) Self Heating Iron. Brand new. Absolutely safe, odorless, a winner. Every home needs it. Low priced. Big profits. Your territory open. Thomas Iron Co., 160 Neal St. Dayton, Ohio.

ABSOLUTELY FREE for 30 days only. One dozen guaranteed U. S. Fire Extinguishers. Secure territory now. Special offer given to but one representative in each section. United Mfg. Co., 1023 Jefferson, Toledo, O.

AGENTS — Handkerchiefs, Dress Goods. Carleton made $8.00 one afternoon; Mrs. Bosworth $25.00 in two days. Free Samples. Credit. Stamp brings particulars. Freeport Mfg. Company, 45 Main St., Brooklyn, N.Y.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT is again writing for Scribner's. Magazine subscription solicitors can earn big commissions. Inquire Desk 62, Scribner's Magazine, 597 Fifth Ave., New York.

AGENTS—$35 to $75 a week income. New invention. Scrubs, takes up water. No wringing, no cloths, less work. Big sales—big profits. Exclusive territory. Write today. Special terms. Pirrung Mfg. Co., Dept. 307, Chicago, Ill.

G. STRATTON, Denver, made net profit $134.40 on our rugs in 6 days. Working sample these rugs with colored illustration; other patterns forwarded prepaid for $1.00. Reference, Bolyston Nat'l Bank, Boston, Dundee Mfg. Co., 46 Chauncy St., Boston, Mass.

WANTED—Investigators and Detectives. $150.00 to $300.00 per month. Free particulars. National Detective Agency, Dept. W 154, Chicago.

AGENTS WANTED; best paving agency proposition in U. S.; assures you $1500 yearly; inexperienced taught how to make $75 to $200 monthly; let us show you. Novelty Cutlery Co., 14 Bar St., Canton, O.

Agents and Help Wanted—Continued.

AGENTS—SOMETHING NEW—Fastest sellers and quickest repeater on earth. Permanent profitable business. Good for $50 to $75 a week. Write for particulars. American Products Co., 6721 Sycamore Street, Cincinnati, O.

AGENTS—$300 every month selling our wonderful 7-piece Kitchen Set. Send for sworn statement of $12 daily profit. Outfit free. Thomas Mfg. Co., 260 Third St., Dayton, O.

$3000 YEARLY in your backyard; No ginseng, mushroom dope. "Poultry Pointers," with its "Egg Schemes" and city lot "Side Issue Plans," is creating excitement and making money for its subscribers. Nothing else like it on Earth; in a class by itself. Let this Magazine and its editors "Boost" you to Success. Two months trial subscription, 10 cents. Poultry Pointers Pub. Co., 53 Fuller Bldg., Kalamazoo, Mich.

SELL hosiery; guaranteed against holes or new hose free; build a permanent trade; big profits; experience unnecessary. International Mills, Dept. A, West Phila., Pa.

$65 to $150 MONTH PAID MEN AND WOMEN. Government Jobs. List of positions available; free. Franklin Institute, Dep't W 6, Rochester, N. Y.

Games & Entertainment

PLAYS, Vaudeville Sketches, Monologues, Dialogues, Speakers, Minstrel Material, Jokes, Recitations, Tableaux, Drills, Entertainments. Make Up Goods. Large Catalog Free. T. S. Denison & Co., Dept. 19, Chicago

Motion Picture Plays

WRITE Moving Picture Plays; $50 each; all or spare time; correspondence course unnecessary; details free. Atlas Publishing Co., 313, Cincinnati, O.

IDEAS WANTED for Photoplays. We show you how to write and where to sell them. Free booklet. Penn Ass'n. Heed Bldg., Phila., Pa., Dept. F.

Short Stories

MAKE MONEY WRITING short stories or for papers. Big pay. Send for Free Booklet; tells how. Dept. P. United Press Syndicate, San Francisco.

Music and Song Poems

SONG-WRITERS, Composers send us your words or music, Songs, Waltzes, Two-steps, Rags. We revise, arrange and publish on royalty. P. J. Howley Music Co., Dep. 9, 102 W. 42d St., N. Y.

SONG POEMS Wanted—Send us words or music. Big money in successful Songs. Book Free. Hayworth Music Pub. Co., 614 G, Washington, D. C.

SONG POEMS WANTED—Send us your song poems or melodies. A hit will bring big money. Proposition Positively Unequalled. Available work accepted for publication and copyright secured in your name. Our Composing Staff Absolutely Best of Any Company of Its Kind. Instructive booklet free. Marks-Goldsmith Co., Dept. 15, Washington, D. C.

SONG POEMS WANTED. I've paid writers thousands in royalties. Send me samples of your work for free criticism. If available, will publish under fairest, most liberal contract ever offered. Your success largely depends upon selecting an absolutely reliable, competent, and successful publisher. New York is recognized market for songs and best place to publish. I composed and published many of the "greatest hits." Est. 16 years. Free Booklet. John T. Hall, 18 Columbus Circle, New York.

JUST PUBLISHED—"TWO HUSH-SONGS" by Alban W. Cooper: Mailed free, 25 cents from Composer: Y. M. C. A. New London, Conn.

DO you write poems or compose melodies? Let me know! No "publishing scheme," but an honest proposition. H. Bauer, 135 E. 34 St., N. Y.

Patents and Lawyers

PATENTS SECURED OR FEE returned. Send sketch for free report as to patentability. Guide Book and What to Invent, with valuable List of Inventions Wanted, sent free. One Million Dollars offered for one Invention. Patents secured by us advertised free in World's Progress, sample free. Victor J. Evans & Co., Washington, D. C.

PATENTS THAT PROTECT AND PAY. Advice and books free. Highest references. Best results. Promptness assured. Send sketch or model for free search. Watson E. Coleman, Patent Lawyer, 624 F Street, Washington, D. C.

Business Opportunities

FREE FOR SIX MONTHS.—My Special offer to introduce my magazine "Investing for Profit." It is worth $10 a copy to anyone who has been getting poorer while the rich, richer. It demonstrates the real earning power of money, and shows how anyone, no matter how poor, Can acquire riches. Investing for Profit is the only progressive financial journal published. It shows how $100 grows to $2,200. Write Now and I'll send it six months free. H. L. Barber, 408, 20 W. Jackson Blvd., Chicago.

WOULD you like to own a good paying mail order business? We have a line that gets repeat orders all the time; you can start in spare time; invest a dollar or two a week and soon own a nice business of your own. Write for particulars. Nadico, 1659 Belmont Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Coins, Stamps, Etc.

$2. to $600. paid for hundreds of old coins dated before 1895. Send 10c at once for New Illus'td Coin Value Book, 4x7, showing prices we guarantee to pay. Get posted. Clarke & Co., Coin Dealers, Box 132, Le Roy, N. Y.

$1.00 to $1000.00 cash paid for all rare money to date. Many valuable coins in circulation. Get posted. Send stamp for large illustrated coin circular. It may mean much profit to you. You certainly have nothing to lose. Send Now. Numismatic Bank, of Texas, Dept. 25, Ft. Worth, Texas.

TRADE DOLLAR 1885 SOLD FOR $1,140; 20 cent 1876 CC, $250; 1 gold 1861 D, $230; $3—1870 S, $1.450. Equally high Premiums on thousands of Coins, Stamps, Books, Paper Money. Illustrated Circular Free. Von Bergen, Dept. K, Boston, Mass.

Telegraphy

THE Omnigraph Automatic Transmitter. Sends you telegraph messages. Teaches in the shortest time. 5 styles $2 up. Circular free. Omnigraph Mfg. Co., 39 N Cortlandt St., N. Y.

Typewriters

AGENTS PRICES. One Machine at Wholesale price to introduce our goods. Bargains in every make. Typewriters for $5.00 up. Standard Typewriter Exchange, 31 Park Row, New York.

TYPEWRITER—All makes—Agents wanted, prices from $5.00 to $70.00. All guaranteed. Free trial allowed. Send for illustrated catalogue. Ribbons 4 for $1.00. Carbons $1.00 per 100. Harlem Typewriter Exchange, Dept. P 27, 217 W. 125th. New York.

SHORTHAND IN 30 DAYS

We absolutely guarantee to teach shorthand complete in only thirty days. You can learn in spare time in your own home, no matter where you live. No need to spend months as with old systems. Boyd's Syllabic System is easy to learn—easy to write—easy to read. Simple. Practical. Speedy. Sure. No ruled lines—no positions—no shading as in other systems. No long lists of word signs to confuse. Only nine characters to learn and you have the entire English language at your absolute command.

The best system for stenographers, private secretaries, newspaper reporters and railroad men. Lawyers, ministers, teachers, physicians, literary folk and business men and women may now learn shorthand for their own use. Does not take continual daily pratice as with other systems. Our graduates hold high grade positions everywhere. Send to-day for booklets, testimonials, etc.

CHICAGO CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
975 Chicago Opera House Block, Chicago, Ill.

SALESMEN

Are paid Larger Salaries than any other class of men

Hundreds of good positions now open. We will teach you to be a high grade Salesman by mail in eight weeks and assure you offers of good positions where you can easily earn good wages while you are learning. Write today for particulars, list of good openings and testimonials from hundreds of our students who are earning from $100.00 to $500.00 a month and expenses.

Address (nearest office) Dept. 108

National Salesmen's Training Association

New York Chicago Kansas City San Francisco

Dr. Esenwein

Short-Story Writing

A course of forty lessons in the history, form, structure, and writing of the Short-Story, taught by Dr. J. Berg Esenwein, Editor Lippincott's Magazine. *Over one hundred Home Study Courses under Professors in Harvard, Brown, Cornell and leading colleges.*

250 page catalog free. Write to-day.

The Home Correspondence School
Dept. 261, Springfield, Mass.

FREE BOOK ON MOTORING

A NEW IDEA OF TEACHING BY MAIL WITH DYKE'S WORKING MODELS CHARTS, MANIKINS, ETC.

Explains how we can start YOU in the Auto Business as Repairman, Chauffer, Salesman or Auto Mechanician with DYKE'S NEW IDEA WORKING MODEL SYSTEM of teaching by mail and our new idea EMPLOYMENT PLAN. Let us tell you the names of some of our students and the salaries they are drawing today—more than you are making. Don't miss it—**Send for Booklet NOW!**

(Beware of imitators. The original and only system of its kind.)

Dyke's School of Motoring, Box 86, Roe Bldg., St. Louis, Mo

LAW

Learn At Home

Scholarships Now Open

Graduate correspondence students most successful at bar examinations. Our method of instruction same as HARVARD, MICHIGAN and other big Law Schools. GUARANTEE to coach FREE graduates failing to pass Bar Examination. Write today for special offer and catalog. (Sent Free). Offer limited—write immediately.

American Correspondence School of Law, Dept 1148 Manhattan Bldg. Chicago

DO YOU LIKE TO DRAW?

That's all we want to know.

Now we **will not** give you any **grand prize**—or a lot of **free stuff** if you answer this ad. Nor do we claim to make you **rich in a week.** But if you are anxious to develop your talent with a successful cartoonist, so you can make money, send a copy of this picture with **6c.** in stamps for **portfolio** of cartoons and **sample lesson plate,** and let us explain.

THE W. L. EVANS SCHOOL OF CARTOONING,
835 Leader Building, Cleveland, O.

A COURSE OF LESSONS IN DRUGLESS HEALING

(Mechano-Therapy)

FREE Not one cent to pay, either now or later—no obligation; just your simple request brings you this valuable course of 62 Lessons by return mail, **without cost.**

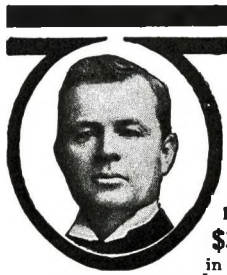
If You Want to Earn $2,500 to $6,000 a Year—if you want an established profession that is remarkably profitable—then send for the free course and see what Drugless Healing has to offer YOU. Remember—This Offer is Limited! Write NOW for FREE Course of Lessons. Get the facts. Send postal or letter right **away.**

AMERICAN COLLEGE OF MECHANO-THERAPY
Dept. 868 81 W. Randolph St. CHICAGO, ILL.

Mr., Miss, or Mrs. Fountain Pen User.

WE WANT TO TELL YOU how you can possess yourself of a **$6.00 pen,**—one that **outlasts a dozen** others, by rendering us a **slight service.** Afterwards you can make a great deal of money easily. **There's no risk whatever.** It is **rare opportunity:** not open indefinitely. Address **Pope,** Dept. A.

Osmiridium Point Fountain Pen Co., Bloomfield, N. J.



J. H. JOICE, Pres.

I Can Increase Your Earnings

No matter where you live, if you are honest and want an independent business of your own, send your name and address and I will mail you our **Big Free 64-Page Book,** showing how you may earn

$3,000 to $10,000 a Year

in the **Real Estate, Brokerage and Insurance Business.**

Our system is a positive success. We will teach you by mail and appoint you our

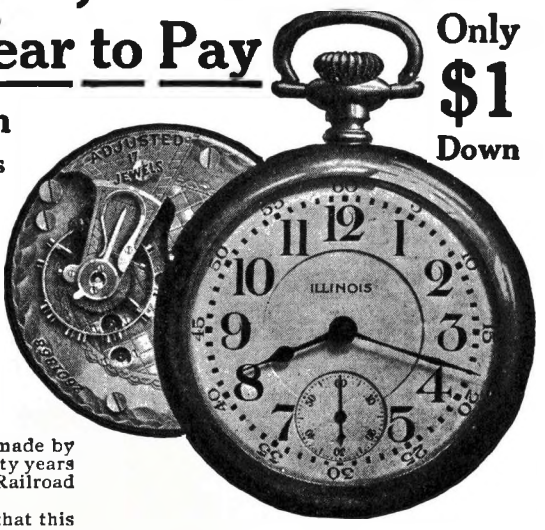
Special Representative

and help you to make money from the start. Write today.

INTERNATIONAL REALTY CORP., 2535 Manhattan Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

A 17-Jewel Adjusted Illinois

For $16.50—A Year to Pay



Only **$1** Down

Our Christmas Bargain

This is simply our annual Christmas bargain. It is not a regular price, and we shall not repeat it. It is positively confined to just 10,000 watches. We cannot get more if we wanted.

Each year at this time we make an offer like this just to open up, by some supreme inducement, ten thousand new accounts. Our profit comes later, when these new customers buy other things we handle.

Note What This Is

Note that this watch is a genuine Illinois, made by the Illinois Watch Co., Springfield, Ill. For fifty years this famous factory has built the finest Railroad watches made in America.

Note that this watch has 17 Jewels. Note that this watch is Adjusted, like the costliest watches made. In oven heat or in ice, under every condition, it is adjusted to perfect time-keeping.

Note that this splendid watch movement is guaranteed 25 years—as long as a $100 watch. And note that this 17-jewel, adjusted Illinois costs you only $16.50, if you get one of these 10,000 watches.

Send Only One Dollar

Send only $1 when you order the watch. We will send it then on 30 days' approval. Test it a month before deciding to keep it. If you are not satisfied, send it back, and we will return your $1. We will gladly buy it back, for we shall at that time have thousands of orders we cannot fill.

If you keep the watch, take a year to pay. We will charge it to you on open account. No references necessary, no red tape. We have charge accounts exactly like this with 1,200,000 people. You are welcome to credit, too.

If you are satisfied, send us $1.25 each month until you pay $16.50. Keep the watch yourself or give it away. That makes no difference whatever.

Send the Coupon Now

But if you want this bargain send the coupon now. These 10,000 watches will be snapped up at once. Our Christmas offers always are. If you delay you are bound to be disappointed.

Don't keep the watch if you are not satisfied. But get it and test it. See what a bargain it is. But waiting even a week may bring your order too late. If you want this watch, send the coupon now.

Spiegel, May, Stern Co

3593 Wall Street, Chicago

Price Now $16.50

Only $1.00 Down
A Whole Year to Pay

17-Jewel Adjusted. Note that this is a 17-Jewel Adjusted Illinois. That means that every friction point is protected by a precious jewel. It means that the watch is adjusted. Each movement is stamped "Adjusted." This is done only in costly watches made for extremely accurate time-keeping. The dial is white enamel and is double-sunk. It is damaskeened in gold and nickel pattern. You never saw a more beautiful watch.

Guaranteed 25 Years. We send with this watch our guarantee certificate covering 25 years of faithful service. But watches of this kind last a lifetime, and are left as heirlooms to one's children.

20-Year Gold-Filled Case. The case is a dust-proof open-face case, with screw back and bezel. It is gold filled and guaranteed for 20 years. It is handsomely engraved on the back.

No $100 watch has a longer guarantee. A better timekeeper can't be made. Prove this by sending this coupon for a 30-day free trial.

SPIEGEL, MAY, STERN CO. (617)
3593 Wall Street, Chicago

I enclose first payment of $1.00, for which send, express paid, the 17-jewel adjusted Illinois Watch No. C4F1203, described in your advertisement. If I keep it I will pay $1.25 each month until $16.50 has been paid. If I return it within the 30-day trial period you are to send me back my $1.00.

Name _____

Postoffice _____

St. or Box No. _____ State _____

JEWELRY CATALOG FREE It contains everything that is new in watches, diamonds and jewelry—all sold on our easy credit plan with a year to pay. Just drop us a postal and it will be mailed you free. But don't fail to use the coupon and send us $1.00, as this wonderful watch offer will never be made again.

The Novel You Have Been Waiting for **SEQUEL TO NORTH OF FIFTY-THREE** "The Rest of the Story"

By B. W. SINCLAIR. Complete in next issue

VOLUME XXX NUMBER 4

TWICE-A-MONTH

The Popular Magazine

CONTENTS

DECEMBER 1, 1913

Twice-a-Month Publication Issued by STREET & SMITH, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York.
ORMOND G. SMITH and GEORGE C. SMITH, Proprietors.

Entered at New York Post Office as Second-class Matter, under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879.
Canadian Subscription, $3.72. Foreign, $4.68.

YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION $3.00 SINGLE COPIES 15 Cents

DECEMBER MONTH-END POPULAR ON SALE NOVEMBER 23rd

The Man Who Can!

There are but two kinds of men in the world—men ***who can*** and men ***who can't.*** Men who ***can*** are ***trained*** and men who ***can't*** are ***not.*** No matter what his occupation, you will find that the man who does things has been ***thoroughly trained*** in his particular line of work. Just compare him to the fellow who continually "falls down"—he's the man who can't hold a good job because he failed to get the training he needs.

Success today depends upon the amount of time and energy you spend in fitting yourself for your life work. No matter how strong, or intelligent, or willing you are, if you aren't ***specially trained*** you will be held back—you will see other men promoted over your head—you will not get the money you would like to earn. Successful men may have no more brains than you, but they do have the one thing you lack—***training.***

Your Opportunity Coupon

Mark the position you want and mail the coupon now

....Electrical Engineer	....Lawyer
....Elec. Light & Power Supt.	....Bookkeeper
....Electrical Wireman	....Stenographer
....Telephone Expert	....Private Secretary
....Architect	....Accountant
....Building Contractor	....Cost Accountant
....Architectural Draftsman	....Cert'f'd Public Acc'nt
....Structural Draftsman	....Auditor
....Structural Engineer	....Business Manager
....Concrete Engineer	....Fire Ins. Inspector
....Civil Engineer	....Fire Ins. Adjuster
....Surveyor	....Fire Ins. Expert
....Mechanical Engineer	....Moving Picture Op'r
....Mechanical Draftsman	....Sanitary Engineer
....Steam Engineer	....Irrigation Engineer
....Municipal Engineer	....Textile Boss
....Gas Engine Engineer	....College Preparatory
....Gas Tractor Engineer	....Auto. Mechanician

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

Pop. Mag. 12-1-13

Resolve, then, to become specially trained. Decide today to fit yourself for a trade or profession and make your mark in it. Remember, it all depends on ***you.*** If you have the ***determination*** to get ahead, ***reasonable ability*** and a ***willingness*** to learn, training will start you on the road to success—a better job—bigger pay.

How you can become a trained man and earn more money

The ***American School of Correspondence,*** an educational institution chartered under the same laws as your state university, stands ready to help you. It will train you, in your spare time and in your own home, in any branch of ***Engineering, Business or Law,*** or will prepare you for entrance into any resident college. You can get the training you need without leaving home or giving up your work and the ***American School*** will arrange for you to pay as best suits your needs.

Fill in and mail the coupon today—***now.*** It's the first step toward becoming a ***trained*** man—***a man who can.***

American School
of Correspondence. Chicago. U.S.A.

This school has no connection with any other school using the name "American"

THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. XXX DECEMBER 1, 1913. No. 4.

The Avenger

By Burton E. Stevenson

Author of "The Boule Cabinet," "The Destroyer," Etc.

When Stevenson spins a story of mystery readers may settle themselves down to a treat of suspense and mental exhilaration that begins with the first sentence and holds through to the last. Here, complete, is a tale as enthralling as any the author has ever given us, and most cunningly contrived. It is the boast of many that at the end of a few chapters they can foretell what is to come, but we doubt that ability when matched against Stevenson's wit. Especially in this story. Try it and see.

(*A Complete Novel*)

CHAPTER I.

AN OLD CLIENT IN A NEW LIGHT.

I HAD known Henry Bronson for a good many years, but from first to last there was a barrier which held us apart from anything like intimacy. I realize now what that barrier was, but I didn't realize it then, though I never made any determined effort to get past it. For I didn't like Bronson. There it is in a nutshell. Our likes and dislikes are past reasoning about, and I soon gave up attempting to reason myself out of this one. Try as I might to disregard it, the barrier was always there. I am glad to be able to add, however, that I don't believe Bronson ever suspected its existence.

Personally, he was a singularly unattractive man. I never saw him without thinking that he had been left unfinished. He was like a statue whose sculptor had grown disgusted with his work and abandoned it when it was half done, with features hastily blocked out and only half indicated. I have only to close my eyes to see that rough face, with its straggling red beard, streaked with gray, growing high on the cheeks; but I despair of describing it. Perhaps the way in which the beard veiled the features, falling before them like a curtain, added to the effect of incompleteness.

And yet the effect was not wholly a material one. He always seemed to me unfinished mentally as well as physically—in a word, as an inchoate, rudimentary sort of man, with few human interests, lacking in sympathy himself, and with something about him which discouraged it in others. There were faint rumors of a wild youth; but long before I ever knew him the oats had all been sown, and, as I supposed, harvested. He had long since settled into a groove, and, as the years went on, the groove grew deeper and deeper with the friction of his passage. For instance, he invariably went from his house to his place of business and back again by a certain route, except when some affair of importance called him

out of it, which was very seldom. People along that route could set their clocks by him with confidence, once they knew the minute at which he was due to pass.

I soon found out that his mind moved in a groove, no less than his body. He was, ironically enough, in the wholesale wine business. But that was quite by accident, and not at all by choice, for he had inherited it from his father. Had it been any other business, I am sure he would have gone on with it just the same. It was not a large business, but it was an old-established one, and enjoyed the confidence of its customers. It deserved that confidence; for, when Bronson sold a wine as being of a certain vintage, there could be no doubt whatever that it was of that vintage and no other.

Graham & Royce had been his father's attorneys; he had inherited us, as it were, with the business, and continued us in the capacity of legal advisers as unquestioningly as he took his father's chair. When I became the junior partner of the firm, his affairs were among those turned over to me. He was frankly averse to me at first, and I think he resented the fact that Mr. Graham, our senior, had not continued on with them; but he got over this in time, and I came to know him, as I have said, fairly well.

But there was always that barrier to intimacy. I have thought since that his eyes had something to do with it—they were so cold and dull, never lighted by a flash of interest. Or perhaps it was because he seemed so utterly indifferent to the amenities of human intercourse. I have since come to suspect that this indifference was merely the armor with which he fenced himself away from the world, which he regarded with suspicion and dislike. That it was not invulnerable, I was to see for myself.

The Bronsons were an old family—so old that, after many flourishing generations, it had begun to die of dry rot, as families have a way of doing. Bronson's grandfather had been an only child; so had his father; so was he. And it seemed inevitable that with him the family would become extinct. He had never married. That he ever should marry would have struck me as absurd, had I thought of it. I never did, because marriage seemed as impossible for him as for—well, as for the obelisk in Central Park. Besides, he was getting old; he wasn't as old as the obelisk, but the obelisk had worn better. He was, I judged, well over fifty, and he looked even older.

Along with his business and his attorneys, he had inherited the ancestral mansion on Washington Square North. It was a great, square, brick building, imposing, no doubt, in its day; but that had been a long time ago. Now, it was merely gloomy and shabby; but it never seemed to occur to Bronson to try to brighten it up. Perhaps he didn't know it needed brightening! So he lived on in the old house, with two old servants, likewise inherited; and its drawn blinds and closed shutters were enough to make any one think that no one lived there at all.

Such was Bronson as I knew him—or thought I knew him—on the day when he gave me the first shock.

I was at my desk, that morning, when my phone rang, and the office boy told me that Mr. Bronson was in the outer office and wished to speak to me.

"All right," I said; "show him in at once." and I pushed my other work away, for I knew that he would not have deviated from his accustomed route except for a matter of great importance, and in another moment Bronson entered.

Even as I shook hands with him and asked him to sit down, I detected a subtle change in him. What it was I could not tell, but there was about him less of iciness, less of clamminess—he seemed a little warmer—more like a mammal and less like a fish. Then I saw that his beard was trimmed and that his whole appearance had a spruceness heretofore quite foreign to it. He looked younger than I had ever known him to look—but he still showed his years.

"I've been away on a little holiday,"

he said, seeing my glance and understanding it.

"It did you good—it's easy to see that," I said, and I wondered if this was the first holiday he had ever taken.

"Yes, I think it did," he assented, in some confusion; then he thrust his hand hastily into a pocket and brought out a paper. "What I came to see you about was this contract. I wish you would look it over and gave me your written opinion as to just what it binds me to. There are two or three clauses in it which seem to me a little ambiguous," and he put on his glasses and pointed them out to me. "I hate to make new contracts," he added, hurrying on, with an awkward garrulity which astonished me; for he was a man who never spoke an unnecessary word; "but my old correspondents at Bordeaux have gone out of business. I have to be careful with the new ones."

"Very well," I said, wondering why he hadn't sent me the contract through the mail and so saved himself the bother of a visit. "I'll go through it. I think I can let you have the opinion to-morrow."

"Thank you. I hope you can." And then he sat for a moment toying nervously with his glasses, as though there was something else he wished to say, and yet could not make up his mind to. "Are you engaged for to-night?" he blurted out finally.

"No," I answered, more and more surprised. "No, I think not."

"Perhaps, then," he went on, still more nervously, "I can persuade you to dine with me. We shall be very glad to have you—Mrs. Bronson and I. In fact, I should count it a personal favor if you would come."

As I look back upon it, I can hardly tell which was the most astonishing clause of this astonishing utterance. I must have stared at him for a moment, open-mouthed, for his forehead reddened and he looked away out of the window.

"I beg your pardon," I said, recovering myself with an effort; "but you took me by surprise. I didn't know you were married."

"No?" and he smiled a crooked smile—a painful grimace, really. "I was married some weeks ago."

"Accept my congratulations," I said, with a heartiness of which I was rather proud; and I held out my hand.

He leaned forward and shook it awkwardly.

"Thank you," he said. "There has been no announcement, as yet. In fact, I want your advice. I am a little inexperienced at this sort of thing."

"Naturally," I agreed.

He laughed mirthlessly.

"But first I want you to meet Mrs. Bronson," he went on. "Then we can talk things over."

"I shall be very glad to meet Mrs. Bronson," I assured him.

"Then you'll come?" he asked, with an eagerness I did not understand.

"Yes, I'll come. Very gladly."

He was out of his chair on the instant, as though he feared I might change my mind.

"Thank you," he said. "That's kind of you. At seven o'clock. There will be no one else. I think you know the house?" and he was gone before I could do anything more than assent.

It was with decided curiosity, as well as with no little embarrassment, that I mounted the steps to Bronson's door that evening. I had never passed that door; I had scarcely expected ever to do so, unless summoned on some legal business; certainly I had never expected to dine with the master of the house, and it seemed inevitable that the dinner would prove a trying ordeal. My heart sank a little at thought of it; but it was too late to turn back, and I rang the bell.

The door was opened almost instantly by a man whom I judged to be one of the old retainers of whom I had heard.

"This is Mr. Lester," I said. "Mr. Bronson, I believe, is expecting me."

"Yes, sir; come in."

As the man took my hat and coat, Bronson himself entered hastily through a door at the right. I have never seen a man more painfully embarrassed, and my own embarrassment

increased at sight of his. It was pitiful to see how he dreaded the moment when I should meet his wife. What sort of monster was she, I wondered!

"Good evening, Mr. Lester," he said, and shook hands even more awkwardly than he had earlier in the day. "Have dinner served at once, Gurley," he added to the man, and then turned toward the door at the right. "This way, Mr. Lester."

For an instant, I thought the room beyond was empty.

"My dear," Bronson began.

There was a rustle of silk, and from a great chair before the fire arose a woman—the most dazzlingly beautiful woman whom I had ever seen.

CHAPTER II.

A STRANGE STORY.

"My dear," droned Bronson's voice, "allow me to introduce Mr. Lester."

But I scarcely heard him. The shock of astonishment left me speechless. Fortunately, we are creatures of habit, and my subconscious self shook hands with her and took the chair which she indicated with a little gesture.

"It was very good of you to take pity on us," she said, and sat down again in the chair from which she had arisen. "I am very anxious to meet all of my husband's friends."

Her calmness gave me back a little of my own.

"You needn't be," I assured her. "The anxiety will be all the other way."

And then I wondered how many friends Bronson had, and I could not forbear glancing at him. I was ashamed of it an instant later, for he caught my eye and reddened, and I knew he read my thought. He was still miserably ill at ease, and had taken up his station, like a footman, behind his wife's chair.

To lessen the tension of the moment, I heard myself uttering I know not what banalities; Mrs. Bronson responded in kind; her husband now and then put in a feeble word or two. I think we all had the sensation of hurling ourselves into a breech—I know I did! Luckily, dinner was announced almost at once, and with the oysters came the Chablis. I blush, even yet, when I remember the eagerness with which I drained my glass. But it steadied me, and I could, at last, look clearly at my hostess.

I am no more impressionable than most men, but in those first moments I recognized in Mrs. Bronson, besides her extraordinary beauty, a charm, a magnetism—to use no stronger word—absolutely compelling. My impression is that Helen of Troy was a blonde, and Mrs. Bronson was very dark; but in some way she seemed to me, in that first glance, like Helen of Troy, and I never found a better comparison. For a moment, my mind played with it. Bronson was undoubtedly like Menelaus; as for Paris—— But I stopped there.

Let me finish the description, as much as I shall ever be able to finish it. Of her charm I can give no idea. Even for her beauty I can find no words which do not seem pale and feeble. She was dark, with black eyes and black hair; not sallow dark, but with a peculiar, lustrous duskiness of skin, behind which one could almost see the warm blood pulsing. Her lips were very red, full, and finely arched, and she had, what I have seen in no other woman, a tiny dimple placed diagonally just above either corner of her mouth. The effect when she smiled was quite indescribable. Her hair, which grew low on forehead and temples, was caught into a knot low on her head, and accented the pure lines of throat and shoulder. Her eyes—but what need to go on? The few who met her would scoff at my description; the many who did not can gain from it no adequate image of her—no, nor from any description ever penned. She seemed to me that night the very pitch of physical perfection. When I looked at her, I could see Peter Pan standing tiptoe with his shout of, "Youth! Youth!"

I scarcely dared look at Bronson—Caliban, I almost called him. Indeed, after a while I almost forgot that he was present, for he made no contribution to the conversation. Not that the

conversation was in any way brilliant or unusual. I am—I need hardly say—neither brilliant nor unusual, and I do not remember that Mrs. Bronson impressed me as especially intellectual. But one does not demand intellectuality of the Venus de Milo; it is enough to be permitted to gaze at her lovely contours; and Mrs. Bronson was far more alluring than any Venus, painted or graven. For she was alive—alive to the very tips of her fingers.

I am attempting to set down here, once for all, the impression she made upon me, and, when I analyze it, I find that it was a mixed one. For, interwoven with an air of innocence and unsophistication, there was another air—not precisely of enticement, but of mystery, of unsuspected depths and bewildering heights. I found her, in her way, as difficult to understand as I had already found her husband. Only here there was no barrier!

And always, hammering at the back of my brain, was the wonder of how she came to marry such a man. Surely, so glorious a creature could have picked and chosen—she had only to fling her glove. The fact that she had married Bronson was like a stain upon her loveliness. I have heard it stated that women admire ugliness in men—that the lovelier the woman, the uglier the man of her choice. I have never observed that this works out in real life; but I am ready to admit that it may be true. But Bronson was more than ugly—he was amorphous. And he was almost three times her age, for she could not have been more than twenty. And youth demands youth.

So my thoughts ran, until the end of the dinner came; and with the coffee, Mrs. Bronson rose, as though in accordance with a plan previously agreed upon, and left us alone together.

Gurley put a tray of cigars on the table. Then he, too, withdrew, closing the door softly behind him.

Bronson pushed the cigars across to me; himself took one and lighted it.

"Well?" he asked, and his voice was a little husky.

I looked at him.

"You remember," he explained, "that I told you I wanted your advice, but that I wanted you to see her first. What do you think of her?"

"I don't need to tell you, do I?" I fenced, for the question confused me. A man might like to hear his wife praised, but not too much. And I knew that, once I began, I could not stop short of superlatives.

He laughed grimly.

"Well, perhaps not," he agreed. "At any rate, I won't press you. But you must be wondering why I asked you here to-night."

"I am," I admitted.

"I'll tell you why," and he leaned forward toward me, his face flushed, his eyes shining. "It is because you are the nearest approach to a friend I possess. It isn't an easy thing to say, but it's the truth. For twenty years I've been a solitary man—I've gone my own way—I've avoided people. But now I need help. I never thought I'd need help; but I do—and desperately. And I've no one but you to turn to."

His voice had grown tremulous as he spoke, and I saw that he was laboring under deep emotion.

"It isn't easy for me to talk," he went on, more calmly. "I'm not a talkative man—far from it; I have never talked about myself; but I've got to now, because I want you to understand. I'll talk to you as client to lawyer, if you prefer; but I'd rather talk as friend to friend."

The man's agony was distressing. I could see that he was literally forcing each word from his lips, and a great pity for him shook me. I came nearer to passing the barrier then than I ever did, before or after.

"Let it be as friend to friend," I said. "I only hope you won't find me a broken reed."

He reached forth his hand eagerly and grasped mine.

"Thanks," he said; then he leaned back in his chair and mopped his shining face. "My difficulty is this: I've won a wife. Now, I want to keep her. And I know it's not going to be an easy task!"

I had suspected that it was something like that, but I had scarcely expected him to put it so bluntly.

"How did you win her?" I asked, not realizing how the words would sound.

"I don't wonder you ask that," he said quickly, and held up his hand when I began hastily to apologize. "I could see the question in your eyes all through dinner. How did it happen that a lovely girl like that would marry a man like me? Frankly I don't know. I can't understand it any more than you do. It astonishes me; it confounds me. But nevertheless there it is."

He paused an instant, while he took a letter from an inner pocket.

"I want to tell you the story," he went on. "I want you to understand, so that you can tell other people as much as may be necessary. I can't keep telling it over and over. I want to give her a place in the world—the sort of place her beauty fits her for—and there is bound to be a lot of talk. I want you to be the buffer; I want people to know the truth. There will be a lot of talk, anyway; but it won't be so bad if they know the truth. It is the realization of that which finally nerved me to ask you here to-night."

I nodded my comprehension. He was right in saying there would be a lot of talk. In fact, unless I was greatly mistaken, Mrs. Bronson would create a sensation.

"It began about six weeks ago," he continued, "when I got this letter," and he drew a sheet of paper from the envelope he held in his hand and passed it across the table to me.

I opened it and read:

COXHAM, Virginia.
November 1. 1902.

Mr. Henry Bronson, Washington Square, North, New York City.

DEAR SIR: I inclose a letter which my father, Richard Carling, instructed me to send you immediately after his death. His death occurred three days ago, and while I shrink from seeming to impose upon your kindness, I feel that I must carry out his wishes. Very truly yours,

CHARMIAN CARLING.

I glanced up at Bronson's flushed face.

"This is Mrs. Bronson?" I asked.

He nodded mutely, and I turned again to the letter. It was in the handwriting of a cultivated woman; but I was not thinking of that. Over and over to myself I was saying, "Charmian, Charmian." I could not imagine a name which would express her more completely. Where had I heard it before? Oh, yes——

"Charmian, quick, unloose my girdle!"

Bronson's voice brought me out of my thoughts.

"Here is the inclosure," he said, and he handed me a second sheet of paper.

This time it was a man's handwriting that I read—a handwriting cramped and irregular, as though the hand had faltered, as though the words had come unevenly, by fits and jerks:

COXHAM, Virginia,
September 15, 1902.

MY DEAR BRONSON: Perhaps you still remember Dicky Carling—I hope so, anyway—though we haven't seen each other for twenty years and more. I am turning to you now for help because I have nowhere else to turn, and I trust that, for the sake of old times and our old friendship, you will grant the request I am going to make.

I am dying, Harry. I may live a month or six weeks—not more than that; possibly not so long. I am not complaining; I have lived my life—the last part of it, at least—as wisely as I knew how. But as the end draws near, I find myself confronting a problem which appalls me.

I have a daughter. She was born up here in the hills, and has lived here all her life. Her mother—but I will not speak of her, except to say that she died when Charmian was a baby. Charmian has been with me always up here in these deserted foothills. I have taught her all I knew—which wasn't much!—and I have tried to keep her unspoiled; but I fear that, after all, I have not been just to her. I fear that I have thought more of my own happiness than of hers. For she knows nothing of the world, Harry; she is not fitted to go out into it. I see that now, when it is too late.

And it is alone she will have to go out into it, unless you help me.

Harry, I want you to assume the guardianship of my child. There is no one else to whom I can intrust her. You will remember that you told me once, many years ago, that, if I ever had need of you, I had only to ask. Well, I am asking now. I am sure you would consent gladly, if you could only see her.

This letter will not be sent to you till after

I am dead. You might refuse me living, though I don't believe it. But I know you can't refuse me dead. Look after my girl, do your best for her, and may God bless you! Your old friend,

RICHARD CARLING.

Hot resentment glowed within me as I finished this letter and leaned back in my chair and looked at Bronson. Had he done his best for her? Had he not rather done his worst for her? He had taken advantage of her youth, her innocence, her feeling of dismay at finding herself alone in the world; and he had married her!

I shuddered a little at the thought. And this was the man who asked my help, who wanted to talk to me as friend to friend, because there was no one else. Why, he had stolen that very phrase from this letter!

His eyes were very bright as he leaned forward across the table toward me.

"Don't judge me yet!" he whispered. "Don't judge me yet. Wait till you hear the rest!"

CHAPTER III.

OLD SCORES.

I waited, looking at him, while he struggled for self-control.

"First, let me tell you about Carling," he went on, after a moment. "Carling was about the only friend I ever had—why, nobody has ever called me 'Harry' since he went away. He was assistant cashier at the Central National, a handsome fellow—very different to me. Perhaps that was why we got on so well. He saved me from a woman—I'd have been easy prey, but for him. Did you ever read Browning's poem, 'A Light Woman'? Well, it was like that. He pulled her away from me, and then he found he couldn't let go. She kept him on for nearly three years; then the crash came. He'd stolen from the bank; he disappeared. Nobody ever heard from him again—I supposed that he had died long ago. The woman didn't go. She soon had another man—and then Carling was revenged; for the man got tired of her, and one night she got drunk and tried to kill him. She thought she had killed him."

"What happened to her?" I asked. "Did she get away?"

A frightful convulsion passed across his face, and I could see the sweat shining on his forehead.

"No, she didn't get away," he answered huskily. "She tried to, but she was—caught and found guilty, and sentenced to twenty years at Auburn. She's there now."

I looked at him in surprise, for he was fairly trembling with emotion. He got up unsteadily, went to the sideboard, and poured himself out a brimming glass of brandy. I could hear how the decanter rattled against the glass.

"Have some?" he asked, but I shook my head.

He came back to the table more steadily, sat down again, and mopped his face.

"I haven't thought of it for years," he said apologetically, "and it fairly upsets me."

"But you didn't figure in it in any way," I pointed out.

"No; but Carling was my best friend—my only friend, I might say. I never had another—not what you would call a friend. All that scandal seemed to freeze something inside me. It never thawed until—six weeks ago."

He paused again and looked at me timidly.

"I suppose you think it strange it should thaw at all," he said. "I never thought it would—I never thought I would care for a woman. But when I saw Charmian—when—when——"

His voice trailed off into a whisper.

"How was she living?" I asked impatiently, for Bronson's face was not suited to sentiment.

"In a little cabin away up in the foothills. I wired ahead that I was coming, and the doctor who had attended Carling met me at the station in his buckboard. Coxham is only a crossroads station, and the cabin was miles back from that. I dare say it was comfortable enough, though there was scarcely any furniture; but it made me

shudder to look at it, after I'd seen Charmian. I could scarcely wait to get her away.

"The sight of her was like wine to me. I felt the frost in my veins turn to fever; but I never thought of marrying her—I swear I didn't. I thought only of having her with me, and taking care of her; and then, that night, as we sat before the fire, making plans for the future, she sat down on the arm of my chair, and put her arm around my neck, and told me how her father had often talked of me—how well she felt she knew me. I saw she liked me, absurd as it sounds! I saw she didn't think me old. And I—I forgot myself. I know it wasn't right—I know I ought to have held off and given her a chance—but—but—— Well, I didn't. I talked it over with the doctor next morning, and I felt better, after that. He didn't seem to see anything strange in it. He said that up there in the hills middle-aged men often married young girls. He said it was the best thing that could happen to her—that now she should be safe, with a place in the world. Well, we were married at Coxham by a justice of the peace, that afternoon, and took the train for Richmond. I got her a new outfit there—the best the town could offer, and then we went on south. It was only yesterday we got back to New York. And, as God hears me, Mr. Lester, I believe she's happy."

I must confess that, during this recital, some of my resentment had faded away. After all, there was something to be said for this backwoods doctor's point of view. There were many worse things which could have happened to the girl. The irony of it was that there were so many better things, too! And yet, in Bronson's place, how few men would have risen to greater heights! I could guess what that impulsive caress had meant to him!

"No doubt you are right," I agreed; "and so long as she's happy, there's no blame can attach to you. The thing is to keep her happy!"

"That's where I need your help," he said, and I confess that I jumped a little at the words and started to protest; but he wouldn't listen. "You know New York better than I do. All I know of it is the way from here to my place in Fulton Street and back again. I want her to meet a few people—the right sort of people, you understand; I want her to have some diversions; she can't stay shut up here with Gurley and his wife. And to all these people explanations have to be made. Oh, I realized it as soon as we got down out of the hills! I saw it in Richmond, when I registered at the hotel! Every one seemed to regard me as an ogre making off with a fairy. Well," he added, with a smile, "and that wasn't so far wrong, either. I've no illusions about myself; only I dare say there have been benevolent ogres, as well as the other kind, and perhaps even a fairy or two who loved them!"

And just then the door opened and Mrs. Bronson peeped in. I had forgotten for the moment how beautiful she was, and it gave me quite a start when I saw her again.

"May I come in?" she asked; and, as we both sprang to our feet, she came forward. "I don't like to be left alone for so long," she added.

"It was all my fault," said her husband contritely. "It was I who kept Mr. Lester. I dare say he'd much rather have been with you. You see, we were planning for your future."

"My future?" She sat down and looked at first one of us and then the other, as a child might have done. "Does that have to be planned for?"

"We were discussing how best to dazzle New York with you," I explained.

"But I don't want to dazzle New York," she protested quickly. "Not even if I could, which isn't likely."

"Just wait and see!" I laughed. "Tomorrow night, you and Mr. Bronson are going to be my guests—a box at the theater and supper afterward—and I'd like to lay you a wager."

"What sort of wager?"

"A box of gloves that more opera glasses will be pointed at our box than at the stage."

She glanced at her husband, as though in doubt how to reply, and I thought her simplicity charming.

He shook his head.

"Don't take him, my dear," he advised. "You'd be sure to lose."

"I refuse to take the wager, Mr. Lester," she said primly; and then a little sparkle leaped into her eyes. "I have always understood that it isn't fair to bet on a—on a——"

"Sure thing," I supplemented, as she hesitated for the word. "It isn't. I apologize."

Bronson rose.

"Suppose we go into the library," he suggested.

As she preceded us from the room, he stopped for a word with me.

"This theater party," he said. "Are you in earnest about it?"

"Thoroughly in earnest. I think you ought to be seen together without delay. And if I'm with you the first time, it's to me the public will come for explanations."

He gripped my hand quickly.

"Thank you, Lester," he said. "You're doing more for me than I have any right to expect!"

I might have pointed out that it was not for him I was doing it; but I held my tongue. There are moments when candor is not a virtue.

I cannot but smile now as I look back over the domestic hour that followed and remember how it impressed me. Mrs. Bronson devoted herself almost exclusively to her husband. She sang for him, accompanying herself on the piano with a charming delicacy of touch. Her voice was a soft contralto, and she had splendid control of it, though her songs were, for the most part, simple, old-fashioned Southern melodies. That she should be so accomplished in music surprised me; but even in the foothills, of course, they have pianos! Bronson seemed to take her playing and singing as a matter of course. Long before I arose to go, I had to admit that he was right in saying she seemed happy. More than that, incredible as it might seem, she even appeared to care for him.

"Till to-morrow night," were my last words to her; but I was destined to be disappointed, for I had scarcely reached the office next morning when Bronson called me up.

"I'm awfully sorry, Lester," he said, "but I'm afraid we can't be with you to-night. Charmian isn't used to so much excitement—she has a little fever this morning. I called Jenner in, and he says she needs a rest."

"No doubt of it," I agreed. "I'm sorry to hear she's ill. Please let me know as soon as she's well again. The invitation is a standing one, you know."

He thanked me and hung up. Later in the morning, I called up Donelson's, and sent some roses to Mrs. Bronson. A little note of thanks came next day, with the assurance that she was not really ill; and a day or two later I called Bronson up to renew the invitation. The voice he answered in told me how uneasy he was.

"She still has the fever," he said, "night and morning. She laughs at me and says it's nothing; that she's had it before, and that old Doctor Owen, up in the mountains, always pulled her out of it in a few days. Perhaps he would understand her case better than a new doctor—I think I'll send for him, if the fever hangs on."

So I sent some more roses and got another little note, as gay as the first, still protesting she wasn't ill. I confess I was puzzled, as well as a little anxious; and that night I called at the house to make my inquiries in person.

It was again Gurley who opened the door to me. I must say a word about Gurley, for it was evident at a glance that he was one of that old and fast-vanishing type of servant who enters the employ of a family and spends the remainder of his life there, utterly faithful and trustworthy. His wife, no doubt, was of the same type, and I could guess how much they had counted in making Bronson comfortable in his queer way of life. So it was with a real feeling of friendliness that I bade Gurley good evening, and asked if his master was at home.

"Yes, sir," he answered. "Come in,

sir; he'll be glad to see you, I'm sure. If you will sit down a minute in the library here, sir, I'll tell him. He is upstairs with the new doctor."

"The new doctor?"

"The one from the South, sir. He came just a few minutes ago."

I heard his steps go up the stair, and then for some moments there was silence. So Bronson had thought his wife's case serious enough to call in this backwoods doctor! I could not but smile at the absurdity of summoning such a man to treat a patient who was under the care of such a specialist as Jenner!

I looked up to find Bronson at the door. As he came forward and shook hands with me, I noticed that his face was rather haggard.

"I hope Mrs. Bronson is no worse," I said.

"No, she's no worse; but on the other hand she's no better. Every morning and evening, there is fever. I thought Jenner would understand it, if anybody would; but he didn't, and told me as much. He said he'd have to observe the case for a week or so before he would venture an opinion. A week or so! As though I would be willing to stand around and wait for him to make up his mind! I wired for Owen at once; he got here this evening."

"Yes," I said; "Gurley told me."

Bronson took a nervous turn up and down the room.

"I suppose you think it is foolish of me," he said, at last, "to call in a doctor from the foothills of the Alleghenies to treat a case that puzzles a man like Jenner; but Owen has been my wife's physician ever since she was a little girl; he has treated her for this very ailment before; he understands her constitution. That's half the battle."

"Did she ask for him?"

"No; she insists she isn't ill. And, really, she doesn't look ill—only a little flushed and excited, and her eyes very bright. But yesterday I found out by accident that she really did want him, though she wouldn't say so. I came home earlier than usual—I had been worrying about her—and when I went in to see her, I found her asleep. She was talking to herself, saying over and over again very low, 'Oh, doctor, I wish you would come! Oh, doctor, I wish you would come!' I stole away without waking her, and hurried to a telegraph office and wired for Owen. When I came back, she was up and dressed and trying to appear well. I didn't say a word about Owen, until I took him into her room to-night. If you had seen her eyes, if you had heard her cry of welcome, you'd have understood how badly she wanted him.

He continued pacing up and down, while I turned this over in my mind. Without being able to analyze it, I felt that there was something threatening in the arrival of this strange man.

"How old is he?" I asked.

"Oh, older than I am!" answered Bronson. Then he looked at me and smiled. "And uglier," he added. "My theory is that up there in the woods her father and Owen were about the only people Charmian ever met; and Owen was by far the more remarkable of the two. Carling was only an ordinary sort of fellow when I knew him, though what he became up there in the hills of course I don't know. But Owen is by no means an ordinary man—I found that out the first hour I was with him. Why he should bury himself in the backwoods, I don't understand; no doubt he has a good reason to—perhaps some such reason as Carling had. But that is none of my business. I should like you to meet him. Can't you stay and have a talk? He will be down presently."

Even as he spoke, there came a step on the stair, and the next moment, ushered in by Gurley, a most arresting personage crossed the threshold.

CHAPTER IV.

BRONSON MAKES HIS WILL.

As Bronson introduced us, my first feeling was one of strong repulsion. At that time I attributed it to his peculiar appearance, for Bronson had not been far wrong in saying that the newcomer was uglier than he. He was a

tall, slim man, with a hawklike face, crowned by a tumbled mass of white hair. The face was thin to emaciation, with nose high and crooked, lips straight and compressed, chin long and pointed, and it disclosed a terrible mutilation, for a deep and livid scar ran across the forehead, over the right eye, and down across the right cheek. It looked as though some one had struck him a terrific blow with a hatchet. The eye had been injured and the lid hung halfway shut, obscuring it.

But the other eye, the left one, was extraordinarily bright. Even as we shook hands, I was conscious of its peculiarly piercing quality, and as the evening wore on I found it upon me whenever I glanced his way. Once I caught it upon Bronson, and the fevered intensity of its regard made me shiver.

At Bronson's invitation we sat down, and our host called in Gurley and asked for cigars.

"Would you care for anything else?" he asked of Owen. "Perhaps you are hungry. Or perhaps you would like something to drink?"

"No, thank you," said the doctor. "I had my dinner on the train." And he lighted his cigar.

"How do you find Mrs. Bronson?"

The doctor took a puff and glanced at me.

"Mr. Lester knows the story," Bronson added. "You may speak frankly before him."

"I am glad of that," said Owen, "because I believe that Mr. Lester can be of use to us. Charmian is suffering from a slight, persistent fever. I have seen her like this two or three times before, usually after some period of mental excitement. It's a temperamental ailment, which will have to be guarded against. She is very delicately organized, and any unusual strain upsets her. I don't mean to say she isn't perfectly healthy, for she is; but her life was so placid and uneventful that she never had a chance to grow immune to excitement. We grow immune to things, you know, by exposure to them."

"Then you think she will be all right again?"

"Oh, yes; that is only the matter of a few days. I put her to sleep before I came down. I won't wake her up until she is thoroughly rested. I want her nerves to repair themselves."

"You put her to sleep?" echoed Bronson uneasily.

"By hypnotic suggestion," Owen explained, with a smile.

Bronson half started from his chair.

"But," he stammered; "but——"

"It is by far the best method in a case like this," interrupted Owen. "In most nervous cases, hypnotic suggestion is the only sure remedy. I never give medicine, except in cases of virulent infection—very little, even then. Nature is the true healer, if you give her a chance. That is all she asks—a chance. Most of us don't give her a chance!"

The words were spoken with an earnestness which impressed me, and a moment's silence followed. As I looked at Owen with new interest, I found his eye upon me, blazing like a coal of fire.

"What we have to consider," he went on, more calmly, "is not how to pull Charmian through this little attack, but how to guard her from future ones. You are about to introduce her to a new life, as different as possible to her old one. It must be done carefully, so that her nervous system will not be too roughly shocked. It is like a complete change of diet. What do you suppose would happen to a South Sea Islander, who had lived all his life upon breadfruit and bananas, if you brought him suddenly here to New York and stuffed him full of lobster salad? He'd die of indigestion!"

He fell a moment silent, staring into the fire; then he turned to Bronson.

"Perhaps it was hardly fair to you, Mr. Bronson," he said, "not to have told you all this before you married Charmian. But I didn't consider it serious—I don't yet, for that matter—and, frankly, I was anxious that you *should* marry her and give her a place in the world. I could have given her a home, but it would not have been worthy of

her—and would have been very uncertain; for my heart is bad and I am likely to drop out of the world any day. Even at the best, it would have been a backwoods home, like her other one, and she deserved something better. So when you came, and I saw how you had begun to care for her and she for you, the road seemed very plain to me, and I did all I could to set your feet upon it."

"And you were quite right," said Bronson warmly. "If there was any uncertainty in my mind about it, it would be on her account, not on my own. Since we have got out into the world, the contrast between us seems greater than it did up there in the hills."

"As long as she doesn't see it," put in Owen, "what does it matter? And you are mistaken to brood upon it—you exaggerate it."

"You *did* caution me in one particular, you know," Bronson added, staring into the fire.

"Yes, I remember."

"You were right to do so," Bronson went on, a little hoarsely. "I have heeded your caution."

I glanced from one to the other, wondering what the particular might have been. Bronson was staring into the fire, and Owen was looking at him with a little smile, which seemed to me one of bitter irony. Then he rose suddenly to his feet.

"I must be getting to bed," he said. "I find those long hours on the train fatigued me—and I don't dare push myself too far. A little overexertion, a little overfatigue, and my heart protests in a way that is damnably painful. Forgive me, Mr. Lester; I shall never refer to my ailment again; but I wanted you to know that I am saying good night so soon only because I must."

"I must be going, too," I said. "I have a busy day ahead to-morrow, and need a clear head for it."

But really, I told myself as I made my way down the steps a few moments later, the reason I had hastened my departure was because I didn't want to be alone with Bronson. I didn't want to talk with him about his wife nor about Owen. The one I feared I might praise too much, the other too little. For though undoubtedly the doctor was a remarkable man, as Bronson had said, there was something about him that left me ill at ease. Away at the back of my mind there was a vague suspicion, which I couldn't analyze, but which, at the same time, I couldn't forget.

A stress of work for the next few days kept my mind off the Bronsons. I remember calling him up once, and asking about his wife, and his replying that she seemed to be doing very well. Then I went out of town for the week-end, and it was not until two or three days after that that I heard from Bronson again. As nearly as I can figure it, at least a week elapsed between the evening I met Owen and the day he called me up and asked if I could see him at four in the afternoon.

I promised to arrange to be free at that hour, and again inquired after Mrs. Bronson's health.

"She seems quite well again, I'm glad to say," he answered, "and Owen and I have already begun to plan our campaign. That's his word for it. We both hope that you will assist."

"Of course," I assured him, "I shall be glad to do anything I can."

"We'll be calling you in before long," he said. "At four o'clock, then."

It was a few minutes after four when the office boy announced him, and when he came in I was startled by the change in his appearance, for he had shaved off his beard.

He laughed a little sheepishly as he caught my glance, and ran his hand over his chin.

"One of my wife's ideas," he said. "What do you think of it?"

"I think it is an improvement," I answered; and certainly, though the face was still ugly, still livid and bumpy, it looked more like a face and less like a lump of clay.

"My wife says that it makes me look younger," he added, and laughed again. "I had to humor her!"

"Of course," I agreed; but I wondered if Mrs. Bronson had already discovered that she would like her hus-

band younger. If she had, then here was the first flicker of danger.

"Owen is working miracles with her," he went on. "As I said this morning, we have been planning a campaign, and want your help. But that isn't what I came to see you about. I want to make my will. I've never made a will; but I think I ought to, now I am married."

"Most certainly," I agreed heartily. "No one with property ought to die intestate—least of all, a married man."

"First, I want to know something about the law. Can a man leave all his property to his wife?"

"Yes; if he has no near relatives and no children."

"I have no near relatives—you know that. I'm the only child of an only child of an only child. And of course I have no children."

"But you may have," I pointed out. "That contingency must be provided for."

He reddened painfully, in a way that puzzled me, for I saw nothing in my remark to embarrass him.

"Of course, it may be as well to provide for the contingency," he agreed reluctantly; "I can see the necessity for that; but in the event that there are no children, I want all my property to go to my wife unconditionally. With this exception," he added, "that I want an income of five hundred dollars a year set aside for my old servants, James and Mary Gurley, during their lifetime."

"Very well," I said, and made a note of the name and the amount.

"Will my property have to be enumerated?"

"No; under the circumstances I do not think a schedule will be required. It will have to be appraised, after your death, in order to determine the inheritance tax."

"Will there have to be an executor, or administrator, or anything of that sort?"

"You can name your wife as administratrix, without bond."

"I want her to be unhampered," he explained. "You see, I feel, in a way, that I've got something to make up to her—that—that perhaps I *did* take advantage of her when I married her—that I should have waited until she had seen more of the world. But she shan't be sorry, if I can help it. I'm going to do my best to make it up to her while I'm alive; and, after I'm gone, I want her to have everything that I can give her."

"You won't forbid her to marry again?" I asked.

"No, no! What right have I to do that?"

"You haven't any right," I agreed, thinking better of him than I had ever done. "I don't think any husband has. But some of them *do* do it. They try to keep hold of their wives even after they're dead. They're mean and contemptible egoists."

"Well," said Bronson, "I feel that I've been egoist enough in marrying her. So we won't have any such condition as that. When can you have the will ready?"

"I will have the first draft ready tomorrow afternoon. Shall I mail it to you?"

"No; I would rather stop in—there will probably be some things you'll have to explain to me."

"Very well," I agreed, and he departed.

I drew up the will the next morning, making it as short and simple as I could, and, in the event that there were no children, placing all of Bronson's property, with the exception of the legacies, absolutely at his wife's disposal, without the necessity for an accounting of any kind. Usually I should have hesitated at such a will; but in this case I felt that it was no more than the wife's due. She would, of course, need an adviser, for I knew that Bronson must be worth considerably over a million; but she would realize that, and would turn naturally to her husband's attorneys.

But in case there was a child, it would not do to trust to chance, and this clause I drew most carefully, for, since the widow would have only a life interest in the estate, it was essential

that its administration should be thoroughly guarded.

When Bronson came in that afternoon, I went over my draft with him and carefully explained its provisions. With the first part he was very much pleased; but he seemed to think the precautions in the second part excessive.

"You throw conditions around her as though you were afraid she would try to cheat her own child," he objected.

"She won't try to cheat the child," I said; "but somebody may try to cheat her. She has no experience in business, and she must be protected from sharpers and adventurers."

"But she is just as apt to be cheated if she hasn't any child."

"That is true; and that is the only objection I see to making over the property to her absolutely in this way. It might be a good idea to have a cotrustee to advise her."

He considered this a moment; then he looked up at me.

"Would you accept the place?" he asked.

It was my turn to consider.

"Unless you will take it, I will have no cotrustee," he added. "The man who acted as cotrustee ought to know the whole story—and I shall never tell it to any one else. He ought to know it, so that he would realize that his business was not to oppose or hamper her in any way, but merely to protect and advise her. Her wishes must always be respected. The only thing which must be required of her is to ask the advice of her cotrustee before taking any important step. Even if you accept, I should want that to be very clearly stated."

I got up and walked to the window, for there was a sharp conflict in my breast. I foresaw the difficulties of such a task, and yet undoubtedly some one ought to perform it. As Bronson said, there was no other choice; it was I or no one; besides, association with this charming woman would be a privilege under any circumstances——

I turned abruptly back to him.

"Very well," I said. "I accept."

He sprang to his feet and grasped my hand. As he did so, as he stood there facing me in the full light, I noticed that he had on his throat under his chin a broad strip of court-plaster.

"Thank you," he said. "I seem to be always asking favors of you, and you are always granting them. But I think we have reached the right solution. You will have to redraft the will, I suppose?"

"Yes; you can come in again to-morrow?"

"At the same hour?"

"Yes."

"Very well, I'll be here." And then he raised his hand to the strip of court-plaster, which, I could see, annoyed him. "I am not very expert at shaving, yet," he explained, "and I cut myself this morning. It wasn't altogether because I'm inexpert, either," he added, in a graver tone, "but I got quite a shock just as I started to shave myself under the chin. It seemed to me that I saw myself in the glass turn the razor and draw the edge across my throat. It was so real that when I found myself bleeding I fancied I had really done it. It wasn't for a moment or two I realized I had only scratched myself."

"That was rather weird," I said; "and it must have been exceedingly unpleasant."

"It *was* unpleasant. For an instant I was looking right in the face of death!" and he shivered slightly at the remembrance. Then he shook himself. "Indigestion, I suppose," he added, more lightly; "I've been eating too much lately. Well, I must be going."

After he had gone, I sat for a moment thinking over his story. It was, no doubt, because he had fancied himself looking in the face of death that he was so anxious to conclude the making of his will.

CHAPTER V.

THE SECOND VISION.

More than once, next day, did I regret my promise to Bronson. I knew too well from observation the troubles which every cotrustee found in his

path, and that these troubles were certain to be unusually annoying to any one trying to work in harness with a girl like Charmian Bronson. And yet it didn't seem fair to her to burden her with the unquestioned control of Bronson's fortune. To be sure, he might live for many years yet, and every year would see his wife wiser in the world's ways; but then again he might not. I had seen too many instances of the uncertainty of human life to count upon the continued existence of even the healthiest and soundest individual—and Bronson did not impress me as either. In fact, he had always impressed me as a man with a canker somewhere. And finally it is a lawyer's business to foresee every contingency and guard against it; so I was obliged to admit that I could not honorably refuse the trust.

But I compromised by naming myself not as cotrustee, but as advisory trustee, with powers strictly limited and duties fully defined. These duties committed me to nothing except to give Mrs. Bronson such advice as she might desire, or I might wish to offer. If she did not care to take the advice, why, that was no affair of mine.

I finally got this drafted to my satisfaction, and when Bronson came in, in the afternoon, and I read it over to him, he expressed his approval.

"I should like my wife to know the provisions of this will," he added. "That seems only fair, and you can explain them much better than I can. I wonder if you would be good enough to do that?"

"Why, certainly," I agreed; "if you wish it."

"Don't you think she ought to know?"

"Yes; I think every wife ought to know the substance of her husband's will. When shall I call?"

"I will find out in the morning if she feels well enough to see you. If she does, I'll let you know."

"Very well."

"If she thinks it all right," he went on, "you may go ahead and prepare the final copy for my signature. If she makes any objections, take a note of them, and we will talk them over together."

"I don't see how she can make any objections," I remarked, "unless it is that you are too generous. You are leaving her everything."

"That is true," he agreed, and got up to go. "That is what I want to do."

As he faced the light, I noticed on his throat the ugly red mark of the cut he had given himself.

"Been seeing any more ghosts?" I asked.

"No," and he smiled; but it was a mechanical smile, with no mirth behind it. "No; and I don't expect to—I'm looking after my diet. But it wasn't a ghost; it was just an optical illusion of some sort."

"Most ghosts are," I said; and he nodded his agreement and left the office.

He called me up next morning to say that Mrs. Bronson would expect me in the afternoon between two and three o'clock, and it was but a few minutes after the former hour when I climbed the steps to the gloomy old house. As I looked up at it, I could not but reflect that it was anything but a fitting setting for so exquisite a jewel. The Little Trianon, now; or, better still, the Château de Sylvie on the borders of the park at Chantilly. I could see her at home there, in the octagonal salon, more dainty, more alluring, than any of the Fragonards on the walls.

Gurley let me in and silently took my hat and coat. As I glanced at the faithful fellow, it occurred to me that he must be much older than I had thought him when I saw him first, for his face was deeply lined and his eyes were dull and sunken.

"I am to take you upstairs, sir," he said, and led the way. "This is the room," and he tapped at a door in the upper hall.

"Come in!" called a clear voice, and Gurley opened the door and stood aside to let me pass. As I crossed the threshold, I heard the door close behind me.

But my eyes were fixed on the vision in front of me. Mrs. Bronson was half sitting, half lying on a broad

couch which had been drawn up before the fire. She was, I suppose, in what is known as negligee, but of her costume I can give no better description than to say that it was a shimmering, cobwebby white. It was cut low at the neck, and the wide sleeves, falling back, revealed her faultless arms. An artist who could have set her upon a canvas as I saw her then would have been famous to the end of the world!

"Ah, Mr. Lester!" she said, and held out her hand, without rising. "Behold in me an invalid by compulsion. I am really strong and well, but men love to tyrannize, and so I am sentenced to this couch."

"Where you make an immortal picture," I said, and took her hand and all but raised it to my lips. But I remembered in time that I was not in the Château de Sylvie, nor in the Trianon, but in a prosaic brick house in Washington Square.

She read my impulse, I think, for she smiled up at me, and I saw again those distracting dimples set slantwise above the corners of her mouth. I had forgotten about them, and they enchained me.

"Pull that chair up here," she said, drawing away her hand, "and sit down. I understand that you have some horrid business to discuss."

"Your husband's will," I said, brought back to earth again, and I sat down and drew it from my pocket.

She made a grimace of disgust.

"How dreadful! He is not going to die, so why should he make a will?"

"A man makes a will in order to be prepared for the worst," I explained, "and in order to safeguard his wife, whatever happens. One has to be prepared for the worst—especially here in automobile-mad, bomb-terrorized New York."

She stared up at me.

"You don't mean that he is in danger!"

I could not help laughing a little at her expression.

"No more than we are all in danger," I said. "Life is a pretty dangerous thing—there are risks for all of us every step from the cradle to the grave. I often wonder that we escape as long as we do."

"How horrible!" she said again. "I never thought of it like that—but now I see it's true!" Suddenly she clasped her hands before her eyes. "You shouldn't have told me! Now I shall always be afraid!"

I confess I was astonished at her vehemence. A girl reared by men in the midst of woods and hills should have had firmer nerves, clearer vision. If there was anything such a life should have done for her, it was to make her unafraid. I stared down at her, perplexed—and then I remembered what Doctor Owen had said of her—of her delicate organization, of her susceptibility.

"I'm sorry," I said. "You must forgive me. It was thoughtless of me to speak so. Of course there is no danger. Your husband is well and strong."

"Do you think so?" she asked, almost in a whisper.

"Why, yes," I said, more and more surprised. "Don't you?"

"You have known him so much longer than I—you must be right—and oh, I hope you are! But sometimes I have fancied——" She hesitated, debated with herself whether she should go on. "Two or three days ago, he frightened me horribly. It was in the morning—I was dressing—when I heard a fearful cry from his room. I rushed in. He was standing before a mirror, his razor in his hand, the blood streaming from his throat. For a moment I thought——" Her voice trailed away, and again she hid her eyes with her hands.

"Yes," I said gently. "He told me about it. No wonder you were frightened. But it was only an optical illusion of some sort."

"An optical illusion?" she repeated, and stared up at me. "What do you mean, Mr. Lester?"

"I mean that what he fancied he saw in the glass was just a fallacy of vision. 'Optical illusion' were his own words for it."

"What he saw in the glass?" she

whispered. "What was it he saw in the glass, Mr. Lester?"

"Didn't he tell you?"

"No; he said it was an attack of indigestion. What was it he saw?"

"He didn't see anything," I answered a little abruptly, realizing that I had already said too much. But Bronson hadn't told me that he had cried out, and that his wife had rushed in. How could I have known that he hadn't told her?

She was looking at me strangely, and I was decidedly uncomfortable.

"Let us say no more about it," I said. "In fact, I think we ought to forget about it. It was just a little accident not worth remembering. Shall I read the will?"

She drew a sudden, long breath that was almost a sob.

"Very well," she agreed coldly, and relaxed from a position that I knew had been a strained one.

So I read the will slowly, and she listened without comment until I had finished.

"And now," she suggested, "perhaps you will tell me what it is all about."

I was a little hurt, as every lawyer is when a doubt is cast upon the clearness of his phraseology; besides, I had labored to make this unusually clear.

"It means, in the first place," I said, "that Mr. Bronson is leaving you all his property absolutely, except for a small legacy to his servants, save in the case of issue."

"What do you mean by 'issue'?"

"I mean children. Issue is the usual word."

"Oh!" she commented. "But there will be——" She stopped abruptly. I did not look at her, but I knew that she was flushed. "Go on," she said, after a moment.

"In the event of issue," I continued, "you have a life interest in the estate, which is conserved by a trustee for the use of the children."

"And you are the trustee?"

"No. The National Trust Company is designated to act as trustee."

"But I thought I heard your name."

"You did. I am to act as your adviser, in case there are no children. But you are under no obligation to take my advice."

"Oh, but I *will* take it!" she cried, and the warmth had come back into her voice again. "It was very nice of you to consent to act as my adviser, Mr. Lester."

"I don't know that you'll need me," I said.

"Oh, yes, I shall!" She was sitting up again and leaning toward me in her earnestness. "You see, I know nothing about money. I don't want to know. It isn't worth bothering about. It only makes trouble. My father taught me that!"

It had, I reflected, certainly made trouble enough for him!

"There are other things more important, of course," I agreed. "There are other things——"

A tap at the door interrupted me.

"Come in!" called my companion.

The door opened, and Doctor Owen stood, hesitating, on the threshold.

I couldn't explain it, but again, at the first sight of him, I experienced that feeling of repulsion.

"May I come in?" he asked. "It is the hour of my visit to my patient," he added, nodding to me. "But I can wait."

"Your patient!" scoffed Mrs. Bronson. "How long are you going to persist in that fiction? Certainly you may come in."

He sat down on the couch beside her and placed his fingers lightly on her wrist.

"I won't have to persist much longer," he replied. "You see, Mr. Lester, I am keeping this young person quiet as much for the sake of discipline as for any other reason. She is sadly in need of discipline, for her father and I both spoiled her. I realize that now!"

She thrust out her tongue at him mockingly. It is not, I admit, an elegant gesture, but no one could take offense at the way she performed it. In fact, I thought it delightful.

"And manners!" went on the doctor calmly. "You see how utterly deficient she is, Mr. Lester. She must take les-

sons in ladylike deportment, before we begin the campaign."

"The campaign!" she mocked.

"For the siege of New York," he explained, and I wondered if he knew that he was parodying Henry James. "Mr. Lester has promised to be one of the engineers."

"And what, pray, am I?"

"You," he said, "are the projectile which we will hurl at society. It will have to capitulate." Then he looked at her more closely, and his face grew grave. "You have had enough excitement for one afternoon," he went on. "I shall send up Mrs. Gurley to get you out of that frippery and put you to bed!"

He arose, and I rose, too.

"Is it all right?" I asked, as I took her hand. "Have you any changes to suggest?"

"Certainly it is all right," she said. "I think it was rather foolish to send you to me. But it was nice of you to bother."

"It was no bother!"

"And it was nice of you," she added softly, "to consent to be my adviser. Good-by, Mr. Lester, and come again soon."

Gurley helped me into my coat, and again the thought came to me that there was something wrong with him. But he kept his lips compressed, as though forcibly keeping himself from saying something he wanted to say, and he did not open them except to wish me good day.

I called up Bronson, when I got back to the office, and told him the result of the interview and arranged for him to stop in next day and sign the final copy of the will. He came promptly on time, I read it over to him again, to make sure that it was as he wished it, and then called in two of our men to witness his signature.

"What do you want me to do with it?" I asked, when that was done.

"I wish you would put it away with my other papers." He sat a moment, silent, looking at me, and I noticed for the first time how haggard and drawn his face was. "I saw it again this morning," he blurted out suddenly.

I sat up with a start.

"You saw it again?"

"Yes; I saw myself cut my throat again. What do you suppose it means? Am I going crazy?"

I was genuinely shocked, but I concealed it as well as I could.

"Tell me just what it was you saw," I suggested.

"I was shaving myself as usual before my glass. I had finished one side of my face, and began on my throat underneath the chin, when I saw myself turn the razor and draw it across my throat. It made a terrible gash, and there was a rush of blood. I jumped back and looked down at myself—and then when I looked back at the mirror, the thing had vanished."

His face was working; it was only by a supreme effort he maintained his self-control. I wasn't any too certain of my own.

"Did you cry out, this time?" I asked.

He started round upon me.

"Who told you I cried out?" he demanded.

"Your wife told me. She said she heard you cry out, the first time, and rushed in to find you with blood on your throat."

"Did you tell her what I had seen?" His voice was hoarse and trembling, and his face was working convulsively again.

"No," I assured him; "I didn't tell her."

He sat back with a long breath of relief.

"I'm glad of that," he said. "I don't want her to know. She mustn't know. But what is it, Lester? What must I do?"

"Of course it's an optical illusion," I answered, as comfortingly as I could, for I saw he was in dire need of comfort. "It's peculiar, but there must be some explanation for it. Anyway, it won't do any good to worry over it. First, if I were you, I should go see a good oculist. Perhaps it's your eyes. If it isn't, try a good nerve specialist.

He can probably get to the bottom of the trouble in short order."

He rose heavily to his feet.

"Thank you," he said. "That's good advice. I'll take it."

CHAPTER VI.

A NEW TERROR.

Christmas came on Thursday, that year, and I left town on the day before —which was the day following the signing of the will—and did not return until the following Monday afternoon. Those five days, spent with some hilarious friends in Westchester, served to efface the trouble of the Bronsons pretty effectually from my mind. Indeed, they had not impressed me as very serious ones, except for the moment that I had found myself looking into Bronson's working face. A pair of glasses for him and rest and quiet for his wife would, I felt sure, put everything right again.

But almost as soon as I reached the office, Bronson called up and asked to see me.

"I've been trying to get you for three days," he said; and there was a quality in his voice which struck me as unfamiliar. It was not a pleasant quality, but I found myself at a loss to define it.

"I have been out of town," I explained. "I'm sorry if it inconvenienced you."

"Can I see you at once?"

"Yes; I'll be in the office all afternoon."

"I'll come up as soon as I can, then," he said, and hung up.

What was wrong, I wondered? But the accumulated work of the past five days demanded my attention; and it was not until the office boy came in with Bronson's name that I thought again of the appointment.

He came in slowly, almost painfully, as a very old man might, and as I rose to shake hands with him I was shocked by the change in his appearance. He looked but the wreck of himself; his face had fallen into livid folds and wrinkles; there were dark bags under his bloodshot eyes, and, as I took his hand, I felt that it was trembling with senility.

"My dear Bronson!" I said, placing him carefully in a chair. "What have you been doing to yourself? Why didn't you take my advice?"

"I did," he said grimly. "There is nothing the matter with my eyes."

"Nor with your nerves?"

"It's hard to get a doctor to commit himself about a man's nerves. But I don't believe it's my nerves."

"What is it, then?" I asked.

"It's my mind," he answered, still more grimly, and sat for a moment blinking at me. "That is why I was so anxious to see you."

"If there is anything I can do," I began

"I want to know about the will. It provides what shall happen in case of my death—but suppose I go crazy, what then?"

I collected myself with an effort. Really, Bronson sitting there in front of me with that terrible face of his was a sight to haunt one.

"When a man is adjudged insane," I said, "a guardian is usually appointed by the court to look after him and administer his property, filing regular accountings. Or, where the property is large, a commission is sometimes appointed.

"Could my wife be appointed my guardian?"

"Yes, I see no objection to that. She is the sole legatee. There are no other heirs. It is really her property. She will have to make an accounting occasionally, as long as you are alive; but the court won't look at it very closely."

"But that's just it—as long as I'm alive. I may live on for years. As long as I am alive, she can't marry again."

"Not without getting a divorce. Of course, she would have no difficulty in getting a divorce if she could prove that you were hopelessly insane."

"But if she got a divorce, she couldn't retain control of the property."

"No; she couldn't do that. If she

got a divorce, the court would have to appoint another guardian."

He considered this for a moment, with puckered face.

"There is one thing I can do, anyway," he said; "I can add a clause to the will stating that, in case I go mad, I want her appointed my guardian."

"No, no!" I protested quickly. "Don't do that. To admit in one clause of the will that you had any reason to foresee insanity would cast a doubt on the legality of the whole document. In case it should be necessary, I will see to it that your wife is appointed your guardian. But this is all nonsense, Bronson. You are not going mad. You have got into a morbid habit of brooding over things. What you need is a change—something to occupy your mind. Why don't you drop everything and go to Europe?"

"I have thought of that," he agreed; "but I am afraid Mrs. Bronson isn't strong enough for a strenuous trip like that."

"But it doesn't need to be strenuous," I protested. "It isn't any exertion nowadays to travel. It would be a good thing for her, too. How is she?"

"Oh, she protests that she is as well as can be. But though she hasn't said anything, I can see that she is worrying about me. No wonder! I've aged ten years in ten days. A month ago, I thought myself not much past the prime of life, and now I'm an old man. Look at my hand."

He held it up, and I could see how pitifully it was trembling.

"What you need, Bronson," I said, "is to go to some quiet watering place in the south of France, say, and stay there till you are well again. You will find specialists there who will understand your case—no doubt it will be an old story to them, though it seems so strange to us."

"Perhaps," he agreed doubtfully; "but I'm not so sure."

"Are there any new symptoms?"

"No; just the old one. But I see it now every morning, when I shave myself."

"Why not stop shaving?"

"My wife wouldn't like it. And there's a fascination about it—a horrible fascination. Besides, I've seen the whole story, now."

"The whole story?"

"Yes; at about the fourth or fifth stroke under my chin, I see myself cut my throat and the blood spurt out. The way I shave myself doesn't make any difference—I've experimented to find out. Sometimes I shave both cheeks first; sometimes I start with the chin; but nothing happens until I pass the razor down my throat. Then I see it turn in my hand and bite in. I can't tell you how I am tempted, sometimes, to really use it that way."

He stopped and swallowed hard. I dare say he could feel the blade across his throat.

"Go ahead," I said; "what's the rest of it?"

"At first," he went on, "I always looked down to see if there really was any blood—I couldn't help it—and when I looked up again all I saw in the glass was just this ugly face of mine, half covered with lather. Then—it was yesterday—I didn't look down, and I saw something else."

He stopped and swallowed again, and I wondered what new horror was coming.

"I watched the blood pour out," he continued, "in spurts—great spurts at first, but gradually oozing away to a trickle. Then I noticed a change in my face. The flesh seemed to shrivel and slough away; my eyes were wide open, staring, but they gradually grew dim, and then I saw that they were nothing but pools of corruption. And then——"

"Go on!" I said again.

"I can't go on!" he answered thickly. "I can't tell you! It's too horrible!"

He was trembling so I thought he was going to faint, and I hastened to him; but in a moment he had got back some semblance of self-control.

"All right," he said. "I'm all right. Don't bother. But—but I didn't look any farther than that, Lester. I didn't dare! To tell you the truth, I fell down in a kind of fit. My wife found me—I wasn't a pleasant object to look at, I

assure you. But Owen gave me one of his treatments, and I was soon all right again."

"One of his treatments?" I repeated, with a vague stirring of uneasiness within me.

"Just a few passes of the hands and a few quieting words—but they work wonders," he explained hurriedly. "And this morning, I didn't look. I turned away my eyes when the blood came, and then went ahead and finished shaving. I didn't want to see that—that horror again." But as he sat staring at me, I knew that he *did* see it; indeed, I could almost fancy that I saw it myself! Then I shook myself together.

"You must get away from here, Bronson," I said decisively. "I shouldn't be surprised if you *did* go mad, if you keep on thinking of such horrors. And the sooner you go the better. I wish you would place yourself in my hands. There's no reason on earth why you shouldn't sail Saturday, at the very latest."

"No doubt you are right," he agreed; "and I should like to go; but," he added, a little shamefacedly, "I hate to talk to my wife about it. I couldn't tell her about what I saw in the mirror, Lester; I couldn't do that! I have just gone on pretending there is nothing the matter. But of course she sees. And I know she worries. But the worst of it is to see her so young and fresh and beautiful, and then to catch a glimpse of myself in the glass! It was bad enough at the beginning; but at least I was a man then, and I could make up to her in a way for my ugliness; but now—now I'm a mass of cor——"

"Stop it!" I broke in. "Good heavens, Bronson! Don't say such things! Don't think such things! And I will have a talk with your wife, if you want me to."

"Will you?" he said eagerly. "That's kind of you. Put it that we are going on a vacation. And don't tell her what I saw in the glass."

"I won't," I promised. "And don't say anything about my coming. I will just drop in to see her to-morrow afternoon, and I'll bring up the subject without any reference to you. Perhaps she wouldn't like it if she thought we'd been planning the whole thing together beforehand."

He nodded emphatic agreement.

"And make it plain, if you can," he added, "that we will go by ourselves. We will go to a health resort—there will be good doctors there, so we won't need Owen."

I looked at him quickly.

"Don't you want Owen?" I asked.

"No."

"Why not? What has he been doing?"

"He hasn't been doing anything," answered Bronson querulously. "But I'd rather not have him. There is something about him—I don't know—but he just sits and looks at one, and the cold chills run up one's back. I fancy, sometimes, that he is some one who has come back from the grave to haunt me—that shows what a state I'm in, doesn't it! Perhaps it's that bright eye of his—it's as if it could look right through and through a man, and see everything he has ever done—good and bad—especially bad——"

He stopped abruptly.

"I agree with you," I said impatiently. "I wouldn't take Owen. I don't like him, either—and I think you made a mistake in asking him to come to New York."

"But we needed him—my wife needed him—and he has made her well again."

"There are a hundred doctors here who could have done as much. You shouldn't have dismissed Jenner—he should, at least, have been called into consultation. Are you sure she's well again? I haven't much faith in hypnotic suggestion."

"Yes, she's well; wait till you see her. She's radiant! She's radiant, Lester! And look at me!"

He held up his shaking hand for an instant, and I could have sworn there were tears of self-pity in his eyes, so weak had he become. Then he got to his feet and shuffled toward the door.

"You will see her to-morrow, then?" he said. "You won't forget?"

"No; I won't forget."

"And you'll impress her that we don't need Owen?"

"Yes. But I don't think she will want Owen. He's not an attractive object. I can't imagine any woman wanting him."

He looked at me strangely for a moment.

"She called him in her sleep!" he said, in a strangled voice, and as I stood, staring, let himself quietly out.

I flung myself into my chair, more shaken than I liked to acknowledge.

What had he meant by those last words? What horrible thought was in his mind? Surely, not that his wife and Owen——

I recalled the man's appearance—his hawklike face, with the livid scar across it, and the drooping lid. Truly, he was not an attractive object! But, then, neither was Bronson. Two more unattractive ones would be hard to find. Perhaps——

I had a hasty impulse to thrust the thought behind me; but I nerved myself and held it fast and looked at it.

Perhaps it was Owen's ugliness which had prepared Charmian Carling for Bronson's, and rendered her unconscious of it. Perhaps the one man had perverted her taste, her instinct, so that the other, when he came, did not offend them. I had heard of such perversions; of flowers beautiful without and fetid within——

I stopped the thought there, for it was an outrage upon a lovely woman. I was disgusted with myself for having harbored it.

CHAPTER VII.

I ASK FOR HELP.

I had intended to spend that evening catching up on my personal correspondence. Instead, I went to see Jenner. For I realized that Bronson was throwing the whole responsibility of his affairs upon my shoulders, and, when it came to the selection of a health resort, I knew that I needed expert advice.

Besides being a great specialist, Jenner is a suave and cultivated gentleman; but it was useless for him to pretend that he was glad to see me, that evening, after he found out what I had come for. Indeed, for a moment I thought he was going to refuse abruptly to have anything to do with the case; but he thought better of it, and asked me to sit down.

"After the way Bronson treated me," he said, "I don't feel that he has any claim upon me. Who is this fellow he's got down there?"

"I don't know anything about him, except that his name is Owen."

"Never heard of him. Where did he come from?"

"From the foothills of the Alleghenies," I answered.

Jenner stared at me.

"Why, I supposed he had been imported at great expense!" he said. "Tell me how it happened."

"Mrs. Bronson was raised among the hills of western Virginia," I explained, "and has known Doctor Owen all her life. It seems she had had previous attacks similar to this last one, and he had pulled her through. So when you refused to diagnose the case, her husband sent for him."

"And next day when I called I was told that my services were no longer required," snorted Jenner. "I was never so insulted in my life. But, even then, if I had had a chance, I'd have pocketed my pride and gone back, for the case promised some new features."

"Why wouldn't you diagnose it?"

"How could I diagnose it when I didn't know what it was? It was a case that needed watching before I could make up my mind. What has this fellow Owen done with it?"

"I haven't seen Mrs. Bronson for a week, but her husband tells me she's cured."

"Do you happen to know anything of the treatment?"

"I know that the first night he got there, he put her to sleep by hypnotic suggestion. He said afterward that it was the only way."

Jenner snorted again.

"That's a quack's talk! I should like

to see her—but there. If she's cured, what do you want with me?"

"*She* may be cured," I said, "but her husband is in a bad way. I want your advice," and I detailed the substance of the several talks I had had with Bronson, while the great specialist listened in amazement. "In my opinion," I concluded, "there is only one thing to do—that is to send him away to a health resort as soon as possible. I am going to try to get him to sail Saturday, and I want you to tell me where he would better go."

"Look here, Lester," Jenner broke in, "when a man comes to you to ask your professional opinion, do you give it offhand, or do you wait till you know the facts?"

"I wait till I know the facts."

"So do I—and I don't do any long-distance prescribing. After I have seen your man, I will tell him what to do. From what you have told me, he seems a fit subject for a sanitarium."

"You don't think he's mad?"

"I don't know what he is. But hallucinations are the commonest symptoms of mania, and mania often leads very quickly to dementia, which is just another name for insanity. Besides, in the interests of science, I ought to see him, because I never heard of another case just like this. The form his hallucination takes is unique."

"I don't care anything about the interests of science," I retorted. "I leave that to cold-blooded specialists. But I want to save Bronson."

Jenner chuckled at my heat.

"And I don't care especially about Bronson," he said. "He is only a single individual in a world of millions—and not an especially valuable one. But in the interests of science, I am willing to save him if I can."

"You are like a naturalist with a new bug."

"Exactly," he admitted coolly. "When can I see the bug?"

I swallowed my wrath. After all, there was something to be said for Jenner's point of view. No doubt, as a lawyer, I had often considered a client as an interesting case, rather than as a harried human being!

"I will try to get him to come and see you," I said; "but I'm afraid he won't. He doesn't like to talk about this thing, even to his wife. He started talking to me because I am his lawyer, and he knew there had to be some one to puncture the gossip which was sure to start when he and his wife were seen together; and he has got to talking a good deal more freely, I think, than he intended to. It seems to relieve him."

Jenner nodded.

"No doubt it does. And that reminds me. Since you know the story, tell me—how did such a glorious creature as that wife of his come to marry him? I confess I can't understand it. What is wrong with her?"

"There is nothing wrong with her," I said, and told him the story. But it left him frankly incredulous.

"That girl was never raised in the backwoods, Lester," he protested. "She's a hothouse flower—an exotic. She hasn't the aroma of the backwoods. When a man has worked around women as much as I have, he develops a sort of sixth sense in regard to them—or perhaps it is just a refinement of the sense of smell. Anyway, I can tell a good woman from a bad one just by her arms. I am not talking about chastity, now; I am talking about something higher and more delicate. And I knew the first instant I was with her that Bronson's wife was not a good woman."

"Oh, come," I said; "we lawyers require better evidence than that!"

"It isn't evidence at all to any one but me," admitted Jenner; "but to me it's conclusive."

"Does your sublimated sense of smell extend to men?" I asked.

"Yes—but it is sometimes harder to decide. Men are much more complex than women!"

"More heresy!" I laughed. "I thought it was women who were complex. But, anyway, I wish you would take a sniff at Doctor Owen, the first time you meet him. I'd be curious to know what you made of him."

"Why?"

"I haven't any supernormal sense of smell," I explained, "but there is something about him which, at the instant I first see him, always makes me shrink back. The impression passes after I have been with him a few minutes, and I even end by finding him witty and agreeable; but the next time I meet him there is always that momentary repulsion."

Jenner considered this for a moment.

"I should be inclined to trust the first impression," he said, at last. "But then, of course, I'm prejudiced against Owen. I'll tell you what I will do: I am interested in this case, and, rather than miss seeing Bronson, I'll go down to his place of business in the morning and take a look at him. I'll say that you were here to-night talking about health resorts, and that, as I happened to be passing his place, I thought I'd stop in and talk it over. He can't take offense at that, can he?"

"No," I said thoughtfully, "if you are very careful to give the impression that I talked with you only in a general way."

"I will do that, of course, and perhaps I can draw him out. Most people like to talk to doctors about themselves." And then Jenner made a wry grimace. "See to what lengths a hobby takes a man. What I'm about to do is absolutely unprofessional. I am butting in where I am not wanted—something no self-respecting doctor ever does!" Then he rose with a laugh. "I'll call you up after I have seen him," he added, "and report."

And so I went away, pondering what a great man he was; for it takes a great man to admit frankly that he doesn't know, and then to be ready to disregard the ethics of his profession in order to find out!

I was looking for his telephone call all the morning, but it didn't come; and then, just as I was getting ready to go to lunch, the office boy brought his card in to me. There was an expression on his face which made me look at him twice, as he sat down in the chair I placed for him. Or, rather, it was a lack of expression, for his face looked as though he had deliberately drawn a mask over it in order to conceal his feelings.

"Well," I asked, "did you see him?"

"Yes, I saw him."

"And you got him to talk?"

"Talk? I couldn't stop him, after he got started. He treated me as though I were a confessor on whom he could unload all his sins."

"His sins?"

"Well, his sufferings. It's the sufferings, real and imaginary, that are unloaded on the doctors. After all, there isn't much difference between sin and suffering—none at all, I sometimes think. And do you know, Lester, it seems to do the sufferers good to get rid of them. It did Bronson good. He has consented to go away Saturday."

"Where will he go?"

"That," said Jenner slowly, "is a secret between Bronson and me. I don't want any one else to know where he is."

"But his wife will want to know where she's going."

"Ah," said Jenner, still more slowly, "that's just it. She's not going."

I could only stare at him.

"See here, Lester," he said, "the things a man tells his physician are told under a seal of secrecy, just like the things he tells his priest. But I will be as frank with you as I can. I'm not entirely clear as to Bronson's ailment; the symptoms are obscure and startling and unique. But on one point I *am* clear. If we are going to save him, we have got to get him away from his present surroundings and influences. His wife is one of those influences. I am not saying that she is a bad one; but she is one of the things he must be got away from."

"But we can't leave her alone with Owen," I pointed out. "He is an old man and an ugly one; but just the same it won't do. It doesn't sound well."

"We won't leave her with Owen. Owen must be sent back to Virginia—or wherever he wants to go. She will be all right with Gurley and his wife."

"She will be mighty dull," I said doubtfully.

"That's where you come in," said Jenner, with a twisted smile. "We expect you to amuse her."

I made a hasty gesture of dissent, but my companion stopped me.

"Wait a minute," he said. "Wait till I've finished. She can't be left alone, and she can't go with her husband—not if we want to pull him through. Right now he is on the verge of a complete nervous collapse. He thinks he is going mad, and he probably will if something isn't done. Or else he will kill himself. That is the obvious suggestion which that hallucination of his has been making over and over. I could see it at the back of his mind. I think you ought to help."

"I don't like him," I said. "I never did."

"Neither do I. His aroma is distinctly bad—there is something rotten in him somewhere. But then there is in most men. No physician ever stops to think of that. We have got to save him, and you ought to help."

His words were insistent—there was no avoiding them. But I felt that I was being drawn into this tangle a great deal more deeply than I wished to be. From the very first I had been consenting to do things that I didn't want to do.

"There are a lot of things I ought to do that I don't do," I protested feebly. "I'm no Samaritan—I'm just a selfish lawyer."

"I know it," Jenner agreed heartily, and then he laughed at the expression of my face. "But just the same you are going to help."

I positively squirmed in my chair.

"But, confound it," I said, "it is too much. How long will Bronson be away?"

"I don't know. Perhaps in a month his wife can join him."

"A month!" I groaned, and then I caught Jenner's eye.

"What is it you're afraid of?" he asked. "Are you afraid of *her?*"

"Yes," I said candidly. "I am."

Jenner looked at me for a moment longer, and the expression of his eyes was distinctly mocking.

"Oh, well," I said, "what's the use! What is it you want me to do first?"

Jenner laughed, a little laugh that was distinctly mocking, too.

"The first thing you have got to do is to see her and break the news to her. We must have her consent—her assistance. She mustn't put any obstacle in the way—not the very slightest, for if she does, Bronson won't go. You will have to handle her delicately."

I groaned again.

"That's a pleasant task, isn't it!"

"And then," went on Jenner inexorably, "you must see Owen and let him know that we don't want him around any longer."

"That's pleasant, too!"

"If I were you, I would simply buy him off. And I wouldn't haggle over the price."

I stared.

"Buy him off?"

"What else can his game be?" Jenner demanded. "If he isn't a blackmailer, what is he?"

"I don't know what he is," I said; "but I don't believe he is a blackmailer. And I can't see myself buying him off."

"Oh, well, do as you think best—only get rid of him. And now I'll have to be running on—there are a hundred people waiting to see me." He rose, smiling at my lugubrious countenance. "I'll say one thing to you, Lester," he added, his hand on the door, "your aroma isn't nearly as bad as that of most men!"

And with that he was gone.

CHAPTER VIII.

A VANISHING OF BARRIERS.

I have faced a good many unpleasant duties in the course of my career, for unpleasant duties are a lawyer's lot; but I had never faced any half so unpleasant as the two interviews to which I had pledged myself. They spoiled my luncheon, they took the savor from my cigar, they distracted me from my work, and finally, in sheer desperation, I slammed my desk shut and left the

office, determined to get them over with.

Again it was old Gurley who opened the door to my ring, and again I noticed how he was failing. Almost as much as his master.

"Is Mrs. Bronson at home?" I asked.

"Yes, sir; come in, sir. *He's* at home, too!" he added, in a fierce undertone, as I crossed the threshold.

His voice startled me.

"What do you mean, Gurley?" I demanded. "Who is at home?"

But before he could answer, the drapery at the library door was flung aside, and Mrs. Bronson fairly ran toward us.

"Mr. Lester!" she cried, both hands extended. "How glad I am to see you!"

"Thank you!" I said, and took her hand, while Gurley stood saturninely by. "How well you are looking!"

"Do you think so? I am certainly feeling well. But come along in. I have a thousand things to say to you."

I gave Gurley my coat without looking at him—I was reluctant, somehow, to meet his eyes—and followed his mistress into the library. A bright fire was burning there, and, as we entered, a tall figure arose from a chair in front of it. It was Doctor Owen, and, as always, I had that feeling of inward shrinking as I shook hands with him.

"The doctor and I were just speaking of you," Mrs. Bronson rattled on, motioning us to chairs, and herself sinking into a deep, low one, placed very near the fire. "He was again talking of campaigns."

"Not of campaigns so much as of diversion," Owen put in. "You see, Mr. Lester, Charmian is well again—*my* work is done."

I could not but admit it was well done, however little I liked the doer.

"I have already told her that she looks it," I said.

"And since there is no further need for me here," Owen went on, "I am anxious to get back to my hills."

For the life of me, I could not suppress a start of astonishment. But I managed to keep my eyes on the fire, though I was conscious that his was upon me.

"This town is intolerable to me," he went on evenly. "All towns are. Up in the hills I have friends, and can do some good."

"But you have friends here," broke in the girl.

"And surely you have done good here," I could not help but add.

"Thank you," he answered gravely. "Yes, I have done a little good, perhaps; and I am glad I came. I think I have already told you, Mr. Lester, that this spoiled child is like a daughter to me. If she ever needs me, she has only to call; but she doesn't need me now. She needs you."

"Me!" I cried, and looked at them in wonder.

"Yes, you," said Owen. "Shall I tell him, Charmian?"

She nodded mutely.

"Have you seen Bronson lately?" he asked.

"I saw him yesterday."

"And you noticed the change in him?"

"How could I help it?"

"Did he refer to it in any way?"

"I know that he is worried about himself," I said slowly, wondering how much it was wise to tell. "In fact, he came to see me again about his will. He is very anxious that nothing should interfere with his wife's absolute control of his property. He came to me to find out what would happen if he—went mad."

The girl cowered back into her chair, her hands before her eyes.

"I knew it!" she cried. "I knew it!"

"What *would* happen?" Owen asked.

There was something in the question which offended me, I scarcely knew why.

"I agreed," I answered a little coldly, "in case he is adjudged insane, to have his wife appointed his guardian, so that the control of his property would be hers."

"Oh, don't, don't!" she cried. "How can you talk about such things! It's he we must talk about! We must save him!"

"I agree with you, Mrs. Bronson," I said. "At least, we must do our best. It was to talk this over with you I came this afternoon."

"Thank you!" and she flung out her hand and gave my fingers a fleeting pressure.

"Charmian and I have already been talking about it," put in Owen, ignoring my attempted elimination of him. "In my mind, there can be no question as to the proper course. Mr. Bronson must be persuaded to change his surroundings absolutely. He must place himself under the care of some competent physician, preferably in a sanitarium, where he can be given every attention. Do you agree with me?"

I knew that I was staring at him, astonishment written on my face, but I could not help it. In fact, I could scarcely believe that I had heard aright.

"Do you agree with me?" he repeated.

"Absolutely," I managed to respond.

"The difficulty will be to persuade him to accept such an arrangement," he went on. "Do you think you can do that?"

"At least I am willing to try."

"Good! You can succeed, if any one can. I think he has more confidence in you than in any one—certainly more than he has in me. I am afraid he doesn't wholly like me."

"Oh, I don't know," I began.

"That's natural enough," Owen interrupted, with a smile. "I don't blame him, for I am not a likable man. But you have his confidence, and you must persuade him. You understand, of course, that he must go alone?"

"Yes," I said, "I understand that."

I confess that my mind was in a maze; I did not understand why the barriers which I had thought so formidable, should fall, one after the other, in this fashion.

And then I was conscious that Mrs. Bronson was crying softly.

"I have had great difficulty persuading Charmian," continued Owen. "She has that old woman's idea that a wife's place is with her husband. She can't understand that husbands are better off, sometimes, without their wives. But she has finally consented."

"But what am I going to do?" she wailed, looking up at me with brimming eyes. "What am I going to do in this big, dark house, all by myself? I will go home with you, doctor dear. And I won't have you saying that you're not a likable man! It isn't true!"

For a moment my heart stood still—was this what Owen had been working for?

"Yes, it is," said Owen, almost roughly. "And you'll not go home with me. In the first place, I don't want you—I want to be alone; in the second place, it wouldn't do. Mrs. Bronson's place is here in her husband's house. It's unfortunate Bronson has no relatives, and that you have no friends but——"

"She has one," I pointed out.

Owen actually smiled at me. It wasn't exactly a pleasant smile—though I have no doubt that it was meant to be; but the thin nose and the thin lips gave it a satiric tinge which made me feel as though I had walked into a trap.

"I hadn't ventured to suggest it," he said, "because, after all, I don't know you very well, Mr. Lester, and because I have seen that you haven't found me likable, either; but I *did* hope that you would see your way to dropping in occasionally and cheering Charmian up."

"I need a lot of cheering," added the object of these remarks, peeping up at me. "Especially here in this big city. It seems to me that the sun doesn't shine here—not like it did in the hills—that's the reason you find me always hugging the fire."

Jenner's characterization of her as a hothouse flower, an exotic, shot through my brain, and I smiled at it.

"Well," I said, "I'm willing to do what I can; and I don't consider it exactly a sacrifice, either. Why can't we start to-night?"

"To-night?"

"There is that long-standing invitation to the theater," I reminded her.

Again her hand shot out and gave mine a little squeeze.

"You dear man!" she murmured. And then her eyes turned longingly to Owen. "Do you think I might?" she asked.

"As far as you are concerned, certainly; it will do you good. But I am not sure it would be wise for your husband."

"Wouldn't the distraction do him good?"

Owen shook his head doubtfully.

"I don't see how it could do him any harm, anyway," I said. "Suppose we leave it to him."

"Very well," Owen agreed, and lifted his long figure out of the chair. "I can't tell you how relieved I am, Mr. Lester," he added, "that you are so heartily with us. I only hope you can persuade Bronson. But I think you can."

"If I can't," I said, "I'll call in Jenner to help me."

"Jenner?" He paused on the word.

"The great nerve specialist," I explained.

"Oh—yes, I have heard of him. You couldn't get a better man. Does he know anything of Bronson's condition?"

Why should I lie or evade, I asked myself. After all, I had done nothing to be ashamed of, and we were all in accord.

"Yes," I answered, "he does. When I saw Bronson yesterday and realized from what he told me the serious state he was in, I suggested to him that he ought to go away, only my idea was that he should take a long trip—perhaps go to some health resort in Europe—and take Mrs. Bronson with him. He half agreed, and last night I went to see Doctor Jenner to ask him which resort would, in his opinion, be the best one. He refused to give any advice until he had seen the patient. He went to see him this morning, and as a result came to the same conclusion you did. So I came around this afternoon to talk it over."

Owen had listened intently, his gleaming eye on my face. He nodded his head slightly, with a quick glance at the girl, as I finished.

"You see," he said to her, with a peculiar emphasis, "I was right and you were wrong. It was only after long persuasion I convinced her she should not go with her husband," he explained, turning to me. "Well, I am glad to be approved by so eminent an authority as Doctor Jenner. And now I must go and pack."

"Go and pack!" cried the girl. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that I shall soon be on my way back to the mountains."

"But you shan't go like that!" she cried, springing to her feet and shaking his arm in exasperation. "How horrible of you! To-morrow night is New Year's Eve. At least, you'll stay and see the new year in with us! And you, too, Mr. Lester," she added, swinging upon me. "You must come, too, and help us see the new year in."

I had made other plans for the celebration, which means so much to New Yorkers; but they were shattered by that glance.

"Thank you," I said; "I'll come."

"And you will stay," she added, swinging back to Owen.

"Yes, I'll stay, tyrant!" he said, and flipped her on the cheek with his finger. "I wonder if you know what a tyrant you are?"

She grimaced up at him, and with a little laugh, he shook himself free, nodded good-humoredly to me, and left the room. I also turned toward the door.

"You're not going!" she protested.

"I must. I have so much to do. And I must arrange with your husband about to-night."

"Oh, don't bother to do that," she said quickly. "When he comes home, I'll ask him about it. He is never later than five. That will be time enough, won't it?"

"Oh, yes," I assured her. "I will wait at the office till I hear from you."

"How good you are!" she cried, her face beaming. "Are you always so obliging?"

"Not always, I'm afraid," I stam-

mered. It confused me to be treated like a grandfather. I had never thought of myself as old, yet this girl seemed to see no difference between me and the other two men she knew. Perhaps she was age blind, or perhaps there wasn't so much difference, after all! The thought was not a cheering one!

"Just so you always are to me!" she said.

I could find no word of answer, and made my way silently out into the hall. She went with me, and watched, while Gurley, with a face more sardonic than ever, helped me into my coat and gave me my hat. She even went to the door with me and waved me good-by from the steps, to the frank interest of the passers-by. I could feel my ears burning as I walked hastily away.

It was perhaps an hour later that my phone rang, and Bronson's voice answered my "Hello." Such a tired voice it was!

"Charmian tells me," he said, "that you want to take us to the theater to-night. But I'm afraid I'm too tired."

"I am awfully sorry," I replied. "I was hoping you would be better. I suppose you know that everything's all right—about your vacation, I mean?"

"Yes; but I want to think it over a little longer."

I started to protest, but he stopped me.

"I can't go until after the first of the year, anyway," he said. "We're to celebrate to-morrow night, it seems, and I want to save myself for that. You will be sure to come?"

"Yes," I promised; "we can talk it over then."

"About to-night," he went on hesitatingly, "I scarcely know how to say it, but I wish you would take Charmian, even if I can't go. I feel that she ought to get out—it isn't fair to keep her cooped up here. Won't you take her?"

"Why, yes," I stammered; "I'll be glad to, of course, if you wish it."

"I do wish it," he said. "It will be a great favor to me."

"Perhaps," I suggested, "Doctor Owen would like to go along."

"No; I asked him. He says he abhors the theater. All he is thinking of is getting back to his hills."

"Very well," I said; "I shall be there about eight."

"Thank you, Lester," and there could be no doubting Bronson's earnestness. "I don't know what I should do without you."

I made some conventional reply; but my pulse was not altogether steady as I hung up the receiver.

CHAPTER IX.

I ACT AS CHAPERON.

At the last hour, in the busy season, I had to take what I could get in the way of theaters, but I finally secured a box at Daly's, where an innocuous musical comedy, long since forgotten, was running, and succeeding, as so many musical comedies do, on the strength of a single song. And, having settled this detail, I hurried up to my rooms at the Marathon to dress.

Half an hour later, I dropped down again and turned in at the door of the dining room. There is a table tucked in by the corner window which Louis knows I like, and he led me to it this evening and himself handed me the menu. But I knew better than to look at it.

"Louis," I said, "I haven't got much time. Do your best for me. You know what I like."

"*Oui, monsieur,*" responded Louis, his face shining, as it always did at this mark of confidence. "A soup, a meat, a *salade, et une* sweete—t'at iss it. *n'est ce pas?*"

"Perfectly," I nodded, and Louis, having provided me with an evening paper, hurried away.

I glanced through the paper, but my mind was elsewhere, and finally I laid it aside. I felt that I had need to adjust my attitude toward Mrs. Bronson; I was not at all satisfied with myself; and all through the meal I pondered this question gloomily, much to the detriment of my enjoyment of the dishes which Louis set before me. At last came the coffee, and I lighted a cigarette and settled back in my chair.

There was only one thing to be done, I told myself: If Mrs. Bronson chose to treat me like a grandfather, it was up to me to behave like one; if she was really only a child, she must be treated like a child. But was she only a child? Was she as ingenuous, as innocent, as unsuspecting as her manner indicated? I recalled Jenner's cynical estimate, I recalled my own sensations? Was Jenner right?

If he was, if the girl was really an exotic, there was only one thing for me to do, and that was to withdraw, as gracefully and as promptly as might be. Bronson must find some other chaperon for his wife. It was too bad he had no elderly female relative to whom to intrust her. I felt that I should be much more comfortable to-night if there was an elderly female relative along.

But as we drove away from the house together, half an hour later, I told myself that I was a fool, a creature of convention, a slave to Mrs. Grundy, to be moved by such doubts and questionings; for, so far from sparkling like an exotic, the face of my companion was downcast, almost sad.

"Do you think I did right to come?" she asked hesitatingly, after a moment.

"Why, certainly," I said. "Why not?"

"I don't know; but I couldn't be sure. I felt a little conscience-stricken about it."

"But why?" I asked again.

"Mr. Bronson was so tired to-night, it seemed almost wicked for me to be away enjoying myself."

"But he wanted you to," I pointed out. "He will be happier knowing that you are happy. One of the things which weighs on him most is the thought that he may not be able to make you happy."

"I know," she nodded. "He's very good, isn't he?"

"He's very anxious to make you happy," I equivocated. "He is very anxious that you should never regret having married him."

"But of course I shall not regret it," and she looked up at me in astonishment. "Why should I?"

"I am sure I don't know," I said feebly. "But I think he is right in wanting you to get out more. You ought to have a drive every day—and you have got to meet some people. I'll have to see what I can do."

She put a hand timidly upon my arm.

"That is very thoughtful of you," she said. "Don't think I don't appreciate it. But don't bring any one for a little while. I'm so timid about meeting people—I'm so afraid I'll do something wrong."

The foyer at Daly's is rather old-fashioned, but it is undeniably handsome; and yet it seemed to me scarcely to merit the awed way in which my companion looked about it. She said not a word as I guided her across it and followed the usher around to our box; and, once arrived there, it was still in silence that she took the scarf from her head and slipped out of her wrap. When I turned from hanging them up and getting out of my own coat, I found her standing as I had left her, looking out over the house with rapt gaze.

I paused for an instant to drink in the picture she made; and then, suddenly, from the battery of glasses turned our way, I realized that others were drinking it in, too. I went hastily forward and placed a chair for her.

"Won't you sit down?" I said.

She sat down with a little indrawn breath.

"Isn't it wonderful!"

I looked out over the house, which I had seen so many times, and undeniably I *did* feel like a grandfather.

"Do you think so?"

"Don't you?" and she swung round upon me.

"I can only say that I envy you your freshness of heart," I answered.

She regarded me doubtfully.

"My freshness of heart?"

"Yes; and I hope that you will keep it always."

She looked at me for a moment longer; then she turned back to the house. And presently the curtain went up, and we assisted at a touching fare-

well between a country vicar and his three lovely daughters. That is, she assisted. I found her face much better worth watching than the foolery on the stage. She thought Mr. Walkley immense.

"But why does he talk in that queer, clipped way?" she asked, when the curtain was down again.

"That," I explained, "is the English accent—the real thing. You must try to acquire it. It is very fashionable."

"Must I?" and then she smiled. "You are making fun of me!"

"Perhaps I was," I admitted. "You must forgive me."

"I don't mind. I know I am very stupid."

"Not stupid," I protested. "Just ingenuous."

"Do you mind my being ingenuous?"

"Mind it! I think it's charming. You see," I added, nodding at the house, "I should have won that wager."

She looked at me, then followed the direction of my nod.

"It's like the Battle of Waterloo, isn't it?" I went on. "All the batteries concentrated on one spot."

I saw a flush of crimson sweep up her throat, and she leaned suddenly back into the shadow.

"Do you mean they are looking at me?" she gasped.

"Well," I laughed, "it would be absurd to suppose they were looking at me!"

She gasped again, and cast a rapid glance down over her dress.

"I haven't any mirror," she said. "Tell me, is there anything wrong?"

"On the contrary, everything is divinely right!"

"You are making fun of me again!"

I confess that I was suddenly sobered, perhaps by the realization of my years and sophistication. And she seemed so movingly young, so innocent and in need of help and counsel.

"My dear child," I said, and it was really as a child I thought of her in that moment, "has no one ever told you that you are beautiful—supremely, enchantingly beautiful? Look around at these other women—why, there isn't one here can hold a candle to you!"

She did not answer, but sat very quietly in the shadow, staring straight ahead of her; but at last she stirred slightly and looked up at me wistfully.

"Do you mean all that?" she asked. "Is it the truth?"

"The absolute truth."

I saw her bosom rise and fall with a quick breath. But she did not speak. For the remainder of the evening she was very quiet and pensive, and was careful to keep within the shadow of the curtain. Mr. Walkley seemed to have palled a little; even the song about the fascinations of the miller's daughter fell a little flat, and I wondered remorsefully if I had been wise to speak as I did. But of course I had! If she was going about the world, it must be with her eyes open! But it would be tragic if she lost her bloom!

She was still very silent when I placed her in the hansom, climbed in beside her, and gave the driver the address in Washington Square. I had fully intended to take her somewhere for supper after the play—to some gay and surprising place, where she would get a glimpse of the night life of New York. But quite suddenly I decided that it wouldn't do. What she needed was a woman friend—a wise and capable woman, to instruct her in the world's ways, to protect her from the world's gossip—and, above all, to make a third in all parties of pleasure. I cast my mind over my own women friends, but I could think of none to fill the part—even had they been willing to do so. Not many women would be willing. To appear beside this girl would be to invite comparisons almost certain to prove disastrous.

At last my companion shook herself out of her thoughts.

"You have been very good to me tonight, Mr. Lester," she said, in a low tone. "I am just beginning to realize how good. You see, I am so ignorant. I need a guide."

"Yes," I agreed, "you do. It must be my business to find one. A general for the campaign."

"Let us not speak of that. I shall not take part in a campaign."

"You can't help it, unless you keep yourself shut up—and that wouldn't be fair to the world. Besides, I am ambitious for you. I want you to go just as far as you can—to mount just as high. But there must be no missteps!"

I fancied I heard a little sob, instantly suppressed; and I knew that, in that instant, the realization came to her that she had already made a misstep—that her marriage to Bronson was a misstep, which would lay her open to suspicion and innuendo. It was inevitable, of course, that she should realize it, sooner or later, and I had an absurd desire to comfort her; but there was nothing I could say. And I am afraid that it was not wholly without satisfaction that I reflected that Bronson was an old and breaking man, almost at the end of his course.

The cab stopped before the gloomy old house, and I helped her to alight. Gurley had evidently heard us, for he opened the door before we had a chance to ring. I saw again the saturnine look in his eyes as they met mine, and its implication offended me.

"Won't you come in?" she asked.

"No," I said; "thank you. And thank you, too, for a delightful evening."

"Oh, it is I who should do the thanking—for the evening—and everything." Her lips were tremulous, her eyes were shining, and suddenly she raised her hand and touched me lightly on the cheek. "You have been good to me! Good night!"

I am ten years older than I was that night, and I know the truth about her now; but the memory of that touch—a child's caress, it seemed—thrills me, even yet!

CHAPTER X.

ENTER MY GUARDIAN ANGEL.

I dismissed the hansom and walked home. Below Twenty-third Street, the avenue was deserted save for an occasional hurrying cab or loitering policeman; but at its juncture with Broadway I found myself in the midst of an after-theater crowd, and drifted along northward with it. Its glitter, its gay talk, its bright eyes and laughing lips served to distract my thoughts; but, once in my rooms, I changed into a lounging coat, filled my pipe, and sat down resolutely to think things out.

And just then there came a quick step in the hall outside, and a knock at my door.

I rose, with an impatient exclamation, and opened it. It was Jim Godfrey who stood outside.

"Ah, Lester," he said quietly, "may I come in?"

I had often heard it said that one sometimes entertains angels unawares; but it was not until long afterward that I understood it was an angel I entertained that night. I tried to tell Godfrey so, the other day, but he laughed at me.

"I've been called about everything else," he said, "but nobody ever called me an angel before. Absurd, Lester—a yellow journalist with wings! Why, that's a cartoon!"

It is true that Godfrey is a yellow journalist—and it is also true that he is my best friend. Do I need to introduce him again? I think not, except to say that for astuteness I have never met his equal—never but once. Yes, stanch friend as I am of Godfrey's, I must admit that there is one man in the world who is more than a match for him—but I have already told that story!

"May I come in?" Godfrey repeated. "I was at the station across the way talking with Simmonds, and felt suddenly that I needed to see you. Don't turn me out!"

It had been on the tip of my tongue to excuse myself, but there was no resisting that sunny look.

"Come in," I said, and stood aside and closed the door after him.

He threw off his coat, dropped into a chair, and got out a cigar.

"It has been an age since I saw you," he went on; "but I've been busy, and I suppose you have, too. I was in Washington for a week on that Hartigan case. Did you notice it?"

I nodded.

"It was a pretty case," he added thoughtfully, his eyes on the smoke circling toward the ceiling. "Not so pretty as some that you and I have been together in, Lester—but that sort of case is rare. It seems to me that crime is growing more and more sordid; I sigh, sometimes, for a really great criminal—or, at least, for an original one. You've read the 'Calf Path'? Well, criminals are like that. They go on blundering along the road the first one blazed for them—using the same old methods, the same old tools. It's discouraging."

I might explain that Godfrey is the star criminal reporter of the *Record*, and I couldn't help smiling at his tone. I can see now that it was that smile which Godfrey was fishing for!

"Perhaps I will bring you another one, some day," I said.

"May it be soon! How has the world been using you?"

"Better than I deserve!"

"It uses most of us better than we deserve—but I thought it was using you especially well to-night."

I jerked around toward him.

"What do you mean?" I demanded.

"I happened in at Daly's," he explained. "Who is that beautiful girl?"

"Her name is Mrs. Bronson," I said shortly.

I heard his chair creak, as though he had moved suddenly; but I didn't look at him. Dark suspicions were circling at the back of my mind—that question had been just a shade too casual.

"A widow?" he asked, after a moment.

"No; she's the wife of Henry Bronson. I don't suppose you know him. He's a client of mine—lives in Washington Square."

Again there was a moment's silence.

"Why, yes," said Godfrey finally. "As it happens, I *do* know him."

There was an implication in his tone I didn't like.

"He's considerably older than she is," I said, "and he's not exactly handsome; but he seems to be a nice enough fellow. He's very anxious to make her happy."

3A

Godfrey smoked on in silence.

"He is worth a million," I added, "so he ought to be able to."

"Ah!" commented Godfrey. "Just so."

I felt myself flushing.

"Though she doesn't care for his money," I explained. "She doesn't know anything about it."

"Doesn't she?"

"No; her whole life has been spent in the foothills of western Virginia. She knows nothing of the world—absolutely nothing. It is astonishing how innocent and ingenuous she is."

"I haven't a doubt of it," agreed Godfrey dryly. "How did she come to marry Bronson?"

I hadn't intended to tell Godfrey the story; but suddenly I found that I wanted to. After all, I was expected to tell it—I was expected to silence the tongues of scandal and innuendo—and surely I could not do better than begin with this yellow journalist, this specialist in crime, who was frankly cynical and took no pains to conceal it. So, almost before I knew it, I found myself launched on the story, and I told it much as I have set it down here. Godfrey listened silently, without interruption, without question, almost without movement, until I had finished. And then he asked a question which seemed to me absolutely irrelevant:

"Where did Mrs. Bronson get that gown she wore to-night?"

I could only stare at him.

"Vanity has always been woman's greatest enemy," he continued, almost to himself. "If they are to be tripped up at all, vanity will do it. Men are vain, too, but in another way. They like to show off before their women; they like to run to them and display their spoils, and shower them with gold and diamonds. And the women put the diamonds on and go out and betray their men. So I would like to know where Mrs. Bronson got that gown."

"I suppose she got it at Richmond," I managed to say. "Bronson told me that he had outfitted her there."

Godfrey glanced at me with a pitying smile.

"At Richmond? Didn't you look at it?"

"I noticed that it was becoming."

"It was a masterpiece. If it wasn't made in Paris, or at least after a Parisian model, I miss my guess. Of course, they may have French gowns in Richmond—but where did this backwoods maid of yours get the taste to choose it? Taste isn't instinctive, Lester, for all the talk to the contrary; it's the result of culture—and one doesn't get culture in the backwoods—not that kind. Even supposing she hit on it by accident, who taught her how to wear it?"

"What do you mean by all this, Godfrey?" I demanded. "What is it you are insinuating?"

"I am insinuating," he answered bluntly, "that things are not always what they seem—nor what they claim to be. Now, don't get angry. I don't blame you—I have never seen a more radiant creature than this Mrs. Bronson; but that only makes the mystery deeper."

"What mystery?"

"The mystery of her marriage to an animated scarecrow."

"You aren't fair to her!" I retorted hotly. "If you only knew her——"

"I wish I did. And I should like to meet this backwoods doctor with the hypnotic eye. Listen to me, Lester: You have taken too much for granted. Have you investigated their story?"

"Why should I?"

"Has it ever occurred to you that Bronson's hallucinations may have a cause?"

"Of course they have a cause—in disordered nerves."

"I wasn't thinking about nerves," said Godfrey pensively.

"No doubt," I retorted, with what I meant to be biting irony, "you see in all this a deep-laid plot of some sort—a picturesque addition to your collection of sensations!"

"It's picturesque, all right!" Godfrey chuckled.

"But there is one thing I want you to understand, Godfrey," I continued hotly, "and that is that what I have told you has been told in confidence. Oh, I know what a nice headline it would make for the *Record:* 'Beautiful Wife of an Animated Scarecrow.' That's the *Record's* style, isn't it? But I warn you, if you do anything like that——"

"Have you ever known me to do anything like that?" Godfrey broke in. "Come, now, tell me."

A quick revulsion of feeling shook me.

"No," I said contritely, "I never have. I beg your pardon, Godfrey. My nerves seem to be disordered, too!"

"All right," he said cheerfully. "You're overwrought to-night—and I don't wonder! But I accept your condition, Lester. I'll keep your confidence until you yourself release me."

I was thoroughly miserable, for these were coals of fire.

"Godfrey," I said contritely, "what is it you suspect, anyway?"

"I don't know," he answered slowly. "I haven't been able to shape it up yet—I've nothing to go on. But when I saw you in the box with that girl to-night, a sixth sense within me sounded the danger signal. And when you told me that she had married Bronson, that alarm bell rang again. For, whatever the circumstances may have been, the very fact that she married Bronson is a presumption against her."

"I know," I agreed. "I felt that at first, too. But since I have come to know her I don't feel it any more. She has never seen any but old men—and ugly ones. You should see Owen, with his scar and drooping eyelid! And she didn't even know she was beautiful."

"Oh, come, Lester——"

"She didn't know it, I tell you," I broke in fiercely, "until to-night. I told her. She was all shaken up over it—scarcely said a word to me afterward. Do you think I was wrong to tell her?"

"No," he answered dryly, "I don't think you did any harm."

He got up and slipped into his overcoat, while I stared moodily at the floor; then he came over and put his hand on my shoulder.

"Look here, old man," he said, "we're

not going to quarrel about this. Perhaps you are right—perhaps I am. We shall find out before long. But a little thing like this can't come between us."

"No," I agreed thickly. "No." And I reached up and gripped his hand.

"All right," he said. "Good night." And he let himself out.

I sat there for a long time, staring at nothing. If Godfrey should be right—if——

But I put the thought away. Perhaps I had been rather too credulous; perhaps Charmian Bronson was not quite so ingenuous as she had seemed; perhaps she had been having a little fun with me. I was ready to admit that possibility, even though it hurt my pride. But that her whole story was a lie, that she was a hypocrite and an impostor, leagued in some evil game with Owen—that I would not admit; that was too absurd! Why, if that were true, she would have to be the most consummate actress that ever lived!

Besides, her story could not be a lie. For it was not she who had told it to me. It was Bronson had told it. Bronson knew it to be true; and Bronson would have no reason to deceive me, for, if there was a plot, he was undoubtedly the victim. A plot! What sort of plot? What was it Godfrey had said about his hallucinations?

But that was absurd, too. That very afternoon, so far from plotting against him, I had found his wife and Owen anxiously planning to restore him to health. I was sorry I hadn't pointed that out to Godfrey; there was the conclusive answer to his suspicions.

With a sigh of relief, I turned out the light and went to bed. And my last waking sensation was of the playful tap of soft fingers on my cheek.

CHAPTER XI.

BRONSON SHOWS A NEW SIDE.

But with the morning my doubts returned. In spite of myself, my mind went back, incident by incident, over the events of the past two weeks, and away down at the bottom of my heart there was a feeling of uneasiness which I could not explain and which disgusted me. But here and there the incidents did not seem to fit together; there were little discrepancies, minute contradictions, which I found it impossible to reconcile one with another. Each in itself was unimportant; but, taken together, I found them more than a little disquieting.

But that, I told myself, was only because I did not understand. How few people would appear consistent if we subjected each of their actions to a microscopic test! And I was furious with Godfrey, who had sown the seed of this uneasiness. I am not by nature a suspicious man; I want to believe in people; and especially I wanted to believe in Charmian Bronson. And there was no reason, I told myself angrily, why I should not believe in her. What was there against her? Jenner had said that her aroma was not good; Godfrey had said that his sixth sense warned him against her. That was all. I could have laughed at the absurdity of it, but for that feeling at my heart.

I ended by calling up Jenner.

"Everything is arranged," I told him. "There wasn't the slightest difficulty. In fact, Mrs. Bronson and Owen had already decided that he ought to go away. Owen said he couldn't be in better hands than yours. He himself is going back to his hills at once."

"That's good!" commented Jenner; "and most surprising. But how did you happen to refer to me?"

"I told them that I had been worried about Bronson myself, and had gone around to see you."

"I'm glad you didn't implicate me any more than that! Have you seen Bronson since?"

"No; but I talked to him a minute over the phone."

"What did he say?"

"He said he couldn't go away till after the first."

"Well, that's to-morrow. He mustn't put it off more than a day or two."

"Can't you see him to-day?" I asked.

"I'm not going to see him again till he sends for me," said Jenner savagely.

"You would better see him yourself to-day and make all the arrangements."

"Suppose I bring him around to you this afternoon?" I suggested.

"I won't be at home. I have got to run over to Philadelphia, and I won't be back until late to-night. Bring him to-morrow."

"All right," I agreed; and presently, when I had got my office work cleared away, I set out for Bronson's place of business.

As it happened, I had never been there before, for he had always come to the office when he had any business too important for the mail or telephone, and I had some little difficulty in finding it; but at last I saw the sign, "Bronson's," over a door in a group of old buildings set back a little distance from the street, and entered. For a moment I could see nothing in the semidarkness; then I perceived that I was in a long room, stacked along the walls with casks and kegs, and with a great pile of cases running down the middle. An odor of damp and mildew, mixed with the odor of wine and spirits, hung heavily over the place. As I stood looking about me, a thickset man wearing a leather apron entered the door behind me, and paused to ask me what I wanted.

"I am looking for Mr. Bronson," I said. And he pointed to a narrow flight of stairs against the wall and hurried on.

So I made my way up the stairs, and found Bronson in a little, dusty office at the top. He was alone, except for an old fellow perched on a stool before a high desk—the bookkeeper, no doubt, and also, from his appearance, inherited with the business. I saw no sign of a stenographer or of a typewriting machine, and concluded that Bronson was far too conservative to admit any such method of correspondence. Probably he answered all letters by hand; I should not have been surprised to find that he used a quill!

He looked up as I entered, and nodded a welcome.

"Why, Lester!" he said. "So you have looked me up at last! Sit down."

He was looking much better than the last time I had seen him. His face had a better color, his eyes were brighter, and he seemed much less depressed. In fact, he wasn't depressed at all.

"I am glad to see you looking so well," I said.

"Yes; I'm feeling better. Besides, business keeps my mind off other things. I am glad you came in. There are two or three things I want to talk over with you."

"Yes," I said; "I thought we wouldn't have much time to talk to-night."

My eyes rested on the back of the old bookkeeper.

"Oh, you don't need to mind him," said Bronson, noticing the look. "He's as deaf as a post—and the best bookkeeper I ever knew. Writes a hand like copper plate. By the way, would you care for anything to drink?"

"No, thank you," I said. "Not at this time of day."

"I keep away from it myself, during business hours—in fact, I don't drink much at any time—don't dare to."

"Why not?"

"It would spoil my sense of taste. I'm my own tester, you know, just as my father was before me, and his father before him. I wouldn't trust anybody else."

"But doesn't that involve drinking a good deal?"

"It doesn't involve drinking at all. I taste sample after sample and never swallow a drop. No good tester ever swallows it. It isn't the effect on the stomach we're after; it's the effect on the tongue and palate and on the delicate nerves of smell at the back of the nostrils. People don't know how to drink wine nowadays. There is a lot more pleasure to be got from a spoonful held in the mouth for an instant than in a glassful gulped down hastily. The connoisseur sips; only a fool gulps. But there," he added, "I'm on my hobby! That isn't what we have to talk about. First, let me thank you for your kindness to Mrs. Bronson, last night. I saw her for a moment this morning, and she said you had been perfectly lovely to her."

It seemed to me that in Bronson's

voice as he quoted his wife's words, and in his eyes as he looked at me, there was just the faintest tinge of sarcasm, and I didn't like it.

"Look here, Bronson," I said, a little brusquely, "that is one of the things I want to thresh out with you. I don't know whether you realize fully what a fascinating woman your wife is. I suppose you do, since you married her; but so do I—so would any man. And her ignorance of the world adds to her charm. Now, don't get a wrong impression; I'm not in love with her, and she evidently regards me as an elderly, grandfatherly sort of person. But just the same it isn't fair to her to be seen about alone with a bachelor like me. You know how eager people are to start a fresh scandal—it gives them something to talk about—and you'll have enough to live down without that. Haven't you some elderly female relative who could act as chaperon while you are away?"

"While I'm away?" he repeated.

"Yes; that's all been settled, hasn't it?"

"You other people seem to have settled it. I think I was entitled to be consulted."

"But—but Jenner *did* consult you," I stammered, surprised at his vehemence.

"I didn't know then that it was a plot."

"It may have been a plot," I said, "though that's a harsh word for it; but I don't see why you should resent it. We were plotting, as you call it, for your good—we were trying to discover what would be best for you. And we have all agreed that you ought to go away for a while, and put yourself in Jenner's care, till your nerves have had a chance to tone up."

His eyes were brighter than ever, and made me vaguely uneasy.

"What's the matter with my nerves?" he demanded.

"Why," I said, "you yourself said it was your nerves."

"Well, I've changed my mind. There's nothing the matter with my nerves. There's nothing the matter at all, except that a little devil has been sent from hell to torment me for my sins, by looking at me when I shave. He would torment me just the same in a sanitarium. In fact, he doesn't torment me half as much as he did at first. I laughed at him this morning when he started to go through his tricks. I doubt if he'll try it again—he doesn't like to be laughed at."

I sat looking at him doubtfully, for I didn't know whether to be relieved or alarmed at this development of his mental condition.

"So you won't go away?" I asked finally.

"Not until I am sure it is necessary," he answered emphatically. "I'll wait a few days, anyway. I want to see if the devil comes back again. Not that I care whether he does or not—I'm not afraid of him now. But he interests me."

I rose slowly to my feet, for I felt suddenly as though a weight were pressing upon me.

"Well," I said, "you are the one to decide, of course. But I think you ought to go."

"And leave my wife?"

"Jenner says you should."

He swore, and banged his desk with sudden violence. "What business had Jenner mixing in my affairs? The next time he comes I'll send him about his business!"

"He told me this morning that he wouldn't come again unless you sent for him."

"He'll wait a long time, then. If I go anywhere, Lester, it won't be to a sanitarium—it will be up in the hills there with Owen. You don't appreciate Owen. He's worth two of Jenner—look what he did for my wife! And now he tells me he's going away. Did you have anything to do with that?"

"With what?"

"With his going away."

"No, I didn't," I retorted hotly; "though if I had, I should only have been carrying out your wishes. You told me you didn't want him."

"I didn't know him, then! Why does he want to go?"

"I don't know. He told me he

wanted to go before I said a word to him."

"Before you said a word to him?"

"I intended to tell him that he ought to go. I'd have done so, even without your approval."

"Oh, you would?" growled Bronson, and regarded me narrowly.

"Yes, I would. I don't think his influence is healthy."

"Well, I don't care what you think!" shouted Bronson, anger suddenly getting the better of him. "I wish you'd keep out of my affairs—I wish you'd——"

But I didn't stop to hear any more.

"Good-by, Mr. Bronson!" I said, and stalked out of the office and down the stairs.

I do not know when I have been angrier, and I decided then and there to dismiss Bronson's affairs from my mind, once and for all. I had been a fool to be drawn into them. What was the ugly brute to me! So the first thing I did, when I got back to the office, was to write him a letter declining to act in any capacity as adviser of his wife or trustee of his property, and asking him to change his will in that particular at once. I sent it off by special messenger, and after that I felt better. The load which had been weighing me down was lifted. I enjoyed my lunch as I had not done for a long time.

Toward the middle of the afternoon, the office boy came in and said that Mr. Bronson was outside and wished to see me.

I let him wait, this time, until I had finished the work upon which I was engaged before I told the boy to show him in. And then all my misgivings were back upon me again, for it was not the violent man of the morning who entered, but a miserable and shrunken object—a mere shadow of a man. He sat down heavily and looked at me.

"I got your letter," he said finally.

"I thank you for coming so promptly. I am ready to redraft the will." And I drew a pad of paper toward me. "Unless, of course, you wish to intrust the work to some one else. I shall be happy to get rid of it."

"I don't want to redraft it," he protested.

"You must redraft it in the particular in which it refers to me," I said firmly. "I refuse to serve. The simplest way would be to substitute some other name for mine."

"There's no other name I care to substitute."

"Then cut out the advisory business altogether," I said shortly. "It's nonsense, anyway."

"See here, Lester," he said suddenly, "are you coming to my house to-night?"

I looked at him in astonishment.

"Certainly not," I answered.

"But my wife is expecting you."

"Make whatever explanation you like," I said impatiently.

He looked at me imploringly, and I saw that his lips were trembling.

"I made a fool of myself this morning," he said huskily. "I don't know what was the matter with me. I apologize. Can't you overlook it?"

I traced some figures on my pad uncertainly.

"I am an old man and a sick one," he went on, after a moment. "I'm not just responsible for what I say sometimes. I'm sorry. You ought to overlook it."

He looked so miserable and broken that I hadn't the heart to resist him.

"All right," I said. "We'll just forget it."

"And you'll come to-night?"

"Yes, I'll come."

"And say nothing to my wife about my—my behavior this morning?"

"Why, certainly not!"

He breathed a deep sigh of relief.

"But there is one thing I won't do," I went on. "I won't serve as advisory trustee. Either cut that out of your will, or name some one else."

"Oh, well, I don't know that it matters much," he said wearily. "It is just a form. Suppose we substitute Owen's name for yours."

I looked at him, with the feeling that perhaps I had walked into a subtle trap, set by Owen himself.

"Do you instruct me to do that?" I asked.

"I would rather you'd leave things as they are."

"But I won't."

"Then put in Owen."

"Very well." I said. "What is his first name?"

Bronson reflected a moment uncertainly.

"Why, the truth is," he said, at last, "I don't know. I'll have to ask him."

"Suppose you do that to-night. And I will get the new draft ready for your signature at once."

"Very well," he agreed. "Don't fail us to-night." And he made his way unsteadily from the room.

CHAPTER XII.

THE STROKE OF MIDNIGHT.

I confess that, as I dressed that evening, my mind was far from being at ease. When I had determined to refuse the trusteeship, it had not occurred to me that Bronson might name Owen in my stead. I distrusted Owen, and I had believed that he did, too. I wondered more and more whether this sudden change of front in Bronson's attitude toward him was not due, in some way, to the subtle influence of Owen himself. In any case, I was sure that no good would come from the continued association with Charmian Bronson which the trusteeship would involve. And then I remembered suddenly what Owen had said about himself—that his heart was bad, that he might drop off at any time. Perhaps that was just a lie; but as I stood there putting on my gloves I was very near to wishing that it might be the truth.

As I stepped from the door of the Marathon, I found that the crowds were already gathering for the raucous celebration of New Year's Eve which has come to be one of the distressing features of New York life, and, glancing at my watch and finding that I had plenty of time, I walked down Broadway as far as Twenty-third Street just to see the crowd. It was a hilarious one, though why the people who composed it should be so eager to welcome the new year was certainly puzzling. But, I suppose, even in the most sordid lives, there is the hope that the future may be in some miraculous way better than the past, and that a new year may bring new joys. Too often it brings only new sorrows; and it was rather pensively that I climbed aboard the bus opposite the Flatiron Building and continued my journey down the avenue.

From the dark exterior of the gloomy old Bronson mansion no one would have suspected that there was to be any joyous welcome to the new year there, and as I mounted the steps I found myself regretting that I had come. To sit at table opposite two such unattractive objects as Bronson and the doctor was certain to be depressing, and my feelings toward the lady of the house were too uncertain to promise me any pleasure from her company. But I rang the bell and did my best to shake the gloom from my face.

As usual, it was Gurley who admitted me. As he took my coat, I saw that he was struggling with the reserve habitual to every good servant.

"I hope you are well, Gurley," I said, loitering over my gloves, for I was curious to hear what it was he so evidently wished, yet feared, to say, "and that the new year will be a happy one for you."

"Thank you, sir," he answered. And then he cast a swift glance over his shoulder along the hall, and came a step nearer. "I wonder if I might have a word with you, sir?" he asked, almost in a whisper.

"Certainly; go ahead," I encouraged him.

"Oh, not here, sir; not now! Perhaps later in the evening, if I see a chance———"

"Gurley!" called a clear voice, and the drapery at the library door was swept aside. "Oh, it is you, Mr. Lester!" And Mrs. Bronson came toward us. "I thought I heard voices, and wondered who it could be."

"I was just wishing Gurley a happy New Year!" I explained, "and he was responding in kind. I shall keep my

wishes for you until the proper moment."

"But how good of you to come!" she rattled on, preceding me into the library. "I can guess what you are missing. Broadway, I suppose, is a mass of people."

"Yes—I have just pushed my way through them."

"And the restaurants are crowded with jolly parties."

"Yes—I caught glimpses of some of them as I came by. But how did you know?"

"Oh, I read an account of it, once, in a magazine that found its way up to us. And how I longed to be a part of it!"

"Perhaps next year you and your husband will be my guests," I suggested.

"Is that an invitation?"

"Yes."

"It is accepted!" she cried, her eyes flashing. "The men are not down yet," she added, seeing my glance around the room. "People are always making jokes about the time it takes women to dress, but as a matter of fact it takes men much longer. They would never be ready if they had to do their hair."

A sudden remembrance of Godfrey made me look at her more closely, and I realized that she was superbly gowned.

"Last night," I said, "I don't believe I even looked at your gown; but I am not going to make that mistake again."

"But it wasn't a mistake," she protested; "it was a compliment—the greatest compliment you could pay a woman. To look at a woman's gown means that she is not herself worth looking at."

"Or that it is unbecoming. No one could say that of yours. It looks as though it were made for you, and for no one else."

"Thank you. But that shows how little you know about women's clothes, for it is only a ready-made one—though I confess I altered it here and there."

"Then Worth must look to his laurels," I said; and, though I tried to speak the words jestingly, she must have suspected the thought behind them, for she shot me a swift glance.

"Oh, I have always liked beautiful clothes!" she countered quickly. "I never had many of them, so I had to make the most of those I had. That taught me ingenuity. You will find that I am very ingenious, Mr. Lester."

"How is Mr. Bronson to-night?" I asked, anxious to escape from a subject which threatened to become embarrassing.

"He seems much better. I have been giving him mental treatment. Don't you think we can get rid of nervous ailments if we really want to?"

"Undoubtedly we can get rid of many of them."

"Well, I am trying to get him to believe there is nothing the matter with him, and I am going to succeed. Have you seen him to-day?"

"He called at my office this afternoon. We are going to make a little change in the will."

"In the will? Are you still talking about that?"

And then, before I could reply, Bronson and the doctor came in together.

As we exchanged greetings, I saw that Bronson's eyes were shining and his face flushed, as they had been in the morning. Perhaps that was the result of the mental treatments his wife had spoken of.

"I am glad to see you looking so much better," I said.

"Yes," he answered, "there's nothing the matter with me. There's a little devil lurking around somewhere trying to provoke me, but when I laugh at him he runs away."

"Laughter is the best medicine there is," put in Owen, as I stared at the speaker uneasily. "I discovered that long ago."

I wondered if he ever made use of the discovery. I found it difficult to imagine Owen laughing.

"No, I don't laugh much," he added, reading my glance. "But then I don't care especially to get cured. What happens to an old wreck like me isn't of any consequence. I have a theory, Mr. Lester," he went on, as, in answer to

Gurley's announcemnet, we made our way to the dining room and took our seats at the table, "that life belongs to youth and beauty. Age and ugliness have no business to go on cumbering the earth and spoiling the joy of it. They ought to take themselves off."

"Age has its uses," I objected; "at least, it has experience and so should have wisdom. As for ugliness—well, if you mean ugliness of soul, I might agree with you. Ugliness of body doesn't matter much. Lincoln was ugly."

"No, he wasn't," dissented Mrs. Bronson warmly. "Lincoln was beautiful."

"He was beautifully ugly," amended the doctor. "But of course I meant ugliness of soul. An ugly body implies an ugly soul."

"Well"—I hesitated, thinking of what that meant as applied to Bronson and Owen—"that's a pretty broad generalization. The great sirens of history certainly weren't ugly."

"Is the devil ugly?" asked Bronson suddenly.

For an instant there was a startled silence. Bronson was sitting across from me, and as I looked at him I saw again how bright his eyes were.

"On Doctor Owen's theory, he must be," I said, for the sake of saying something.

"But how do you know he's got an ugly soul?" Bronson persisted.

"I don't believe in the devil," put in Mrs. Bronson decidedly, "and I object to talking about him."

Bronson chuckled sardonically.

"You've never seen him," he said. "Wait till he looks out at you from your mirror! You'll believe, then! By the way, Owen," he added, turning to the doctor, "what's your first name?"

"My first name is Philip," answered Owen, and I saw his mouth close quickly, as though he had spoken without thinking.

"Philip!" echoed Bronson, and stared at him, an uneasy light in his eyes.

"Yes," answered Owen, with a lightness I knew was assumed; "it is a common name—there are thousands of Philips."

"So there are," assented Bronson, with a breath of relief that puzzled me. "Philip—I never liked the name—but put it down, Lester. Let us have the next course, Gurley."

I noticed a little wrinkle of displeasure between his wife's brows; but she said nothing, and Gurley removed the dishes.

"But what is the riddle?" asked the doctor.

Bronson chuckled sardonically again.

"I'm going to put you down in my will," he said. "Some more wine, Gurley."

The other two watched him while he drained his glass, and I could see that they were uneasy. My eyes, save for a glance at each of them, were on the cloth, for I was considerably embarrassed; but I was conscious that Bronson emptied his glass at a gulp, and I remembered how he had said that only fools drink wine that way.

"The fact is," he went on, "that Lester has shied at the job of acting as my wife's adviser after my death—he washes his hands of her—so that will be your job, Owen."

Again there was an instant's silence. It was Owen who broke it.

"That is rather foolish," he said heavily. "I shall be dead long before you are, Bronson."

"Well, then, she won't have any adviser. I dare say that would suit you, eh, Charmian?" And he turned to her with an unpleasant leer.

"No," she said decidedly; "it would not suit me."

"Perhaps you can wheedle Lester round."

"I shall be glad to advise Mrs. Bronson whenever she wishes it," I said, a little stiffly, for Bronson's air seemed to me decidedly offensive. "But I don't believe she needs an adviser."

"Why," cried Bronson, staring at me, "it was you who suggested it!"

"Well," I said lamely, "I know Mrs. Bronson better now."

Involuntarily I looked at her. She was staring at me with eyes bright with

tears, her under lip caught between her teeth, as though to keep it from trembling. After a moment, she turned her eyes away, and went silently on with her meal. I knew she had read into my words that I was disillusioned—that I thought less highly of her—and I was acutely uncomfortable. After all, I hadn't any right to hurt her—to sacrifice her to my own silly pride.

"At this season of peace and good will," I began stumblingly, "I don't want to be a cause of discord—even of so slight a discord as this. Therefore, if Mrs. Bronson still wishes it, and her husband also, I withdraw my objection."

Her hand flashed out to me in the little intimate gesture characteristic of her.

"Thank you!" she breathed. "I *do* wish it."

Bronson, from across the board, was regarding me with a sardonic grin.

"I thought she'd get round you!" he sneered.

But not even his alternate bursts of irritability and senile jocosity could damp my spirits after that.

The talk wandered on, till at last we came to the coffee.

"You are not going to banish me, this time," said Mrs. Bronson. "Gurley, bring the cigars, and then you may go. We shall not need you again."

Gurley placed the cigars on the table and went out silently.

"By the way, Bronson," Owen remarked, "that old servant of yours wouldn't be any worse off for a little of the laughter cure. He is positively owlish. And no wonder, considering the kind of stuff he reads! I'll wager he has the nightmare regularly. Did you see the papers this evening, Mr. Lester?"

"No; I didn't have time to look at them."

"Well, when I came home this evening, I saw Gurley sitting on the basement steps, bareheaded in the cold, so intent on what he was reading that he didn't feel the cold, or even hear me. He was reading as though fascinated, and I looked down over his shoulder to see what it was. It was one of your sensational papers, with a great red headline across the top: 'Nance Howard Hangs Herself at Auburn'—I think that was the name——"

There was a strange sound from Bronson, half choke, half sob. He was holding his napkin to his face, and I could see only his gleaming eyes. But they were horrible.

"I beg pardon," he said, in a muffled voice. "Go ahead. Don't mind me."

"I had happened to see the article on my way downtown," continued Owen, with only a glance at Bronson. "You wouldn't think it, would you, to look at me—but I like good pictures, and I paid a farewell visit to the Metropolitan this afternoon. It is the one possession I envy New Yorkers."

"But what about the article?" asked Bronson, still in a strangled voice.

"Oh, yes; I nearly forgot! I happened to see the article on my way downtown in the bus. I didn't read it, but I glanced at it to see what it was. This Nance Howard, or whatever her name was, had had an adventurous career, according to the paper; had tried to kill a man, after ruining two or three, and had been sentenced to a long term in prison. Her term was about up, for she had won an allowance for good behavior, and she was to have been released this afternoon. When the warden went to her cell to get her, he found she had hanged herself. The paper went on to analyze the mental attitude which had made her unable to face the world again, and gave a detailed and highly colored account of her adventures. Well, it was that mass of filth which had fascinated Gurley. He was reading it with bated breath, so absorbed he didn't notice me. Not a healthy habit of mind, I should say."

Bronson made no response. Instead, he drained another glass of wine, and then attempted to light a fresh cigar; but his hands were trembling so that it was fully a minute before he succeeded. And his face was frightful to see. As he glanced across at me, I saw stark terror in his eyes.

Then, suddenly, there flashed across

my mind the story he had told me of his indebtedness to Charmian Carling's father; of the woman who had ruined him and then tried to kill a man——

Could this Nance Howard be the woman? Could this——

I shot a glance at Bronson's convulsed face, and realized that I had guessed aright. But his agitation and terror puzzled me. Why should he be so shaken? He had never been involved with her. But perhaps he had not told me the whole story.

My eyes wandered to where Mrs. Bronson sat at my right. She was playing absently with her wineglass, a little smile upon her lips. It was evident that she did not suspect how nearly this sordid tragedy touched her.

Did Owen know?

I looked at him. His single eye was very bright, but there was nothing in his face to indicate that he knew the story. And as soon as he caught my glance he began to talk easily of other things, as though he had not noticed Bronson's agitation. Mrs. Bronson was soon drawn into the talk, but her husband sat silent, hooped forward in his chair, a pitiable sight. It seemed kindest to take no notice of him.

At last, Owen took out his watch and glanced at it.

"It will be midnight in a minute," he said, and there was a vibrant quality in his voice which drew my eyes to him. "Let us fill our glasses."

The bottle went round, but Bronson made no motion to take it, and Owen leaned over and filled his glass for him. Then he stood erect, glass in hand. Mrs. Bronson and I followed suit, but Bronson still sat huddled in his chair, staring at the cloth.

"Aren't you going to drink the toast with us, Bronson?" asked the doctor, and Bronson, after an instant's hesitation, pulled himself heavily to his feet and braced his swaying body against the board.

For some seconds we stood there silent, and I was conscious of a tenseness in the air, a sort of breathlessness which puzzled and oppressed me. Then from the old clock in the hall came the slow strokes of the hour. Mechanically, I counted them—one, two, three, four, to the end——

"Twelve!" said Owen, as the last stroke rang out. "The new year!" and he held his glass high. "May it be a happy one for all of us!"

But that toast was never drunk, for the last word was drowned by the crash of breaking crystal, as Bronson's glass dropped from his fingers, and I saw the crimson stain of the wine spread like blood across the cloth. And then I looked at Bronson.

I can see him yet, standing there clutching at the table, staring over my shoulder at something behind me; I can still see that hideous open mouth with froth upon the lips; I can still see those starting eyes, with awful horror in their depths.

"It's Nance!" he shrieked. "It's Nance! Oh, my God!"

And he crashed forward toward me across the table.

CHAPTER XIII.

NIGHTMARE.

I am not ashamed to admit that I cast a frightened glance over my shoulder, for Bronson's eyes had imaged vividly some horrible shape standing close behind me. But there was nothing there. The next instant I sprang to help Owen, who was already lifting Bronson's limp form from the table.

"We must get him to bed," he said. "He has had an attack of some sort. Have you any idea what brought it on?"

"Then—then there wasn't anything there?" I stammered.

"Anything where? What do you mean?"

"Bronson was staring over my shoulder as though he saw a ghost."

Owen smiled sardonically.

"I don't believe in ghosts," he said shortly.

I glanced at Mrs. Bronson where she sat cowering in her chair, watching us with white face.

Owen saw my glance, interpreted it,

and at once took command of the situation.

"You go into the library and lie down on the couch, Charmian," he said, with a ring of authority in his voice. "Draw it up close to the fire. Bronson has fainted, that's all. We'll put him to bed, and he will soon be all right again. You would better send Gurley to help get him upstairs."

"I think Gurley has gone to bed," she answered; "I dismissed him hours ago." And then she gave a startled exclamation, for the door opened and Gurley's white face peered in. I saw the quick glance which passed between her and Owen, but I was too upset to think about it then.

"Come in, Gurley," called the doctor. "Your master has fainted, and we've got to get him to bed. You take his feet. Mr. Lester and I will take his shoulders."

Gurley came tremblingly forward, as though reluctant to obey, and yet not daring to refuse. He also seemed on the verge of collapse. Perhaps he guessed what had happened to his master. He, of course, knew the story of Nance Howard, and I could easily understand the absorbed attention with which he had read that story in the evening paper.

"Now!" said Owen, and between us we raised Bronson in our arms.

I had never realized, until that moment, what an awkward thing to handle a lifeless human body is. Bronson was not very heavy, but we were all panting by the time we got him up the stairs and into his room, and I noticed Owen pressing his hand to his side as though in pain.

"That is trying on a man with angina pectoris," he remarked, smiling thinly; and I realized suddenly that he hadn't lied about his condition. Then with set lips he turned to the work of bringing Bronson to consciousness. He curtly dismissed Gurley, who was shaking like a man stricken with palsy, and advised him to go to bed; then he deftly stripped Bronson of his outer garments, loosened his shirt at the neck, slapped some cold water over his face, and, disappearing for a moment, come back with a little green bottle in his hand, and applied it to Bronson's nostrils.

The result was apparent in a sudden lift of the unconscious bosom, followed by a strangled gasp.

"He will be all right in a minute," said Owen, and held the vial to his own nostrils and drew a deep breath. "As soon as he is conscious, I will put him to sleep. His nerves are in a bad way. I think you would better go down and reassure Charmian."

"Do you think he'll rally?" I asked doubtfully, for Bronson seemed to me a man visibly stricken with death. "I doubt if he can stand a shock like this."

"A long sleep will quiet him. If he isn't better in the morning, you can call in Jenner. In any event, we must make light of it to Charmian. I wouldn't keep her waiting."

I nodded and left the room. I was glad enough to get away from that ugly object on the bed; I didn't want to witness the awakening; and, besides, I found myself dreading an explanation with Owen. He must be wondering what had caused the collapse; he must be wondering what that cry of "Nance! Nance!" had meant; but I didn't want to tell that story, and yet I knew, if he set about it, he would drag it out of me.

Outside the door, I paused for a long breath. What was to be done? If Bronson was to take to seeing ghosts, to imagining himself haunted, there would be no living with him. A sanitarium, whether he wished it or not, would be the only place for him—and probably a strait-jacket. But, for the second time that evening, I tried to assume a cheerfulness I was far from feeling, and I put aside the portière and entered the library.

Mrs. Bronson was lying on the couch, her chin supported by her hand, staring at the fire, so deep in her thoughts that she did not hear me enter. As I stood looking at her, I saw how worn and sad her face was. Surely she had had enough to make it so!

She stirred slightly, and glanced up

and saw me. Her face softened, and she held out a hand to me.

"Well, my friend?" she asked, as I drew up a chair and sat down beside her.

"He will soon be all right again," I assured her. "He is conscious, and Doctor Owen is putting him to sleep. He will be all right in the morning."

"But what was it?" she asked, and shuddered. "Did you see his face, his eyes? And what made him cry out like that?"

"He must have fancied he saw something," I answered. "But it was just his nerves."

"Saw something?" and she stared up at me. "Do you mean a ghost?"

"He has been seeing them for a good while, hasn't he?"

"Seeing ghosts?"

"Seeing apparitions."

I said it gently, but she reached out and caught my hand again.

"Oh, what shall I do?" she cried, her face suddenly convulsed. "I can't go on like this—I can't stand it! It's too much for me! Call the doctor! I must see him! I must tell him I can't go on with it! I'm not strong enough!"

"Wait!" I said thickly. "Wait! Don't take it like that! Don't give way to it!"

She jerked her hand away and passed it across her eyes.

"Call the doctor," she repeated faintly. "Please—at once!"

I flew rather than ran up the stairs and knocked sharply at the door of Bronson's room. Owen's voice bade me enter. He was standing beside the bed, watching his patient, who was tossing from side to side, muttering restlessly, and he looked around at me in surprise.

"Mrs. Bronson wants you," I panted. "She has broken down. She says she can't stand it—can't go on with it!"

His face stiffened queerly—became set and stern. Looking back at it, it seems to me that in that moment I should have understood.

"What else did she say?" he asked.

"That was all."

He glared at me a moment with that eagle eye of his; then his countenance relaxed. He must have seen that there was in my mind no suspicion of the truth.

"Very well," he said. "I will go to her. I wish you would stay here until I get back. He's very restless—you'll have to keep him from rolling off the bed."

I nodded, and Owen hurried away. I didn't relish the task he had set me; I felt a sort of shuddering horror at thought of touching that tossing figure; I scarcely dared look at the distorted face, with its purple lips and eyes half shut, showing only a line of white between the lids. His breath was coming in convulsive gasps, and his hands were clenched tightly over his breast. And always from his throat came that hoarse murmur.

I drew up a chair and sat down and tried not to listen to it, tried to fix my thoughts elsewhere; but gradually I became conscious that back of the murmur there were words, half-formed, inarticulate words; and then I had to put out my hand and hold him, for his tossings had brought him to the edge of the bed.

I started to push him back out of danger; and then my heart leaped sickeningly, for one of his hands closed over mine and held it tight. Then his eyes opened and he stared up at me. For an instant he lay so, staring; then his eyes went past me——

"Nance! Nance!" he screamed. "Not that!"

Chilled with horror, I looked behind me, but there was no one there.

"Be still!" I commanded, striving at the same time to loose myself and to push him back upon the bed.

His teeth were chattering now, and he cowered back upon the pillow.

"Go away!" he groaned. "Oh, go away! Don't haunt me, Nance! I couldn't stand that—you couldn't expect me to stand that! Don't stand there so white, with that red mark on your throat——"

I set my teeth and rolled him over bodily into the center of the bed, then tore my hand away. It seemed befouled

by his touch. I felt myself befouled through and through.

There was a noise at the door, and I started round, expecting to see I knew not what. But it was only Owen who entered. He glanced at me, and then came forward quickly.

"What is it?" he asked. "What has happened?"

"I can't stand this!" I panted, echoing Bronson's words. "It's too much! He's—he's horrible!"

"I can take care of him now," said Owen quietly. "I have got Charmian calmed down and sent her off to bed. I would advise you to go, too."

"I'll be glad to go," I said gratefully; "that is, if you don't need me. I'm not used to this sort of thing."

"So I see," he assented, with a little smile. I wondered what his nerves were made of that he could look forward so quietly to a night beside this maniac. "Will you stop in the morning, as you go downtown?"

"Yes," I said; and then I remembered. "I shall not be going downtown. It's New Year's Day."

"So it is—I had forgotten that!" and he smiled again. "We haven't found it a happy one, so far, have we?"

"Happy!" I groaned. "It has been a nightmare!"

"I think you would better come down in the morning," he went on tolerantly. "Suppose we say ten o'clock? We shall have to decide whether or not to call in Jenner."

"I won't have to decide," I said, "for I've decided already. I've had enough of these horrors. I've got to get out of it."

"Sleep is what you need—the sooner you get to bed the better. You can let yourself out."

"You're right," I agreed, and stumbled to the door. "Good night."

The last glimpse I had of him was as he leaned above the bed and bent an earnest gaze upon its occupant; then I closed the door.

If any one had told me, before that night, that I should ever be afraid of the dark I would have laughed at him; and yet I *was* afraid, as I stood alone in the hall outside. For there was no light—Owen had turned it out, I suppose; and the darkness seemed alive with sinister shapes. Bronson *may* have seen something; there were many well-authenticated stories of apparitions; many intelligent men believed in them; and a cold sweat burst out all over me at the thought that, on those deserted stairs, I might suddenly find myself face to face with that white figure—white but for the livid line about its throat!

And then my self-control asserted itself a little, and I moved forward cautiously, along the hall to the stair head, and down to the hall below. There, in the vestibule, a dim light was burning, and at sight of it my courage returned. I reached up to the light and turned it on full; then I saw my coat and hat hanging on the hall tree. I crammed the hat upon my head, and was struggling into the coat, when my heart leaped again. For suddenly I felt a timid touch upon my arm.

I don't know what prevented my crying out—perhaps my racked body was past such primitive expression—and the next instant, as I jerked around, I saw that it was Gurley.

With a finger on his lips, he went to the outer door, opened it, and closed it with a bang. Then he stole back to my side.

"This way," he whispered, and drew me quickly through a door opposite that of the library. "Be careful," he added, in the same tone, and guided me forward across a room and along a narrow hall. "Here are the stairs," he said, and placed my hand on the rail.

Step by step I went down into what I knew was the basement. Gurley's hand was on my arm again; he drew me to the right; I heard a door close softly, and a bolt pushed into its socket. Then again he guided me forward, and I felt a chair against my knees.

"Sit down," he said, still in a voice carefully lowered. "I think we are safe here."

I never cease to be amazed when I consider the ingenuity which this old man displayed that night. I can only

explain it by the theory that even the most commonplace natures can, when necessity calls, rise to unsuspected heights. But I wasn't thinking about that then. I collapsed upon the chair and mopped my face.

"Can't we have a light?" I asked.

"We'd better not—it might show under the door or through the keyhole."

"Who would see it?"

"I don't know—Owen might see it—or the other—that thing I saw on the stairs. It's that I'm most afraid of."

"Saw on the stairs!" I echoed, suddenly steadied by the words. "What did you see on the stairs?"

"I don't know—a white shape gliding up in the dark. I thought it was Mrs. Bronson—but she was in the dining room when I got there. I wasn't really scared till then!"

My heart was beating madly, for in that instant I knew that Godfrey was right—that there *was* a plot—that something hideous was going on beneath this roof—something unbelievable, revolting——

"Gurley," I said, leaning forward in the darkness, "did you read the paper this evening?"

"Why, yes, sir," he answered, in a surprised tone. "I always read the paper. It's about the only amusement I have."

"Did you read about a woman who had hanged herself at Auburn?"

"Yes, sir," he answered, and my heart sank, for my half-formed theory tottered at the words. "Yes, sir; there was a big headline about it."

"What was the woman's name, Gurley?" I asked, and held my breath.

He hesitated for an agonizing instant.

"I don't remember, sir," he said finally.

"Was it Nance Howard?" I asked.

I heard his exclamation of surprise.

"Nance Howard!" he repeated, in a horror-stricken voice. "No, sir; it was nothing like that!"

"Are you sure?" I persisted.

"Sure!" he echoed, and I breathed again. "Where did you hear that name, sir?" And I knew from his tone that he knew the story.

"No matter," I said, and I sat there for a moment cursing my own credulity.

Then a sudden hideous thought brought me shaking to my feet. What was happening in that room upstairs? What was Owen doing to his victim?

"Gurley," I said hoarsely, "I'm going for help—I'll be back as soon as I can. There's a basement door, isn't there?"

"Yes, sir."

"Let me out by it—and leave it unlocked, so that I can get in when I come back."

"But I want to tell you——"

"There's no time now! Quick, quick!"

I heard him move forward, caught his hand in mine, and stole forward beside him. A moment later, I was out under the bright stars of the new year's morning.

CHAPTER XIV.

GODFREY TAKES COMMAND.

I paused only for one long breath—a breath of relief and thanksgiving to be in the free air again—then, buttoning my coat about me, I set off westward as fast as my legs would carry me. I must get to a telephone—that was my thought; I must get to Godfrey; and I strained my eyes ahead for a glimpse of a blue sign that would tell of a public station. But Washington Square is not a lively place at one o'clock in the morning; even at its liveliest, it is dull enough. And then, in the circle of light under the lamp at the next crossing, I saw the blue coat and gleaming buttons of a patrolman on post.

He heard my running feet long before I got to him, and swung round toward me, one hand at his hip; but as I panted up into the circle of light, his hand dropped to his side.

"I want a phone!" I gasped. "Where can I find one?"

"What is it? Somebody sick?"

"Yes—dying!"

"There's a booth in the saloon at the next corner, right by the L station."

"Thanks!" I gasped, and panted on again.

The way I burst through the swing

doors of that saloon must have startled the hangers-on at the bar; but I did not so much as glance at them, for there, at the back of the room, was the booth. I jumped into it, slammed shut the door, and fumbled desperately for a nickel. Luckily I knew Godfrey's number—I did not have to wait to search for that!

"Sixty-four twenty-four Columbus," I said; and then strained the receiver to my ear in an agony of suspense. Suppose Godfrey was not there! Suppose he had been called out of town——

"Hello!" said a voice, and with a sob of thankfulness I knew that I had caught him.

"Godfrey," I cried, "this is Lester. I want you, quick! Are you dressed?"

"Yes—but for Heaven's sake——"

"Don't talk," I burst in. "Listen! I'm at the Eighth Street station of the Sixth Avenue elevated. Get down here as quick as you can!"

"But what is it?" he demanded. "What's the matter with you, anyway?"

"It's Bronson—and I'm scared to death! For God's sake, hurry, Godfrey!"

I heard his startled exclamation.

"All right!" he said. "Look out for me!" And he hung up.

I leaned forward above the little desk, limp as a rag under the reaction. Then I opened the door and staggered up to the bar.

"Brandy and soda!" I gasped, and the bartender hastened to produce the ingredients.

"You surely need it!" he commented, as he fizzed the soda into the glass and pushed it toward me.

"Yes, I do," I agreed, and drank it eagerly. My knees ceased to tremble and my brain cleared a little. "Have you got an evening paper?" I asked.

Without comment, he produced one from beneath the bar and handed it to me. Sitting down at one of the little tables along the wall, I opened it. It was no doubt the same one that Gurley had been reading, for there, flung across the page, was a flaring red headline:

Mary Hatfield hangs herself at Auburn!

And then I remembered that Owen had said he wasn't sure of the name—perhaps he hadn't lied—perhaps——

My eyes devoured the triple-leaded story, and I breathed a sigh of relief. Yes, he had lied—these details were nothing like the ones he had related to us across the dinner table, while Bronson cowered in his chair. That story, told so glibly, so seemingly upon the spur of the moment, had been carefully manufactured, had been thought out beforehand—but for what purpose? And then I bent hastily over the paper to hide my face from the curious eyes of the men at the bar.

For that story, so carefully told, could have had but one object—to pave the way for the appearance of the specter!

For a moment, my brain could go no farther; it shrank back, appalled, from the horrible vista this thought disclosed. For, if that were true, what else might not be true?

Were they hounding Bronson to death? Were they trying to drive him mad?

Was Mrs. Bronson in it, too, I asked myself, my heart sick at the thought; or was it Owen only? She must know—she could not be ignorant of what was going on—why, she as well as Owen must have seen the specter; from the very first she had been playing a part——

I arose giddily and started for the door.

"Wait a minute, comrade," called the bartender. "You're not well—better sit down a while longer."

"No," I said, "I'm not sick." And then I remembered the patrolman's inquiry.

Bronson was sick—desperately sick—dying, perhaps——

I turned and made my way blindly back to the booth, and sought Jenner's number. It was some moments before I found it, for my eyes were strangely blurred; and some moments before any one answered, and then it was not Jenner's voice.

"I want Doctor Jenner," I said.

"This is Doctor Jenner's."

"Is he there?"

"He has gone to bed."

"Well, wake him up and tell him——"

"I can't wake him—it's against orders. He has been out of town and is very tired. I can take your message and give it to him in the morning."

"Morning won't do—it will be too late then. Do as I tell you—I'll take the responsibility. Tell him that Mr. Lester called, that affairs are desperate with Mr. Bronson, and that I implore him to come down right away. It's a matter of life and death!"

There was an instant's silence. Then his voice spoke again.

"If it is that serious, I will tell him, sir," it said, and I slashed the receiver triumphantly back upon the hook. Then I hurried out and took up my station at the foot of the elevated stair, for I knew that Godfrey was almost due.

A train rumbled in over my head, stopped a moment, and then rumbled on again; but Godfrey was not one of the three passengers who descended. The wait that followed I found most trying of all; at this hour of the morning, the trains were moving only at fifteen-minute intervals; but at last I heard the roar of one approaching; it jarred to a stop at the station, and an instant later two men came down the stair three steps at a time, the one in front tall and slim, the one behind stocky and heavily built.

"Ah, Lester!" said Godfrey, for it was he who was in the lead, and he put his hands upon my shoulders and peered down into my face. "Great heavens, man, what has happened to you?"

"Is my hair white?" I asked quite seriously, and passed my hand over it. Then the light fell on the face of his stocky companion. "So you brought Simmonds?"

"Yes—I judged from your tone that things were pretty serious, and it seemed safer to have a member of the police along. We can rely on him, you know; he is not a great talker."

Detective-sergeant Simmonds grinned cheerfully, but made no remark.

"And now, what's up?" Godfrey added.

"I can tell you as we go along," I said, and outlined the evening's events, while my companions listened with astonished faces. When I mentioned Owen's story, Simmonds snorted.

"Nance Howard wouldn't hang herself," he said. "She wasn't that kind. All she lived for was to get out. She got every minute of good time coming to her. She was released three months ago."

"What has she done since?" asked Godfrey quickly.

"I don't know; she just dropped out of sight. Maybe she's trying to start straight again with that lover of hers—the feller she tried to kill, you know. He's been going to see her regular once a month, all these years."

"Who is he?"

"I don't know very much about him—only what the warden told me once, for he's never done anything to bring the police down on him, so far as I know. He was a doctor once, the warden said, and a smart man; but he went down and out after Nance tried to do for him. Then he kind of picked himself up, and began to come to see Nance. The warden said he'd heard he was in the moving-picture business up State somewheres."

We were passing under a street lamp as he spoke, and I saw a sudden flame of interest in Godfrey's face.

"Anything else?" he asked.

"No," said Simmonds, after a moment's thought, "I don't remember anything else. Oh, yes—the warden said old Nance had a daughter. This feller was raising her. He brought her to the prison to see her once, and the warden said she was certainly a beauty!"

If a thunderbolt had fallen at our feet, I could not have been more shaken than I was by these careless words. A daughter—a beauty! I turned sickly away from the implication of those words. Then I heard Godfrey's voice.

"I wasn't surprised when I got your distress signal, Lester," he said. "I was rather expecting it. I had our Richmond correspondent investigate that story you told me, and I heard from him to-night. The story was all a fake—except one detail: Bronson and Char-

mian Carling were married at Coxham by a justice of the peace——"

"Then that's her name!" I cried. "That's her name—she isn't that woman's daughter!"

"Perhaps it is—but nobody at Coxham knew anything about her. She had never lived there—no one had ever heard of her, nor of this man Owen—but here we are," he added, lowering his voice.

He stood for an instant, looking up at the gloomy old house; then he turned to me.

"Which way?" he asked.

"Down here," I said, and led the way down the area steps.

"Wait a minute," broke in Simmonds. "What is it you're going to do? Enter this house?"

"Just that," answered Godfrey.

"But what's it all about, anyway? I can't make head nor tail of it. Is somebody committing a crime?"

"Is murder a crime?" asked Godfrey incisively.

Simmonds' manner was still dubious; but now, as always, he yielded to Godfrey's judgment.

"All right; go ahead," he said. "But if you're wrong, I'm going to have an awful job explaining to the inspector!"

"I told Gurley to leave the door open," I said, and put my hand on the knob; and then a thrill shot through me, for I felt it turn in my grasp. The door opened, and Gurley's white face peered out.

"Thank God, you're back!" he breathed, and stood aside for us to pass.

"Has anything happened?"

"I don't know, sir; I haven't dared to move."

We entered, and Gurley closed the door behind us; and again a feeling of uneasiness and apprehension fell upon me like a pall. For an instant we were in darkness; then a white circle of light leaped along the passage ahead of us, disclosing a narrow flight of stairs.

"Come along," said Godfrey, and led the way toward them, torch in hand. "Quiet now," he added.

But it is impossible for four men to mount a flight of stairs in semidarkness without making some noise; and it seemed to me that we had made enough to alarm the whole house before we got to the top.

"Which way, Lester?" Godfrey whispered.

"Straight ahead," I said, and led the way along the passage, and across the room beyond. "This door opens on the main hallway. Bronson's room is right at the head of the stairs. I left a light in the vestibule," I added.

Godfrey released the button of his torch, and I opened the door cautiously—to find myself staring into utter darkness. The light I had left burning in the vestibule had been extinguished.

For a moment we stood there, motionless, listening—and suddenly a spasm of terror shook me; for I fancied I heard a step upon the stair. Regularly, slowly, it descended, step by step, step by step, step by step—and then I realized that what I heard was the ticking of the tall clock on the landing. With a sudden whir, which made my heart leap, it struck two. Could it be, I asked myself, that only two hours had elapsed since the moment when Bronson crashed down upon the table? It seemed incredible. I had lived ages since then; I had——

"Sh-sh-sh!" said Godfrey softly in my ear, and pulled me gently back and held the door almost shut.

And then my ears caught the sound which his had already heard. This time there was no mistaking. Some one was coming down the stairs, slowly, irregularly, clinging to the rail, I fancied; then I heard the swish of skirts, and knew it was a woman; then a low sob, instantly stifled——

Along the hall the steps went falteringly, unsteadily; past the door where we stood breathless; across the vestibule. There was an instant's silence, then a draft of cold air, and then the outer door closed softly.

For another moment we stood there motionless; then I heard Simmonds draw a deep breath.

"Come on back here," he whispered savagely.

Godfrey shut the door gently, and again his torch flashed out.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"We haven't got no business in this house," whispered Simmonds; and as Godfrey's torch played across his face I saw the beads of sweat upon it. "We've got to get out—and quick, too! The first thing we know, somebody'll be pumping his pistol into us—and small blame to him. Are you coming?"

"No, we're not coming," answered Godfrey sternly. "Go ahead, if you want to—nobody's keeping you. But at least I hope you'll stay on guard outside."

"Oh, if you put it like that!" growled Simmonds. "But I don't like it. It ain't regular."

"Regular!" echoed Godfrey sarcastically. Then he turned to me. "Who do you think that was, Lester?" he asked.

"I think it was Mrs. Bronson," I answered thickly. "She said she couldn't stand it—but I thought it was Bronson she meant; I see now she meant——"

"Wait!" whispered Godfrey, and held up his hand.

The light went out, but I heard him open the door again.

And then, suddenly, from somewhere overhead, rang out a burst of wild, demoniac laughter.

CHAPTER XV.

THE TRAGEDY.

I know my heart stopped beating for a moment, and I suspect that my companions' did, as that horrifying laughter rang suddenly through the silent house. We stood there, gasping, straining our ears——

"What's going on up there?" demanded Simmonds hoarsely, at last.

"That's what we've got to find out," Godfrey answered, and opened the door wide.

I saw Simmonds' shadowy hand reach out to stop him, but Godfrey had already stepped into the hall. I should have liked to stop him, too, for my soul faltered at thought of the task that lay before us; but I gritted my teeth and followed him. And then I heard a little noise behind me, and knew that Simmonds was coming, too. Good old Simmonds!

Godfrey moved forward cautiously in the direction of the stair, and just for an instant he let his light play over it. Then, step by step, he felt his way up. On the landing, he paused an instant to listen; but everything was still—menacingly still, it seemed to me. Then he took up again the slow ascent. And at last we stood together in the upper hall.

In the first glance about me, I saw that under the door of Bronson's room lay a thread of yellow light. Owen was still there, then, working over him; and a sudden sense of the absurdity of my suspicions fell upon me. Whatever Owen was, there was no reason to suppose he was a murderer. Whatever his plot might be, there was no proof that it was any such hideous thing as I had dimly figured to myself. And at that moment, I was ready to run away.

"Is that Bronson's room?" asked Godfrey, in the merest breath.

"Yes."

"You left Owen there?"

"Yes."

"Open the door and see if he is still there."

I started back in repulsion.

"Oh, I can't do that!" I protested.

"You've got to do it!" whispered Godfrey fiercely. "If everything seems all right, if Owen is still working over him, or if he's sleeping calmly, go in and close the door. You can say you got anxious, you thought you might be needed, and so came back. Don't let Owen suspect anything—and stay by him the rest of the night!"

"But how could I get in!" I protested. "He'll know the door was locked."

"Say you found it open. He'll think that woman left it open. If we don't hear anything from you, Simmonds and I will steal away. Then we can come back in the morning and bring Jenner with us, and everything will be quite regular, as Simmonds would say."

I suspected that he also was beginning to repent his precipitancy, and to

be anxious to find a way out. Certainly, his plan was a good one.

"All right," I agreed; and, bracing myself for the effort, I went forward and quietly opened the door.

For an instant the flare of light blinded me. Then I saw that the room was empty. The covers of the bed had been thrown back, as though its occupant had left it hastily. The chair on which I had sat had not been moved from the bedside.

I beckoned Godfrey forward, and he stole to my side and peered in over my shoulder at the empty room.

"It was his laugh we heard," I whispered; "but where is he?"

Godfrey stood staring into the room with thoughtful eyes.

"We couldn't have heard him so plainly if the door had been closed," he said, at last. "It must have been opened just as he burst into that fit of laughter. It was then that Owen left him."

I glanced uneasily over my shoulder, suddenly conscious of how we were silhouetted against the light. I confess the thought of Owen stealing up behind us in the darkness gave me a little shiver.

"But where is Bronson?" I said again; and then I felt Godfrey's hand tighten on my arm.

"Listen!" he breathed.

From somewhere near at hand came the sound of running water, as though a tap had been turned. It stopped, after a moment, and there was a little silence; then, suddenly, came a series of short, sharp sounds, as though some one were half slapping, half rubbing two objects together. And Godfrey, with a low chuckle of comprehension, drew us forward into the room, and softly closed the door.

"This way!" he whispered, and led the way toward another door which stood half open at the other end of the bedroom. He peered through this cautiously, and then beckoned us forward.

At the first glance, I understood. The room beyond was a bathroom, and Bronson, clad in his underwear as Owen had left him, stood before a glass, his face lathered, a razor in his hand. The strop he had been using still swung upon its nail.

"He's going to shave himself," whispered Godfrey. "I wish we could see the glass!"

So did I; but from our position we could see only one corner of it, and to attempt to steal forward seemed too hazardous. Besides, I wanted Bronson to lay his razor aside before we approached him. A madman armed with a razor is not a pleasant thing to handle!

I crooked my neck forward, in an effort to see more of the glass. It was quite a large one, fastened to the wall above the washstand. Then Godfrey gripped my arm again, and I drew back and looked at Bronson.

He had begun as most men do by shaving his left cheek. Then he renewed the lather and shaved his right cheek. His hand seemed quite steady, and the razor moved evenly and quickly. Finally he came to his chin, and I watched the shining steel glide down over his throat with a shiver of apprehension, for I remembered that it was then——

Suddenly he stopped, the razor poised in air, and stared into the glass; his face was rigid and apprehensive at first, but gradually it broke into a smile, and I heard him chuckle.

"You devil!" he muttered, half to himself. "You wily devil! But I'll fool you—I'll fool you!" and he threw back his head and laughed. It was not laughter, really; it was a wild scream that had nothing mirthful in it, and it rasped my nerves frightfully. But in some mysterious way it seemed to relieve Bronson, for, after gazing into the glass for a moment longer, he nodded his head with satisfaction and went on with his shaving.

"He seems to have conquered the devil," commented Godfrey, in a whisper.

"He told me he could do it by laughing," I said. "I only wish——"

But that sentence was never finished; for suddenly Bronson stopped shaving, and stood staring into the glass, as though some new, strange horror had appeared there.

"I must see what it is," Godfrey whispered, and crept slowly forward; but the next moment I knew what it was, for Bronson began to shake convulsively, and mutter hoarsely to himself.

"Nance!" he moaned. "Nance! And with that mark on your throat! Why did you do it, Nance? Why do you come here? You're not going to haunt me, Nance?"

And then my skin prickled with horror, for I could have sworn I heard a hollow, muffled voice reply, as from beyond the grave.

"I shall always haunt you!" it said. "To the grave I'll haunt you!"

Bronson had heard it, too, and for an instant he straightened and stood rigid. Then he laughed shrilly.

"I'll fool you, Nance!" he shrieked; and, with a single savage movement, he drew the razor across his throat.

I saw the blood spurt from the severed arteries, I heard him gasp as it choked him; then, while I still stood rooted to the spot, he sank gently to the floor. The next instant, I was beside him, on my knees, and Simmonds was there with me.

"Wait till I get hold of this big artery," he said, "and squeeze it shut. He'll bleed to death in a minute."

I saw the thick blood run over his hand as he dug his fingers into Bronson's throat and grasped the big carotid; another minute and the red flood sensibly slackened.

"I don't think we can save him," Simmonds added hoarsely. "But we'll do our best. I suppose there's a phone in the house somewhere—find it, call the Roosevelt Hospital, and tell them to send an ambulance here on the jump."

I envied his coolness, for I was shaking like a leaf. It is worth something to have nerves equal to anything!

Then I looked around.

"Where's Godfrey?" I asked.

And, as though in answer to the question, there came from somewhere close at hand a shout of rage, a crash of falling bodies, and then a woman's scream. Shrill and high it rang, cutting to the quick.

Simmonds and I, kneeling there on the floor, stared into each other's eyes.

"In the name of——" he began.

"They're killing him!" shrieked a voice at the door. "This way! This way!"

It was an instant before I recognized that frenzied countenance as Gurley's.

"Get a move!' said Simmonds savagely. "Holler if I'm needed."

And, stung into action by the words, I leaped to my feet and sprang for the door.

CHAPTER XVI.

OWEN PAYS THE PRICE.

My remembrance of the next few moments is confused and uncertain. I know that I followed Gurley's fleeting figure into the darkness of the outer hall, and through a near-by door; I recall colliding with a chair and hurling it wildly aside; then, from somewhere ahead of me, came the sounds of a fierce struggle, gasping oaths, frenzied pantings, and, before I could stop myself, I stumbled over an outstretched leg and fell heavily forward.

An instant later, before I could so much as move to extricate myself, I was involved in the struggle. An arm was thrown about my neck and tightened savagely. I tore at it with all my strength and managed to get a breath before it was back again; and then, as I lashed forward, a cloud of hair fell about my face, and I realized that I was fighting with a woman!

That discovery cleared my head a little, and I managed to jerk her arm away, throw my own arm about her, and hold her fast. She was panting heavily, as if exhausted, and now and then a strangled sob shook her. For a moment longer she struggled wildly to free herself; then suddenly went limp and fell against me.

And at the same instant I was conscious that the struggle behind me had also ceased. I could hear some one gasping for breath; and then, to my immense relief, came Godfrey's voice.

"Are you there, Lester?" it asked.

"Yes," I answered thickly. "I've got a captive."

At the words, the captive began another frantic struggle, but her strength was spent.

"Wait a minute," said Godfrey; and then from the darkness before me leaped a face that fairly chilled my blood—a terrible face, with starting eyes and swollen lips, white as death save for a livid streak across the throat——

Right opposite my own, so close I could feel its gasping breath, that awful face hung in the air and stared at me——

And at the sight my strength fell from me, my grasp relaxed—the face vanished——

"Don't let her go, Lester!" cried Godfrey's voice, and the face sprang into the light again.

And then I realized that it was the face of the woman I held, picked out from the darkness by the circle of Godfrey's torch.

She had not thought of escape, but was only staring blindly, her hands against my shoulders; but at the words she started from me. In an instant I had her fast again.

"Have you got her?" Godfrey asked.

"Yes," I panted.

"We must have some light." And I saw the torch flash about the room. Then he stepped quickly to the wall, a switch clicked sharply, and the lamps in a wall bracket sprang to life.

For a breath, we all blinked stupidly at each other. I saw Gurley's white face peering from the door, and behind him another—a woman's face—his wife's, I told myself; and then I was conscious of something on the floor behind me. The woman I held saw it at the same instant, and, with a frenzied cry, tore herself from my grasp and fell on her knees beside it.

And then, as I jerked half round, I saw that it was Owen, lying on his back, his arms flung wide, staring with sightless eyes at the ceiling.

The woman seized one of the limp hands and pressed it to her cheek. Then she glared up at Godfrey.

"You've killed him!" she hissed. "You've knifed him! You've——"

"Steady, now," said Godfrey sternly. "I didn't kill him—he went limp in my hands. Where's Simmonds?"

"He's——" And then I stopped. "What's that?"

For suddenly a muffled pounding echoed through the house. It was Godfrey who grasped its meaning first.

"Somebody's hammering at the door," he said. "Go down and see who it is, Gurley."

Gurley's face vanished into the darkness; so did that of the old woman I had taken for his wife, and I did not see her again. Godfrey turned back to me.

"Where's Simmonds?" he repeated.

"He's over there with Bronson, holding an artery shut. He told me to call an ambulance, but I hadn't time. I must call one, or it will be too late."

"It's too late now, probably. But go ahead. I'll stay here."

"Hello! What's the matter here?" called a voice from the door, and, as I sprang to my feet, I found myself confronting Jenner. "I got your message," he added; "I came as fast as I could; but what——"

I seized him by the sleeve.

"Come on!" I cried. "Quick!" And I dragged him after me into Bronson's room.

Simmonds, his hands covered with blood, still knelt on the floor beside that hideous body. From his drawn face, as he looked up at us, I could see that even his iron nerve was shaken.

Without a word, Jenner dropped to his knees beside him, looked at the gaping wound, glanced into the sightless eyes, touched the limp wrist.

"Get up," he said to Simmonds. "We can't do anything. He's dead."

And Simmonds rose painfully and staggered to the washstand.

"I want to get this blood off," he said hoarsely. "I can't stand it sticking to my hands." And he turned on the water and plunged his hands into it.

"What happened?" Jenner asked.

"He cut his throat," I answered. "We saw him—it was something in the mirror."

"Ah!" said Jenner, and he got up and looked at the mirror. "Why, this isn't a mirror!" he cried. "It's just a sheet of glass!"

For an instant I didn't understand; then I heard Simmonds' startled exclamation as he raised his head and looked at the glass; then I, too, was staring at it—no, staring *through* it into the next room, where, dimly visible, the woman in white still knelt beside Owen's body, with Godfrey gazing down at her.

It was Jenner who was first to regain his self-control—but then his nerves hadn't been racked and tortured as ours had.

"There seems to be some one over there who needs looking after," he said, and disappeared through the door.

A moment later we saw him join the group in the other room and drop to his knees beside Owen's body. And then Godfrey glanced up and saw us, and nodded; but he didn't seem surprised.

Simmonds slowly turned his staring eyes over his shoulder and gazed into mine.

"Do you understand it?" he asked.

I couldn't answer; I could only shake my head.

"It isn't a mirror—it's just a sheet of glass!" he muttered, echoing Jenner's words, and he put out his hand and touched it, as though trying to convince himself. "A little cloudy," he added; "but nobody could shave himself in a glass like that—and yet we saw him do it!"

I saw that it *was* a little cloudy, that the scene in the next room seemed progressing dimly, behind a veil——

For a moment longer Simmonds stood staring; then he shook himself together.

"Oh, well," he said, in another tone, "Godfrey can explain it. Anyway, it can wait. It looks like we were needed over there."

He hurried from the room, I after him, stepping over Bronson's body with averted eyes. When we reached the other room, Jenner was just rising to his feet.

"Angina pectoris," he said to Godfrey. "The struggle brought on the attack. It's evidently of long standing. We can't do anything."

The woman, still on her knees, was staring up at him.

"You mean he'll die?" she asked, in a strangled voice.

Jenner nodded, and his eyes ran over her whitened, distorted face, and rested for an instant on the livid band about her throat. Then he turned to Gurley, who was again staring from the door.

"Got any brandy?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Bring some up."

Gurley disappeared, to return in a moment with a decanter and glass. Jenner filled the glass and knelt beside the dying man.

"Hold up his head," he said to the woman; and, as she obeyed, he pried apart the rigid jaws and poured a little of the brandy into the mouth. There was a choking sound, and the brandy ran out upon his chin. Again Jenner tried it, and again, and finally there was a convulsive swallow, then two or three. "That's all I can do," he said to the woman, and stood erect.

"Get back, all of you!" she said, looking up at us fiercely. "Let me have him now! Get back where he can't see you!"

"That's just!" murmured Godfrey. "Stand back, Simmonds!" And we shrank back until we were almost at the threshold.

The woman waited until we were huddled together there, then she turned back to the unconscious man.

"Phil!" she called, bending low above him, and I started at the name. "Phil! You're not going till you say good-by. Look at me, Phil!"

She laid her cheek to his and kissed him; and I felt a sudden choking in my throat, as I began to understand.

"Phil!" she called again, not loudly, but in a voice whose anguish, it seemed to me, must reach beyond the grave. "Look at me, Phil! You can't leave me till you've said good-by!"

The inert body stirred a little—then I told myself that it was only my fancy.

"Phil! Phil! Just for a moment, Phil! Just to say good-by!"

The livid lips opened a trifle, and from between them came a whisper, a mere breath:

"Nance!"

"I'm here, Phil!" she said. "I'm here, holding you fast. Come back, Phil!"

The head turned on her breast, and he looked up at her.

"Nance!" And then, after a moment: "My God! What torment!" and he pressed one hand against his side. "What's happened?"

"Nothing, Phil! Only—we've won! You remember, don't you?"

"Yes," he muttered thickly. "I remember. And then my heart gave out. It's the end!" He writhed convulsively as another pang shot through him.

"But we won!" she repeated, her lips to his. "For twenty years we waited, Phil, and now we've won!"

I saw his lips move responsively to hers.

"All right, old girl," he said. "I won't forget!" And then I saw his body stiffen. "Nance," he breathed, agony in his voice, "what happened? Tell me! Did—did the cops get us?"

"The cops!" she laughed—I trembled to hear her laugh. "Why, no! Whatever made you think that, Phil?"

"I don't know," he answered heavily. "I was always afraid of that man, Lester—I thought he suspected something. I thought somebody jumped at me, just at the end."

"It was your heart, Phil. I'm afraid you're done for, old man."

A terrible spasm shook him; beads of agony stood out across his forehead.

"That don't matter," he gasped, when he could speak. "I'm ready—to go—now we've won. Just so—they didn't—get you—Nance!"

He was fighting for breath, and she held him close.

"Never fear!" she said.

"Look out—for the girl—Nance. Keep her straight—she's—worth it."

"Never fear!" she said again.

"I guess—I'm going." His voice was only a breath now, coming in gasps. "I'm ready. We've—had—our—revenge! Hold me—tight—Nance!"

She strained him to her, her cheek to his—close, close——

Then gently she laid him down upon the floor, and folded his clenched hands across his breast.

She sat for a moment looking down at him quite calmly; but suddenly something seemed to give way within her, and she fell forward across the body, sobbing wildly.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE AVENGERS.

It was Godfrey who drew us outside and gently closed the door.

"Take us downstairs, Gurley, and get us something to drink," he said.

As we started down, I saw Simmonds open the door again, remove the key from the inside, close the door, lock it, and slip the key into his pocket. Godfrey saw him, too, and smiled pensively. As for me, I was hot with anger.

Gurley, who had evidently switched on the hall lights when he admitted Jenner, led us to the dining room, and we stood for a moment on the threshold, contemplating the disorder. Then Gurley got out glasses, and we sat down.

"Now let us have the story," suggested Jenner. "I feel as though I were having a particularly atrocious nightmare."

So I told the story of the evening's happenings. When I ended, there was a moment's silence.

"Well, Simmonds?" said Godfrey finally.

"Well, what?" demanded Simmonds; but I knew from his face that he had caught Godfrey's meaning.

"What are you going to do now?" Godfrey asked.

"I'm going to send the man to the morgue and the woman to the station," answered Simmonds defiantly.

"What is the charge against the woman?"

"She helped kill a man, didn't she?"

"No; he killed himself. You saw him do it."

"Well, she scared him into it. It's the same thing."

"His own conscience scared him into it."

"Look here, Godfrey," said Simmonds sullenly, "I don't know what you're driving at, but if you think I'm going to let that woman go, you're greatly mistaken. I suppose that play acting of hers touched you in a tender spot—but it didn't alter the case none. Maybe Bronson deserved all he got—maybe his conscience *was* scary; but that's none of my business. I've got to arrest that woman. The fact that she's just out of Auburn won't help her none!"

"That's just it," broke in Godfrey; "she won't get a fair trial, and you know it. After she has gone wrong once, no woman ever gets a fair trial—she's lucky if she gets it the first time."

"Well, I can't help that, can I?" growled Simmonds.

"You can help it this time by letting her go."

"And what would I say in my report?"

"You don't need to mention her in your report—put the whole blame on Owen, or whatever his name is. He's dead, and it can't hurt him."

"If I did that," said Simmonds slowly, "I wouldn't be fit to be on the force. Nobody knows that better than you."

He was right, of course, and I honored him for it. So, I was sure, did Godfrey.

"If that's the way you look at it, Simmonds," he said, after a moment, "why, that settles it. But, before you send her off, I should like to hear her story."

"All right," agreed Simmonds, greatly relieved. "I have no objection. But I doubt if you can get her to talk."

They left the room together, and Jenner and I sat on in silence. Presently the hall clock struck three, and I marveled again at the rush of events which had been crowded into my life since midnight.

"Where is Mrs. Bronson?" asked Jenner suddenly.

I started at the question, for it brought me face to face with another problem.

"I think she left the house some time ago," I answered slowly.

"Before all this happened?"

I nodded, and there was a little silence.

"Doctor," I said desperately, at last, "I hope there is some way to keep her out of this. I am sure she didn't know what was coming—that she was just a blind agent."

"Who is she, anyway?" Jenner asked.

"She's this other woman's daughter," I answered thickly. "Owen was her father, I suppose."

Jenner whistled softly to himself.

"About the last thing she said to me," I went on, "was that she couldn't go through with it. She tried to stop it."

"I am not so sure of that," objected Jenner; "but I'll keep my mouth shut, if that is what you mean. But I'm afraid you can't get around Simmonds."

I was afraid of it, too, and I blamed Godfrey bitterly for bringing Simmonds. But for that, the way would have been clear for both women.

"I wonder what's keeping them so long?" said Jenner impatiently. "Can anything else have happened?"

But presently we heard them coming down the stair, and when they entered we saw what had detained them. The woman had washed the powder from her face and the livid stain from her throat, had twisted up her hair, put on a hat, and thrown a dark wrap over her white gown. Some remnants of her youthful beauty still remained; she must have been a glorious woman in her prime—just such a woman, I told myself, as Charmian Bronson would become. She seemed quite composed, and sat down quietly in the chair Godfrey placed for her.

"Would you like something to drink?" he asked.

"No," she said; "I'm all right."

"I wonder if you would be willing to tell us why you did all this?"

"I don't want to talk about it. What good will it do?"

"It might make things easier for you if people understood."

"I don't care what happens now. I'm satisfied."

Godfrey leaned forward and looked at her.

"What was it Bronson did to you?" he asked.

A sudden crimson flared in her face, and her eyes gleamed savagely.

"What's the worst a man can do to a woman?" she flashed. "Well, multiply that by a million, and that's what he did to me. The last thing he did was to set me on, by his lies, to kill the man I loved. I thought I'd done it, too; but he got well, thank God!"

"And then the police got you."

"Yes; but how did they get me? Well, I'll tell you. I was hid—I was safe. I wrote to Bronson for money. And he called up the police and told them where I was!"

A shiver ran through me, and I glanced at Simmonds. His face was set, and he was staring straight before him. But I knew he had not relented.

"Is Mrs. Bronson your daughter?" asked Godfrey, and at the words I jumped in my chair.

"I don't see——" I began furiously; but he stopped me with a gesture.

"She thinks she's my daughter, but she ain't," answered the woman sullenly; and a great wave of thankfulness swept over me. "She's my niece—my sister's child. She was an honest woman—very different to me. But she died, and I took the baby. Phil took her and looked after her, after I was put away. We made her think she was my daughter, so she'd help us, when the time came."

"You were asking a good deal of her, weren't you—to marry a hideous man like Bronson?"

The woman laughed ironically.

"There was no other way we could get to him. But it wasn't as bad as you think. He didn't get nothing from her—she held him off."

"Yes," broke in Jenner, "that's the truth. He told me. The marriage was never consummated. It was that helped drive him crazy."

I turned my back to the others and stared at the opposite wall. I didn't want them to see my face, just then. So that was the detail on which Owen had warned Bronson to be careful. The irony of it! The terrific irony of it!

"Did she know your plans?"

"No—only in a general way. She thought we just wanted to scare him. But she suspected at the last, and nearly broke them up."

"Just what was the plan?" asked Godfrey casually.

"Well, I'll tell you," she said fiercely. "It will do me good to tell you. It wasn't till I was in Auburn I found out all he'd done. Then Phil came to see me—with that awful scar I'd given him—and when I told him, he was like a madman. He wanted to come right back and kill Bronson. But I wouldn't let him—that was letting him off too easy. Besides, I wanted to be there when he died—I wanted him to die looking into my eyes! I had twenty years ahead of me, and I knew we'd think of something better than that before the time came. We thought of lots of things—Phil used to come to see me every month, and we'd talk them over. Once or twice he brought Charmian, and when I saw the woman she was growing into, I knew that she could help us. But I didn't see just how, till about a year ago. Then Phil came to me just brimming over with it. He had seen a phony mirror in a shop somewhere—the kind the mediums use—and he had it all figured out. He'd been in the movies for years, and knew just how to work it."

"Wait a minute," broke in Godfrey. "A phony mirror—what do you mean by that?"

"It's a sheet of plate glass coated with some kind of stuff—I forget the name. When there's no light behind it, it looks just like any other mirror; but put a light behind it, and you can see right through it."

"The stuff is called iridium," said Simmonds. "They paint a film of it on the back of the glass. It's an old game. 'Most all the mediums have got one."

"Go ahead," said Godfrey, nodding to the woman.

"We spent the next six months fixing up the plan," she said. "A detail here and a detail there—we thought of everything. The only question was whether Charmian would be ready to help. Phil left that to me—he thought I could tell her better than he could. I got out about three months ago. I'd been a model prisoner—I wanted to get all my good-behavior time—and I went right to Phil. The first thing I did was to tell Charmian. Phil had brought her up careful—kept her in a good school, and all that—but when I told the story and saw her face, I knew she'd help. She was wild for a time—said she'd help no matter what happened. But I showed her what she must do—that she mustn't give way to Bronson. It got too much for her at the last, though," she added. "She's just a kid."

"But the letter?" I asked suddenly. "The letter he got from Virginia? There *was* such a fellow as Carling?"

"Yes—his best friend—another devil. He robbed a bank and had to light out. That was Phil's idea. He rigged up the cabin he took Bronson to."

"Didn't Bronson know him?" asked Godfrey.

"With that scar? After twenty years? He was a handsome man, once. Besides, twenty years ago, he wore a beard—they were the fashion, then. No, Bronson didn't know him. There was no danger of that."

"I think he felt there was something wrong," I said. "He remarked to me once, that when he looked at Owen he felt as though some one had come back from the grave to haunt him."

"Well, he was right about that!" said the woman exultantly.

Again there was a moment's silence. Then Simmonds stirred restlessly.

"Is that all?" he asked.

"Yes," said Godfrey; "I guess that's all."

Simmonds jerked himself to his feet.

"Then I'll go call headquarters," he said. "Where's the phone, Gurley?"

Gurley, who had stood by the door listening to all this, came suddenly forward.

"There's one thing I want to say first," he burst out. "It's all true. I know. I've been with the family forty years and more. I hoped it was all dead and buried. It ain't right to punish her—she's been punished enough!"

"Show me the phone, Gurley!" said Simmonds savagely. "It's that, or I'll go out on the steps and blow my whistle."

"Do as he asks, Gurley," said Godfrey quickly. "He's got his duty to do. We'll protect her all we can."

Gurley looked at him a moment; then he turned and went out through the door. Simmonds followed him.

Godfrey waited till the sound of their footsteps died away.

"Now," he said, and crossed to the woman's side with a bound. "Make your get-away. I'll hold him as long as I can. It's the most I can do for you—but there will be no one to betray you, this time!"

She stared up at him for an instant, uncomprehending.

"I don't know that I want to," she said slowly, at last. "What happens to me now doesn't matter!"

"Yes, it does," he urged, and raised her to her feet. "There'll be a grave you'll want to visit sometimes and plant flowers on; there's a girl who needs you!"

She stared at him an instant longer, and her face softened. She drew her cloak about her.

"I guess you're right," she agreed. "I'll go."

She glanced around at us, nodded, and went silently out. Then we sat there and waited.

It was quite a long wait, and I didn't understand it; but at last Simmonds came back. I saw his quick glance about the room, and held my breath for the explosion which was sure to follow when he realized how he had been betrayed. For quite a minute he stood there, then his face broke into a grin, and he strode over to Godfrey's side.

"You fool!" he said. "Did you think I didn't see through you?"

And Godfrey, his face suddenly alight, sprang to his feet.

"Simmonds!" he cried, and threw his arms about him. "Simmonds!"

And I confess that my eyes were blurred as I sprang forward to wring that honest hand.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MAGIC MIRROR.

The ambulance came presently, with three or four attendants, and Simmonds went upstairs with them to superintend the removal of the bodies.

"We'll wait till they go away," said Godfrey, "and then we'll have a rehearsal. I confess that I am curious to see just how the thing was worked."

"So am I," said Jenner, with a mighty yawn. "I'm half dead for sleep—I'm twice as old as you boys, and this will probably be the death of me; but I'm going to see it through."

Ten minutes later, we heard the ambulance men tramping down the stairs again; then the front door slammed, and Simmonds came back to us.

"All right," he said, and looked at Godfrey. "I suppose you want to try that apparatus."

Godfrey laughed.

"What a mind you have, Simmonds!" he mocked. "You're getting so you can read me like an open book."

"Oh, come on," said Simmonds, "and stop your kidding." And he led the way up the stair.

"You fellows go into Bronson's room," said Godfrey, when we reached the top, "and I'll see if I can't give you a demonstration."

We did as he bade us, and took our places before the mirror. It was still transparent, save for the filmy cloud behind it, and we saw Godfrey enter the next room. He waved to us; then, suddenly, he disappeared, and we found ourselves staring at our own reflections.

"He's turned off the light," said Simmonds; but even though I understood what had happened, the effect was startling. "Ah—look there!" he added, after a moment.

We moved a little closer together; for there, in the mirror's depths, beneath our own reflected faces another face was forming, and as it grew brighter and brighter, our own faded and paled. Then, with a shiver, I saw that the face was Bronson's.

Gradually the shoulders appeared, the arms, the body. He was wearing a shirt without a collar; and, all at once, with a lifelikeness almost appalling, he lathered his face and began to shave.

As I stared at it, I saw that the image was misty and uncertain, as though separated from us by films of gauze, but that made it all the more ghostly. It was as though we were gazing at a man a long way off, almost in another world—the wraith of a man!

I watched him as he shaved his left cheek with rapid, even strokes; then he raised his chin—and suddenly the razor flashed across his throat, and a great spatter of blood burst almost in our faces.

It was too much! I shrank back, with averted eyes——

When I dared to look again, the face was still there, but a subtle change had come upon it. The great gash gaped in the throat, but the blood had stopped; the flesh turned yellow and purple and seemed to slough away; the eyes——

I knew what was coming—Bronson had described it all—but I felt my flesh creeping and my hands trembling at the utter horror of it. No wonder he had gone mad; no wonder——

The light flashed out; for a moment, we stood staring at our own white faces—then back of them appeared another face, dim at first—I thought it was Bronson's—then I saw that it was Godfrey's, and my heart stood still, so horrible it was, with its greenish pallor and closed eyes and hanging jaw.

"I'll haunt you!" moaned a hollow voice. "To the grave I'll haunt you!"

Then one eye opened and winked at us, the light flashed on, and there he was, smiling through the glass.

That quick revulsion was too much for me. I staggered to a chair and sat down heavily. Simmonds was mopping his livid face, and Jenner leaned against the wall, as though in fear of falling.

"What a nightmare!" he murmured.

And then Godfrey's voice came through to us.

"Come over here, you fellows," he called, "and look at it."

And after a moment I got enough strength to stagger after my companions.

Godfrey smiled as he saw our faces.

"Pretty hideous, wasn't it?" he said. "You all look as though you'd seen a ghost!"

"A ghost!" cried Jenner. "Why, fifty ghosts couldn't touch that horror! When I think of Bronson seeing it, morning after morning, without understanding it—believing it to be real——"

He broke off and passed his hand before his eyes.

"I don't want to think of it," he added. "How, in Heaven's name, was it done?"

"It's simple enough," Godfrey explained. "This room was evidently Owen's, and he could work here without fear of interruption. First, he slipped around into Bronson's room and substituted that sheet of glass coated with a white film of iridium for the mirror. Then he cut away a portion of the wall back of it—and that was some job, because it's a brick one! He probably worked a couple of days at it. Then he fitted a board in the opening, and hung some of his clothes over it to conceal it. When he wanted to see Bronson, he had only to take out the board. So long as he kept this room dark, Bronson couldn't see him. Then he set up his little moving-picture camera, and made a film of Bronson, while he was shaving himself. Then he doctored it to give the effect of the throat-cutting, painted in a lot of blood, added those fancy pictures of his own showing Bronson in the process of dissolution, stretched a sheet of muslin back of the mirror, set up his moving-picture machine, and was ready for business. Pretty effective, wasn't it?"

"Effective!" echoed Jenner. "I should say it was effective! But we all know that," he added, in another tone, "since Bronson killed himself."

"It wasn't that made him kill himself," corrected Godfrey quickly. "It was driving him mad, for he had got to believing it was a devil and laughing at it. But what made him kill himself was the apparition of the woman he'd wronged, and who, he thought, had just hanged herself. Imagine how that must have looked to him—with face white as death and that livid mark across the throat! She just stood here, in front of the machine, and Owen gradually turned on this little green light over her head—why, it must have been frightful! I can almost pity him!"

"I pity anybody, no matter what he's done, who has to go through an experience like that," said Jenner soberly. "And now I'm going home. I don't suppose I'll get any sleep—but I'm going to try. Maybe you'll believe in my sense of smell, after this, Mr. Lester," he added. "I told you Bronson was a bad un! Good night." And he was off.

Five minutes later, we others bade good night to Gurley and went slowly down the steps.

"Well, it has been a great night," said Simmonds briskly; "but now I'll have to leave you. I've got to report at headquarters in the morning, and I might as well go down there and turn in. Good night." And, waving his hand, he strode away across the park.

We watched him in silence for a moment.

"I am always on the verge of doing Simmonds an injustice," said Godfrey, at last, "just as I did to-night. He's sound all the way through, with a heart as tender as a child's—and afraid all the time that some one will find him out. Which way are you going?"

"I think I'll walk," I said. "I feel the need of some fresh air."

"So do I." And he fell into step beside me.

As we turned into the avenue, a clock in a neighboring church steeple struck five.

"Well," commented Godfrey, with a smile, "we have certainly made a night of it—welcoming the new year! I wonder if you have looked ahead, Lester, at what is yet to happen in this affair?" he went on, in another tone.

"What *is* yet to happen?"

"Bronson was wealthy, wasn't he?"

"Yes."

"Had he any relatives?"

"No, I think not."

"Don't forget he had a wife," he said.

"She wasn't his legal wife."

"Why not?"

"She married him under an assumed name."

"Does that make any difference?"

"It would be grounds for a divorce."

"But it wasn't the name he was marrying—it was the woman. Do you think he'd have wanted a divorce, even if he'd known the truth?"

"No," I said, after a moment. "I don't think he would. He was obsessed by her."

"And no wonder! She was enough to obsess any man. But if he wouldn't have wanted a divorce, I don't see that the fact she married him under an assumed name makes any difference."

"In ethics, perhaps not," I agreed. "But it makes a big difference in law."

"No doubt," commented Godfrey ironically. "I had forgotten that they are not at all the same thing! But, at any rate, I am glad she got out of it so cleanly. And, of course, she must have the property, unless he willed it away from her."

"He didn't. He made a will only a few days ago, and left everything to her absolutely."

"Without condition?"

"There was only one condition. I was to be an advisory trustee."

He was silent for a time, and I wondered uneasily what was in his mind.

"I don't think she ought to have it," I burst out, at last. "I don't think she ought to want it. I don't believe she will."

"Why not?"

"There's blood on it."

"Will you advise her not to claim it?"

"I won't have to advise her. She has no legal right to it."

"Perhaps not. But she has an ethical right to it. And nobody will know she has no legal right, unless you choose to tell it."

We walked on in silence.

"Even if she was his wife," I said doggedly, after a time, "I'd advise her not to take it. But I'll never see her again."

"Oh, yes, you will," he rejoined lightly, "though probably not for a long time. I take it that you agree to do nothing in the matter until you *do* see her?"

I nodded a reluctant assent; for it seemed to me that I was compounding a felony.

"And I shouldn't advise her not to take it," Godfrey went on. "It's a sort of retributive justice that it should be hers. Some day, when this cloud has passed, she'll need it. She's not the kind of woman to be kept under a bushel. She'll set the world on fire—or a corner of it, anyway!"

"That is what Owen was always planning for her. He was more ambitious for her than she was for herself. He was always talking about campaigns! So was Bronson."

"You see!" said Godfrey. "He'd like her to have it." And again we walked on in silence.

"I wonder what she'll do now?" I asked miserably, at last. "Do you suppose she has any money?"

"I don't know. I shouldn't worry. She can take care of herself, and you'll hear from her when she's ready to come back. Here we are at the Flatiron. I think I'll take a car. Good night."

"Good night," I answered, and turned slowly up Broadway.

It was deserted now—a very different place to the crowded thoroughfare through which I had pushed my way a few hours before. The crowd had seen the new year in—had welcomed it with shouts of rapture—and had gone home to bed to dream of the golden future and the joys it was sure to bring. Joy to some, perhaps, I told myself wearily, but to the most only sorrow and disillusion.

What would it bring to me?

And that question was still running through my mind as, in the cold light of the dawn, I slowly undressed and went to bed.

What would it bring to me?

Gratitude

By Roy Norton

Author of "The Garden of Fate," "The Plunderer," Etc.

The first of a new series of stories about the Competents in Alaska. The season ended, they throw their last shovelfuls of dirt and bid good-by to the homely cabin on the mountainside. But their last days on the claim were not to pass without adventure.

I've heard of hearts unkind, kind deeds
With coldness still returning;
Alas! The gratitude of men
Hath oftener left me mourning.

SHAKESPEARE GEORGE, lover of poetry, found the quotation in an old magazine, and carefully framed and tacked it above his bunk, where, in somber moods, he might refer to it. And the rest of us, partners in that isolated heart of Alaska, smiled, being well aware that cynicism had no place in his character. Sometimes, when tales of ingratitude came to his ears, he attempted to quote it; usually after this fashion:

"I've hearn of hearts unkind, them deeds
With coolness still a-turning;
But, Lord! The gratitude of folks
Has most always left me busted."

He sometimes stated that there were cases where even the poetry was inadequate, and in particular mentioned this fact in connection with Laughing Jim.

Jim was bad, through and through, with a thoroughness that left no cause for mistake, and he was rendered worse by such a charm of recklessness, bravery, and laughter, that half his misdeeds were overlooked. He laid no claim to honesty, and with amazing, disarming truthfulness, admitted his own shortcomings. He was a delightful storyteller, who could amuse and interest his auditors with recountals of his varied experiences in many jails. He was above the average in height, and as if to give the lie to his life, had fearless, candid, laughing eyes. Perhaps it was his sense of humor that made one doubt whether he was consciously bad, or merely lacking in moral sense. Anyway, he laughed at everything, himself included.

No one quite remembers when he arrived in Marook, or, at least, none ever mentioned it. Probably he came with that inrush in the late fall of '97, when the newly discovered Klondike sent its refugees hurrying down the river to camps where they might be sure of supplies through the long winter season, and he laughed his way into a job as bartender, for want of something else to do, and then, in time, graduated to the post of running the roulette wheel at the Hang-out. He was distinguished in dress by having the only toothpick shoes in camp, which he always wore, and for the excellent care he bestowed on his hands. He was popular with those who went to the Hang-out to lose their hard-won gold dust, and set a new pace in crying his wares.

"Come, gather round me, merry gentlemen!" he would shout, when business languished. "Why play the bank when you can lose your money here so much faster? Your money extracted without pain. Try the wheel! No man ever quit me winner!"

And then he would throw back his handsome young head, and that free, reckless laugh of his would roar out over the rumble of conversation, the clink of bottle on glass, the persistent clacking of chips and markers at the

bank, and the clattering of dice where chuck-a-luck held forth. My partners, known to the camp as "the Competents" Westerners all, and all of the sober, taciturn type, were too wise in the ways of gamedom to patronize either his or any of the other games in the Hang-out; but when spending nights in camp they frequently went there in lieu of other places to go, and for Shakespeare George this strange, unmoral, laughing man formed a liking. That George did not dislike him stood him in good stead on that night when Phil Mahoney ran amuck.

Phil had sold a claim for two thousand dollars, and Phil, ordinarily taciturn, developed into a roaring carouser of high rank. Moreover, a sporting tendency led him to accept Laughing Jim's challenge and attempt to worst that proficient at his own game. We were loitering there when Phil, leering, trudged away from the bar to the wheel and bought chips.

"One more man's money in the till!" shouted Jim. "Fair warning is fair warning. Play with me long enough and I take your wad!"

"If I plays long enough," growled Phil, seating himself and shoving a stack of chips on the fifteen spot and sparing a few for the single and double O.

Still voicing that deep-throated laugh, Jim raked them in, and again asserted that all men who came to his wheel lost; but Phil, angry, doubled his stakes, and assumed a grin. Five times in succession he lost, and then bought more chips, and now the grin had given place to a sullen frown.

"There'll be trouble with that fool yet," said George to me, "and it'll be his own bloomin' fault, because he's been warned often enough by Jim."

We drew closer to the table, as did several others, seeing that Mahoney's bets were increasing; but his exclamations of disappointment were drowned in the babel of sound that weltered throughout the Hang-out. Jim had begun by taunting him; but now, discovering his ill temper, as merely the cool "wheelman," twirling the little white ball, and raking in the losses, or paying out the winnings. Once he objected to something Phil said.

"What makes you play when luck's all against you?" he demanded. "It's not my fault if you lose all the time, is it?"

But Phil, by this time heavily short in purse, played on with a certain unmistakable desperation, and lost with a persistence that rapidly depleted his bag of gold dust. Now and then he won for a few turns of the illusive wheel, but the certain percentage of the game against him again told, and finally he was down to his last money. He staked everything recklessly on the old "star combination," and Jim waited patiently for him to place his bet, and, it seemed to me, with a faint hope that it might be withdrawn.

"All bets down?" he demanded at last.

"Ain't blind, are you?" was Phil's surly response, and Jim, with a slight shrug, twirled the ball. It hovered aimlessly for two or three turns as the wheel slowed down, and once it threatened to fall into a winning pocket; then, with the perversity of fortune, it slipped quietly into a partition and lay there. For a full quarter of a minute Jim did not touch it, nor the stakes that Phil had lost, and then he slowly reached over and swept the table clean, and, as he did so, again vented that slow laugh of his.

"Told you I'd get you," he said; but in the friendliest and most careless of tones.

Phil, who had risen to his feet as the wheel spun, stood as if transfixed by adversity when Jim swept the last of the money into the drawer; but his lips were drawn back into a stiff, snarling grin, and his eyes were wild with disappointment and anger. At the sound of Jim's laugh he suddenly broke loose into a storm of oaths, and, almost before any one could realize his intent, so swift was his action, he whipped a gun from his belt and "threw it down" on the wheelman.

The quickness of Shakespeare George was, and still is, proverbial

among those who knew him up and down the long Northwestern coast. Undoubtedly, on that evening, it was the means of saving the life of Laughing Jim; for even as George leaped forward from the side and caught Phil's arm, the pistol exploded. But so sure and deft had been George's attack, the heavy bullet merely buried itself in one of the poles of the cabin roof, and the pistol hand, clutched by the harsh, sinewy fingers of the miner, waved aloft helplessly as the two men struggled backward and forward. The roulette wheel with its table was overturned, and for a minute the room was filled with excited men who broke forward to witness or participate in any trouble. Quite steadily George forced Phil back against the wall, still clutching the upraised hand, and held him there.

"Phil! Phil!" George expostulated. "What's the matter with you—you fool! Cut it out, I tell you!"

Other voices joined the protest, and another of the competents, Bill Davis, reached up and twisted the gun from Phil's hand. George released his hold, and for a minute they stood there, angry, excited, and gathered as if for further combat; then, slowly, Phil relaxed.

"You got a square deal, pardner, all right," insisted Shakespeare George with his slow drawl. "I ain't got no use at all for gamblers or them that plays; but we stood behind you when you commenced, and Jim told you he'd get your money. Then he tried to get you to stop when he saw luck was against you, and that you was gettin' sore, and that didn't do no good. I ain't right sure that, if you'd 'a' killed him, I wouldn't have helped hang you. Now will you be good?"

With an impatient curse Phil shoved men out of his path and tramped through the doorway and into the night. Some one laughed with a clear, cool laugh, and it was Jim, the wheelman, righting his table and wheel. Another man laughed, some one said, "The cussed fool!" There was a return movement toward the other gambling tables, and the Hang-out had resumed its normal atmosphere of rumbling, subdued noise, stale smells of sweaty furs, dead smoke, and poisonous liquors.

Laughing Jim dropped the wheel back to its pivot, gave it a spin, and looked across at Shakespeare George. His face was, for an instant, grave and earnest.

"Close call—that!" he said quietly. "And I reckon, Mister Shakespeare George, that I owe you one. Thanks!"

He looked down and began to adjust his chips as if words were awkward for him under such circumstances, and then, as if to further conceal embarrassment, or through sheer, careless hardness, he again lifted his head and laughed, and his clear voice went out: "Everything all right again! Still doing business at the same old stand. Come up and try your luck, boys! Come try your luck!"

I was not certain whether mine was a sense of surprise at this callous outburst, or one of intense disgust for the whole sordid and near-tragic drama, as we followed the broken man out into the cold, still, starlit night. And, so slight is our gift of prescience, I did not in the least anticipate that this was but the opening scene for others in which Shakespeare George, clean, homely, and capable, and Laughing Jim, bad, attractive, and reckless, were to play parts.

The second scene was two months in coming. It was toward the very close of the long winter season that shut us in, and infolded us, like prisoners in a gloom of frost and ice, in the cold, yet attractive, center of a frozen world.

We, the Competents and I, had been working with persistent industry for weeks, and hungered for a touch of the camp and its vicissitudes; so, one night, when the restless craving for recreation was strong upon us, we went, slipping swiftly over the frozen trails in our moccasins, panting up steeps, and racing down short hills between bare trees as the dim path opened and beckoned us on.

The trail leading into the camp debouched into a cluster of cabins owned by miners who had claims on the gulches, and these were spread, regard-

less of streets, on the flat facing the river—frozen now into a broad ribbon of ice, snow-covered, and resting like a sinuous white blanket between the bordering hills. We passed through this clump of black squares, snow-capped, and out to the ribbon's edge. Bill Davis, in the lead, stopped us with a gesture and an exclamation.

"Listen!" he said.

We did. In the profound stillness we heard voices—angry voices—as of turbulent men. They came from down the straggling business street, lasted for a moment, and then were again shut off, even as the shutter of a camera, timed, permits light and then stops it.

"Must have been down at the post," Bill said. "We heard it while the door was open. Something doing. Let's lope along and see."

He set the pace, and in a few minutes we opened the door of the trading post to find it filled with muttering men, and it was plain to us that a miner's meeting, irregular and hurried, perhaps, but nevertheless a miner's meeting, was in session. Men in mackinaws, furs, and parkas were crowded into the place, and the dim lamps, with their tin reflectors, betrayed angry faces. Phil Mahoney was standing on the rough counter haranguing the men, and his face was black with excitement and temper.

"And look what he did to me!" he shouted, just as we entered. "Skinned me out of all I had, then laughed in my face. And it only took him ten or fifteen minutes to do it. They ain't no square game could do it. He's a crook! That's what this Jim is! Why, he says so himself, and laughs about it. This camp's had too much of him. He's busted too many men. I move we go down and get him and start him over the ice, to-night! Now!"

Despite the small esteem in which I held Laughing Jim, a shudder rippled up my spine at the thought of such an execution; for it meant nothing less. To "start a man over the ice," meant that he would be sent without blankets, or food, and that, with a full eighty miles to Taninaw, the nearest point of succor, meant nothing save condemnation to slow death by cold or exhaustion.

"Hold on! Hold on, a minute, before that's put to a vote," I heard Shakespeare George demand.

Men turned and craned their necks to look at him as he crowded toward the counter and into the little, open space reserved beneath it for courtesy.

"Me and my pardners just got here," said George, "and we'd like to know what Jim's done this time."

"Done?" shouted Phil, rendered more angry by interference. "He's skinned Missouri Jones out of all he had, and then won his pay dump from him. Ain't that enough?"

George eyed Phil steadily, and took his time to answer.

"Why did Missouri go against him?" he demanded. "Ain't he old enough, and wise enough, to know that he can't beat a wheel?"

"But the wheel's crooked!" declared Phil, his very beard bristling with excitement.

"Humph! You don't know that, and I don't," retorted George. "Until it's proved that it is, I'll not vote to kill a man. That's what it amounts to. You all know it."

There was an instant's silence that gave way to murmurs of approval, angry protests, and argument, above which rose Phil's voice, high and shrill, demanding the question. George fought for more time, and begged men to consider carefully before voting; but the clamor drowned him at last, and the chairman put the motion to a vote by counting hands. There was a sudden silence, portentous, as it took place, and I looked around me at the hard or cruel faces of men whose hands were uplifted in the death sign, and heard the steady, solemn voice of the chairman counting: "One—two—three——" and so on, up to "twenty-seven."

When the call for those opposed came, my hand, with those of the Competents, was held high, and with restrained breath we again listened to the tally. Slowly and more slow, it approached the end, and stopped at identically the same number. Three or four

men, loudest of whom was Phil Mahoney, began shouting arguments; but were silenced by the chairman, who calmly stated that for purposes of certainty he would ask for another vote. Again trying moments passed and the result was the same. Quite deliberately the chairman got to his feet on the counter, and held up his hand.

"It rests with me to cast the deciding vote," he said, and we all leaned forward in suspense and stared at him. His face was firm, and his voice without a tremor as he spoke. He was a brave man, was that chairman, standing there, dominant, before more than half a hundred earnest men!

"Shakespeare George," he said, "has convinced me that we are in possible danger of condemning a man who, though his business is questionable, and his character confessedly loose, may be innocent of crookedness in the cases before this meeting. I therefore cast the deciding vote against sending him out over the ice, and declare the meeting open for any further business, or a motion to adjourn."

Instantly the room was in a tumult that the chairman could not quell. Above the clamor, I heard Phil Mahoney shouting; "To thunder with such a vote! Come on, boys! Meeting or no meeting, we'll get that thief! All that's with me, come on!"

I felt a sudden jerk at my arm that almost overthrew me, and saw that it was George's hand that had seized me.

"Quick! Outside!" he shouted in my ear, and plunged toward the door.

As a flying wedge the Competents, accustomed for many years to fighting together, quick, sinewy, big, and powerful men all, charged to the door, jerked it open, and drew themselves together in front of it, a grim little line of determination. The moon had risen to cast shadows at the foot of the trees on the white, still snow, and shadows at the feet of our pitifully thin line; but we were tensed and waiting for the rush. As the foremost men belched from the door they halted in surprise, for directly before them stood Shakespeare George with a heavy, menacing gun, held at the hip, and pointed toward them.

"Stop!" he ordered, and there was something so chill and commanding in his voice that men paused irresolutely; then, sensing the deadliness of the situation, obeyed.

"The meeting in there fairly voted down any action against Laughing Jim," George said quietly. "My pardners and I stand for law and order. The majority is still the law in this camp, and if it comes to a show-down, we, my pardners and I, will furnish the order! There'll be no rush on Laughing Jim so long as any of us can handle his gun. If you think you can put it over, men, try it on!"

His grim conclusion was not to go unchallenged; for when he ceased, Phil Mahoney leaped to the front, waving his arms and shouting an appeal to his followers to pay no heed. Before he had uttered a dozen words George leaped. The long barrel of his pistol flew into the air, and came crashing sidewise against Phil's head, and the disturber fell to the snow, stricken as is an animal beneath the blow of a pole-ax.

Even as he fell, George's voice, cold and drawling, steady and distinct, queried: "Who's next?"

There was no "next." I found myself the only unarmed one from our camp, leaning forward on tiptoes, with fists clenched, and the expectant lust of battle ripping through my veins as I saw them waver, saw other men line themselves back of us ready for combat, and witnessed, as the long seconds flew, the dissolution of Phil Mahoney's forces. At the time it seemed that hours were passing; but that entire change of sentiment could not have required more than five minutes, and then there arose the murmur: "George is right, boys! The meeting decided it! That settles it!" and all was over.

The strange character of Shakespeare George was never better exemplified than in his following action, and thinking of the events of that far-fled night, I sometimes smile at his conception of "law and order"; for when it

was certain that the mob spirit was quelled and dissipated, he slipped the gun back into its worn holster and whispered to us, his partners: "Come on, boys! I've got something else we ought to do," and trudged away. The door of the trading post slammed as old Mayo swore at the loiterers and asserted that he had no contract to warm all outdoors. Black-moving spots were here and there on the white-covered earth as groups turned toward their cabins, moving quickly to escape the nipping teeth of the air.

Wondering what George could have in mind, we followed him, for with us it was custom to cling together, come what might. Straight he led us to the Hang-out, and in through the door. Already Laughing Jim was the center of a garrulous group, and his face for once was grave. As we entered he broke away from those who retailed to him the narrowness of his escape, and came toward George, admiring, reluctant, yet evidently anxious to voice his gratitude. But George's brows drew themselves into a scowl, and his gray-blue eyes were cold and sharp as he looked at the man whose life he had most certainly saved for a second time.

"Put on your coat," he said, "and come outside for a minute. We want to talk to you, Jim."

Again we followed him out as we saw that Jim, his young face depicting curiosity, was turning over his cash drawer to the bartender, and looking for his mackinaw. We had but a minute to wait before he emerged, and no time at all to speculate over George's intentions.

"I've saved you to-night, for the second time," was our partner's terse statement.

Jim started to thank him, but George threw up his hand, demanding attention.

"So you owe me something, and you'll pay! Jim, your game's done as far as this camp's concerned."

Again the wheelman opened his lips as if to speak, and again was abruptly silenced.

"We'll have no powwow," declared George, scowling at him, as he stood there in the moonlight. "But you'll do this! You'll walk back into the Hang-out and announce that never again in this camp will you roll a wheel or turn a card; that you're through; that you've finished! Then you'll wait for the first chance to go down, or up, the river when spring comes, and—Jim—you'll go!"

"But——" objected Jim.

"I said you'd go!" was the quick assertion. "There are a bunch of us here, pardners all, who say that you'll go as I say, quit to-night, and go as soon as you can. And it's up to you where you go. Up the river to Dawson, down to St. Michaels, or——"

Significantly the thumb of his mitten turned toward the earth, and Jim understood. The shadows on the snow, sharp and defined, nodded their heads in assent, and the gambler looked from man to man, reading in those dim faces a sentence. It was characteristic of him that after this quick appraisement he drew a deep breath, looked out across the broad expanse of snow-clad river, up at the flaming skies, and then laughed, deeply, recklessly, and shrugged his shoulders. Also it was characteristic that he turned toward the door, and said: "Good! Come ahead and see if I can't play any game!"

Once inside he walked unhesitatingly to the rough bar, seized a cigar cutter that rested thereon, and banged it loudly on the pine boards. Every one in the room paused and turned toward him, men's faces, dim through the smoke, expressing open-mouthed curiosity.

"Men," said Jim, when he had their full attention, "I've been accused of turning a crooked game. It isn't so. I've played it fair, but had rare good luck. I owe Shakespeare George a debt. I'm paying it, full and square. And to pay it, and be quits with a clean slate, he demands that I play no more—any game—in Marook. It costs me a lot, for you're a bunch of easy marks—suckers—with gold dust! But I pay! From this minute, now, I play nothing, gamble nothing in this camp, and am done!"

The surprised silence following this strange assertion was broken by his big, hearty laugh, and the banging of his emphatic fist on the bar. Quite mockingly he backed away from George, doffed his hat, brought his heels together, and bowed deeply.

"I've made good," he said. "Othello's occupation's gone! But God speed the spring so that he may find other fields to conquer!"

And he backed away, down the open space in front of the bar, and out of the door, while George's face lighted with sudden interest at the sound of the double quotation.

"That's from the third act and the third scene," said George delightedly, as if he had made a great discovery. And then: "It means that he's lost his job! That's the place where Othello talks about the dread clamorous counterfeiters. That Jim's a scholar! That's what he is—a scholar."

It was not the fear of enmities that kept us away from the camp on the banks of the Yukon in the weeks that followed that night, but the demands of work. Slowly the disappointment had come to us that our claims were not of the best, and that only by continuous effort could we hope to make them pay scant profit. Save on occasions when some of them passed on the trail we saw nothing of the men of Marook or Laughing Jim. Once we heard that the latter had complained that George had kept him from reaping the profits of the camp, and again that, loafing on the outer edge of his gambling world, he had angrily sworn that if he had been left undisturbed he would have made his fortune. I suppose there was some truth in his statement. Yet he held to his word, this unmoral, reckless vagabond who laughed. They said that he was still there, wearing, despite derision, his pointed-toed shoes, and manicuring his nails; but gambling not at all.

And so, at last, the sun found us, and burst glaring upon our activities, and thawed the huge black dumps, and melted the snow, devoting all his energy of the high latitudes throughout the long days. Water streamed from the hillsides. Every brook was a torrent, every snow bank the repository for the continuous, melodious chorus of tinkling water drops as they dripped and dripped, and sang their little good-by songs. The dams were built, the gates swung up and down, the shovels tore into the pay dumps, and the sluice boxes roared as we men of Little Marook strove, and cleaned up our winter's profit, be it large or small. Gone was the whine of the windlass in the frosty air, gone the sound of belabored arms beating heavy chests in the struggle to keep warm. Gone was the ring of the ax, the clatter of buckets emptying their contents on the apex of pyramids. The air was redolent with the call of wild fowl come to the breeding ground, the chirping of migratory birds, and the noiseless hum of insects.

"Boys," said Bill Davis on the night we cleaned up the last of our pay dirt, "I figure that she runs about fifteen thousand dollars, at eighteen an ounce. Not much, but a mighty sight better than nothing."

As he talked, he poured the dust into one of our half-filled buckskin sacks, and dropped it into our safe deposit—an empty oil can. Then, heaving a tired sigh, he slid the can under the bunk. On the morrow we would pick up the last scant remnants, pull the sluices, and divide this mass of gold into packs for the next day's journey to the post trader at the camp. Our season's work was done. As claims went in that country, and in proportion to the cost of living, we had not prospered; but we had more than paid our way and were glad; for, long before, we had decided to sell the claim and go "outside"—to the real United States—for the summer season. We went to sleep with the cabin door open, now that spring had come, and I remember that the last feature I observed was the lengthening of the daylight.

Full of the desire of youth for rest, I awoke only when Tim shouted his call for breakfast, and tumbled sleepily to my clothing, to the washbasin outside

the door, and my seat at the table. Then, a gallant company, we sallied down for our last day's work on the claim. And we made merry over it, this last day, and played pranks, and loitered, and threw the last shovelfuls with something of regret, for we were leaving the ground that had promised much, paid something, and was to be bartered. It was like bidding good-by to a friend, when we took the last pan of dust we would ever "clean up" from it, and filed toward the homely cabin on the mountainside. George put the pan on top of the stove to dry, for we used no amalgam; and Tim, whose week it was to cook, put the supper before us. We ate with something of melancholy, some queer mingling of good-by regret and satisfaction that at least we had worked as men. Tim got up at last and caught the pan in his hands with a strip of cloth, and reached under the bunk for the can. We heard an exclamation, first of surprise, and then alarm, as he pulled it out from beneath the bunk, clattering hollowly.

"Robbed! By heavens! Some one's looted us!"

His voice arose in a queer crescendo of astonishment and indignation. Stools were thrust back and our feet trampled heavily over the floor as we bent above him and stared down at the empty can, disbelieving him and our senses. It was true. The can was empty, and the profits of our year's toil had vanished as if by malignant magic. We started toward the door foolishly intent on plunging out into the night, but Bill Davis, veteran of the trails, leaped in front of us and threw up a restraining hand.

"Easy, boys! Easy does it," he said quietly, and we paused, looking at him expectantly, and wondering what he had in mind.

"Our only chance," he said, "of learning how, or by whom it was taken, is the sign out here in the mud. Whoever got it left a track. If we run over it in the night, it will be wiped out. If we wait until morning the sign will be there, some place, unless the man that robbed us had wings."

"Right for you!" was a chorus, growled in unison.

And so we all remained in the cabin, and sat and talked, and waited for daybreak, and indulged in idle speculation, but there was no lamentation.

It was George's wholesome, kindly hand that crept over on mine, as we sat there in the gloom, and it was his kindly voice that said: "Don't worry, boy! It hits you harder than us, because we've money outside. Alaska to us was an adventure. To you it was the first step on the big stairs of life, for you are young, but we'll get him yet. It's part of the game that we should."

And I was comforted thereby, and asleep when some one aroused us in the morning. I tumbled from my bunk, astonished by the sudden knowledge that I had slept in all my clothing, and that I had not suffered a wickedly troublesome dream. Tim was up and pouring coffee, hot and steaming, into the tin cups, and the day was breaking over the eastern hills in the early hour of the morning, so swift is the sun's reappearance in that high clime. We ate and drank sparsely, quietly, each intent on what the signs might show, and deliberately, nay, almost leisurely, tightened our belts and went out of the door, George in the lead, Tim, short and stocky, bending behind him like an unleashed hound, and Bill, huge and grim, following.

It was a foregone conclusion that the robber had done one of two things—approached from behind the cabin in the daylight, while we were working, or crept stealthily in at night while we were asleep. In the latter case he had doubtless fled down the trail. In the former he would have retreated by the rear of the cabin, and out into the screen of the forest on the mountainside above. So, first, we inspected the trail. Veterans in reading signs were these men who had permitted me to share their lot, and they walked forward with keen eyes sweeping this way and that—eyes which nothing could escape. A broken twig, a patch of crushed, indented moss, anything unusual, would be observed and noted. They bade me

walk behind, and scanned the ground for a hundred yards before one of them uttered a sound. Then George straightened up, and I saw the hurt look on his face give way to an angry scowl, and saw him swing one ponderous fist into a palm.

"Come here," he said, with strange repression, and we joined him.

There, plainly imprinted in the mud, where some one had entered the trail from a moss-carpeted side, were tracks, and they were those of one who wore shoes—shoes of civilization, such as but few men wore in our outskirt of a rough world, and the shoes were pointed, delicately, foppishly, almost daintily.

We lifted our heads and stared at one another, with the same unvoiced comment leaping from our eyes. We looked again at the telltale tracks in the mud, clearly leading down the hillside to the gulch below, and thus off toward the camp. We lifted our heads once more and George spoke.

"Laughing Jim!" he said.

"No other man in all the country wore such shoes!" Tim added.

"And no one but an expert crook would have taken a chance in coming into our cabin night before last," suggested Bill.

"That's when the trick was turned," declared George. "And he has paid me —gratitude!"

We passed, peering, down the trail and out into the gulch. Straight down it we went, finding here and there, in the slow miles, that unusual mark, the mark of a toothpick shoe in a country where all men wore rubber boots or mukluks in the wet and soggy spring. There could have been but one destination for those feet, so, at last, we wasted no more time on signs, but strode hurriedly and angrily away toward Marook. We gained the top of the hill in the pass above the town and looked down. Where last we had seen the ribbon of white, was now open water. The river had broken and cleared itself of ice while we toiled over our dumps. It ran below us, a turgid flood. Down in front of the A. C. Trading Post men were assembled, and they fired guns and shouted, while dogs ran hither and yon, howling a chorus of excitement and salute for the first steamboat of the year. It was coming slowly toward the bank, a tiny, rough affair that had wintered in a slough up the river. We hurried onward toward the water front, and had small need to ask questions, inasmuch as the first one was answered.

"Has any one seen Laughing Jim lately?" demanded George of the group in front of the Hang-out.

"If you're looking for him, you're a trifle late," jocularly asserted the nearest man. "He pulled out yesterday mornin' in a boat, goin' down the river. And he seemed in a hurry; but he stopped to laugh and twiddle his thumb at his nose to the boys who saw him go, and said he was right sorry he hadn't had a chance to skin the whole blamed camp before he set sail. Ha! Ha! Ha!"

He laughed boisterously at his own joke, a laugh in which we did not join, for now we knew, indubitably, that Jim had sufficient reason for haste. It was Bill, slow and cautious, who asked another question, pertinent to our quest.

"Any one else gone from the camp?" he asked.

"Nope! No one else had any reason to be in a rush," was the response.

"What makes you think Jim was in a hurry?" asked George, frowning at the man.

"Because he just dumped himself, and some blankets, and grub into a canoe that belonged to an Injun, and paddled away as if he was out to break records," asserted our informant. "Somebody asked him what was his rush, and he said he had a new job that he must move fast to grab. Cute of him, wasn't it? He was a smart son of a gun, all right, and would have his little joke, right up to the last."

Again the man laughed, and then, as the steamboat was about to land, hurriedly left us and started toward the river bank.

Bill beckoned us to one side.

"Boys," he said, "we've got just one chance, and that is to get to St. Michaels as soon as he does. Unimak Pass probably isn't clear of ice yet, and he will have to lay there until the steamer can get in from outside to take him away. We've got to try to catch him between here and there, and we've got several hundred miles to do it in. Two of us better rustle a boat. The others arrange for some one to keep an eye on our cabin up in the gulch, and buy grub for a cruise. Then it's a case of work at the oars and make time. Let's get a move on ourselves."

We did, most effectually, and in just two hours' time were shoving a crude, whipsawed skiff out into the river, and feeling the current catch us and sweep us toward the Ramparts below. We had begun the grim chase to overtake the one man who had paid his toll of gratitude by robbing the man who had twice saved his life, and it was certain that, did we overtake him, this time there would be no escape; for we would bring him back for trial.

The current helped us, and, to our satisfaction, we discovered that the apparently clumsy skiff handled excellently and responded bravely to our steady oars. We tore through the Ramparts where the waters lashed the rocks, and out into the breadths below, and then set ourselves to our task, as we traveled through that great uninhabited country. Save for the flying fowl, and a bear that lazily paused from drinking on a distant shore, we saw no living thing, and we did not pause for luncheon, but took turns with the oars. Accustomed as we were to the heaviest work, and in the perfect physical condition that comes from healthful food and clean lives, we did not suffer from the prolonged exertion. Indeed, had our mission been less melancholy and desperate, I, for one, would have enjoyed that steady, rhythmic motion, the gurgling of the water under our bow, the ever-changing scenery at our sides, and the beauties of a perfect day. We did not talk much, but once or twice Shakespeare George, brooding, quoted as if to himself, in a bitter tone, his own version of Wordsworth's "Gratitude."

What would have been evening in a more southerly latitude came on, and found us still rowing with that same measured stroke, save that we took shorter turns at the oars, and found the resting spells more grateful. The current carried us closer toward a shore, around a point that seemed blanketed with the evening's purple haze, and we stopped rowing abruptly at the sound of a rifle shot. Nestled at the foot of a bluff was a squalid little Indian village, and the natives were running excitedly up and down the water's edge and waving to us. It was evident that the shot had been fired to attract our attention. We headed the boat toward them, and they caught our prow and pulled us up on the shingle before we could protest.

"Come! Quick come!" urged a withered, kindly faced old native, presumably the tyune of this little domain. "White man 'most *peluck!* Him soon die. Quick come!"

We hastened after him to the big Kazima, a sort of clubhouse which each village of any size possesses, crawled in after him, and when our eyes grew accustomed to the dull, smoke-blackened, raftered interior, lighted only by a huge hole in the upper center over the fire pit through which the soft daylight streamed, we stood above the cause of his solicitude. Our chase was ended; for on the skins, at our feet, lay Laughing Jim.

George knelt beside him, and ran his hand inside the blue shirt that was torn open across the chest, and then looked up at us.

"Somethin's happened to him," he said, "feels to me as if he was all shot to pieces."

At the sound of his voice Laughing Jim opened his eyes a little wildly, then smiled as recognition crept into their clear, but pain-drawn, depths.

"I'm going," he croaked, with a queer, gasping effort. "You got here just in time. I—I—— Drink!"

Bill Davis pulled our little emergency

flask from his pocket, George lifted the wounded man up, and gave him a strong sup of the brandy, and it momentarily strengthened him. All our animosity was forgotten now, as we stood there rubbing shoulders with death, such is the queer awe and pity that assails us at sight of the mortally stricken regardless of their merits.

"Who did it, Jim?" asked George, still supporting the dying man's shoulders and head.

"Mahoney. But I got him! He's over there!"

He rolled his eyes tward the dark corner of the Kazima, and with exclamations of surprise all of us, save George, hurried to the corner, struck matches, and looked. There lay Phil Mahoney, beyond all aid, dead. I threw my handkerchief over his face before we went back to George and Jim, on tiptoe, as if the sound of our footsteps on that beaten earth would ever matter to him. We gave Jim another draft of the brandy, and he feebly waved for silence.

"Let me talk," he said. "Not much time left. Been going out all day. I've never been any good. Gambler's habit of sleeping days, awake nights. Took walk yesterday morning. Wanted to get close to birds and hear 'em sing. Mile above camp. Saw Phil Mahoney toting something toward boat. Acted queer. Didn't see me. Got in boat and shoved off. Skirted opposite shore as if afraid being seen. 'Funny,' says I. 'Wonder what that big, ugly devil's up to?' Forgot all about it and went back to my cabin, to clean up. Couldn't find best shoes. Cussed some, and wondered what Siwash could have swiped them. Then, all of sudden, remembered Mahoney walked queer. So I——"

He stopped and his lithe, wounded body was twisted with a harsh cough that threatened to undo him, and again we gave him brandy. After a time, but in a weaker and more broken voice, he went on: "So I went back. Never trusted him, anyhow. Sure enough there were tracks in the mud. He had 'em on. I back-tracked him. Found thicket of pussy willows, and inside of it empty gold sacks. Special buck. You fellows' names on 'em in indelible pencil. Got wild! Ran back farther along tracks and saw he must have come from gulch trail—your direction. Saw it all in a minute. Saw you fellows wouldn't believe me, because you know I've been a bad one—sometimes—not always. Maybe not so bad as some. Only thing I could do to show you I wasn't a dog, and appreciated what you all had done for me, was to catch thief. Grabbed canoe and chased him. Caught him here, where he'd stopped to make tea, above village. Saw smoke. Found boat—nothing in it. Crept up on him. He had gold dust with him. Tried to get drop on him, but he was too quick. Whirled and shot."

He rested silently for a moment as if to gather strength, and there was a little, exultant gleam in his eyes as he continued:

"I was down. Played fox. 'That's all right!' says he, as he came up and stood over me, 'but I'd rather you'd been hanged by them Competents.' Then he laughed and turned back. I got to my elbow and shot. He went down. Then we shot from the ground, and luck was against me. Could feel every one of his hit. Didn't know any more till Indians came running and picked me up. Phil was dead. Made natives bring me here with your dust. Told 'em better bring Phil, too, so if I went out, and you came, you'd understand."

He coughed again, more violently, and the brandy seemed to have lost its effect. He motioned with his dying fingers toward his side, and we had to bend over to catch his whispered words:

"It's there—by me—all of it—and—and—George, you're white and—I'm not so bad—after all—am I? Wanted you boys to know that——"

As if the severing of soul and body had given him an instant's strength, he half stiffened, struggled, and then tried to laugh, a ghastly semblance of that reckless, full-throated laugh that had given him his sobriquet, twitched, gasped, seemed to abruptly relax, and rested very still.

"Right? You're right as rain! You are! God knows you are!"

George shouted the words to him as if speeding them out to overtake his parting soul, and I like to remember that Laughing Jim's eyes seemed to twitch and that he went out with a smile on his face.

Side by side we buried them there, close to where the babble of the Yukon might croon to them in the long summers, or display to the cold skies its beaten winter trails, Phil Mahoney, the thief, in his stolen shoes, and Laughing Jim, the strange admixture of evil and nobility. And over each, with equal forgiveness, we put a rude wooden cross, while curious, stolid natives stood quietly by. The sole distinction we made was that the cross above Jim was carefully hewn. But George lingered behind as we made our preparations to camp in the village for the night, and the next morning, still filled with the tragedy; I slipped back up the hillside for a last look at the graves. On that of Laughing Jim, who would laugh no more, lay a handful of dying wild flowers, and I saw scrawled on the cross, in the handwriting of Shakespeare George, these words:

Under here is Laughing Jim. Paid a little favor with his life,
And died with a laugh on his lips! Bad as he was, better'n
Most of us, and provin' that sometimes even poets is wrong, and
That men don't forget. Lord help us all to do as well.

And so we left him, and my eyes were fixed, as we rowed back up the river, and the village with its natives was lost to view, on the rough-hewn cross that seemed to blaze with a peculiar glory all its own, a shining standard for one honorably dead on the field of gratitude.

"THE CLOCK" is the title of the second story in this new series of THE COMPETENTS. It was a battered old clock, and rather freakish, but Shakespeare George thought so much of it he had it locked up in a safety-deposit vault. You will hear about it in a future issue of the POPULAR.

A NEW LINE OF ART

THE red-headed and dissatisfied boarder was a large man with a large appetite. After dinner, he went out into the narrow yard, shook both his fists at the silvery moon, hurled several imprecations toward the congress of the stars, and burst forth into a picturesque and voluminous flood of abuse which was devoted entirely to the landlady.

One of the other boarders, who had been at the house a long time, thereby accumulating a pallid look and a palate with corns on it, drew near timidly and ventured to ask what the special kick was.

"What's the matter!" echoed the large man. "That old dame's the first woman I ever knew who could literally paint food on a plate."

INFLUENTIAL BUT INEFFECTIVE

THE fellow who knew everybody of consequence in Washington wanted to get a six-hundred-dollar job for an old-time friend. This fellow who knew everybody was as full of influence as a honeycomb is of honey. At his request, senators, representatives, cabinet members, State leaders, and even foreign ambassadors smote their arching heads with their high silk hats and beat it rapidly to the place where the influence was being concentrated like forty million sixteen-inch rapid-firing guns.

The old-time friend did not get the job.

"By George!" said the fellow who knew everybody. "Ain't that awful? We had as much influence for him as if we'd been trying to depose the pope!"

The Two Bulldogs

By Wells Hastings

Author of "The Man in the Brown Derby," Etc.

The case of a man who, suddenly becoming wealthy, determines that his unknown future employment shall be enthralling, shall demand the joyous devotion of every energy. He shouldn't have believed it had anyone told him that before many hours he should be seated in a taxicab with a bulldog on either side of him; and that, after taking the dogs to his home, an attempt should be made to chloroform him! All this happened, and much more — and the probability is that Carlyle has found his enthralling occupation and that we shall hear more of his escapades.

WHEN Neil Carlyle was left his fortune he waited eagerly the summons of his employer. For something over two years he had known Mr. Ruggles and for every minute of that time he had detested him. Since the first day of his employment he had been bottling up back talk. He had been gently reared and perhaps a little spoiled, as any orphan brought up by a maiden aunt is apt to be; and earning his living, or some part of it, had been a sore trial to him. He had come to the conclusion that he hated work. What he really hated was working for Mr. Ruggles; and it cannot be denied that Mr. Ruggles was an unsatisfactory employer—a boorish and cocksure fat man, who employed college men for what he imagined was their social position, and then delighting greatly in taking them down.

Carlyle's first thought, when he heard of the unexpected money, was a fine relief that he should never have to sell another case of wine; his second was that, at last, he was at liberty to express himself freely.

This morning he had been around tying up the last details with his lawyers, and had come in late half expecting that this very tardiness would give him the opening he longed for; but somehow it had escaped observation. He sat down, therefore, in the chair in front of his desk, and, lolling back, lighted a cigar—which was against the office rules—and sat smoking while he waited. The call came at last, the imperious whir of the wooden buzzer under his desk, which meant that he was wanted in Ruggles' private office. He strolled the length of the long room, his cigar still in his mouth, his hat still upon his head, and opening the gilt-lettered, corrugated glass door he found himself in the Presence.

As usual Ruggles was writing, or pretending to write. It was a principle of his to keep his subordinates standing for a little. As he did not look up Carlyle brushed some papers from a chair onto the floor and seated himself, blowing a luxurious exhalation of smoke toward the ceiling. He was perfectly happy.

Ruggles looked up and scowled at him as he took in the situation.

"Are you drunk?" he asked at last, and, without waiting for a reply, "take off your hat in my office and throw that cigar away. The first thing you know you'll get the bounce, young man. Remember, now, you've had your warning."

Carlyle knocked his ashes off onto the floor. "Is that why you rang for me?" he asked.

"No," said Ruggles, "I want you to run out and get me a sandwich."

"Have you thought of the office boy?"

"He's gone on an errand—say, what's the matter with you this morning?"

"I just came in to tell you," said Carlyle calmly, "that I have perpetrated my last ill deed on the already overdrugged public, that you and your near-imported, near-wine can go to blue-blazing Weehawken, that I don't like your face, or your morals, or your neckties. In short, I wish to disrespectfully tender my resignation."

"Get out of here!" yelled Mr. Ruggles. "You are drunk. Go on now while the goin's good, or would you rather be kicked out?"

"Much rather," said Carlyle eagerly. "That's just what I'm telling you the truth for." He opened the door into the outer office. "Bertie," he said to one of the clerks, "just come over here, will you? Ruggles is going to kick me out of the office, and I want you for a witness that he hit me first, and while you're about it, you might as well turn in a call for the ambulance. I'm waiting for that kick, Mr. Ruggles."

Every sound had stopped in the office. They were gazing at him with incredulous fascination. One of the younger clerks giggled nervously. Ruggles glowered at him, but prudently kept his seat.

"No kick?" asked Carlyle hopefully. "Well, then, I suppose I must leave without it," and still puffing on his cigar, he crossed the silent office and closed the door of his bondage behind him.

He knew on reflection that he had acted childishly, but he was unrepentant; childish or not, undignified or not, it had been fun and was worth the money. He was perfectly conscious that he had behaved somewhat after the manner of a small boy "sassing" his master, but he was not so many years from boyhood, and a boyish impulsiveness was characteristic of him.

Freedom—how he enjoyed it! The weeks that followed were like one of the old vacations. He found himself gorgeous quarters, and filled them with things he had been longing to buy for years. He sent gifts home to the adoring maiden aunt until she telegraphed him to stop it. He went constantly to the theater and explored the city for new restaurants. He idled, and dawdled, and luxuriated. With golf, and tennis, and racquets, he stretched his cramped muscles. Like Harun-al-Rashid, he wandered about the city and stretched his cramped mind. It seemed to him that he would never tire of idleness and spending, and then he awoke one morning in his fine new bed to make the startling discovery that his vacation had automatically come to an end. He was sick of it. He didn't even take the trouble to mentally debate it. He just knew suddenly and surely that he had played long enough. That if he was to keep on being happy, he must find something to do.

All his life decisions and determinations had come to him suddenly like this. He was too buoyantly healthy to admit seriously that he was a fatalist, but, nevertheless, he had a subconscious belief in himself and in his certain destiny. He had taken the unexpected legacy with a large gratitude, but scarcely any feeling of surprise. The knowledge that he must find employment had come as suddenly, but he had no thought of questioning it. He got up briskly and started dressing, choosing his various garments with deliberate care; for he was already thinking hard. It was easy enough to know that he had to do something, but extremely difficult to choose a satisfactory occupation. It was not necessary that he make money; it was necessary that what he chose to do should hold him heart and soul. He had done unsympathetic work long enough. He was mentally determined that his unknown future employment should be enthralling, should demand the joyous devotion of every energy.

Dressing finished, he stood staring down at the great city square beneath his window, frowning in his stress of thought. It was a fine early September day with a brisk breeze stirring in the treetops, a cooler day than usual, and he noted with that part of his mind which was not bent upon the problem, that the loungers on the park benches were slouching more closely into their thin garments, their coat collars turned up, and that pedestrians moved no lon-

ger with a summer languor, but strode along about their affairs with a step as brisk as the day itself. He put aside his problem to watch them, or rather it was his problem that made them interesting; soon he, too, would be like these busy, occupied men, intensely bent on contributing his portion to the work of the world.

From his high window the life of the square moved before him like a picture film in vivid color, a soundless, hurrying panorama. Whimsically he began a search for the principal character, a temporary star of the drama, and at last had the satisfaction of finding him. He had, at least, all the characteristics of a hero. He moved at a more leisurely pace than the rest of the crowd, he was bigger, and broader, and apparently stronger, and his clothes alone set him apart. Carlyle watched him for a moment, and then ran to his center table, and got a pair of field glasses from the drawer. They were good glasses, and he could almost see the man's expression. He did not look quite so much of a hero through them. His features were still a bit indistinct, but he thought them of a meaner cast than he had supposed. And though the man walked slowly, there was something nervous in his gait, and in the quick sidelong glances he gave the bench loungers that he passed. He was an Englishman; his clothes were of the outrageously checked variety invariably worn by the comedy Englishman on the American stage, and truly enough dear to the English heart; his cap, too, was a fore-and-aft affair, made of the same stuff as his suit. He carried a tremendous Gladstone in his left hand, and in his right a leash that stretched to the collar of a burly English bulldog, rolling placidly behind him. It really seemed like some stage affair, and even as Carlyle thought it, a little comedy play suddenly developed in the drama; for as the Englishman passed a clump of bushes, another man in a long, black ulster stepped out from behind it and followed him. There were no benches here, and the two were comparatively alone. Carlyle saw the man in the black ulster stoop and catch the great bulldog up under his coat, then he dropped him again, and, turning, walked rapidly away in the opposite direction.

Carlyle frantically turned the adjustment of his binoculars that he might see more clearly, swinging them in a rapidly widening arc from one man to the other. The black ulster seemed to move with a sort of inward convulsion, and when he swung his field of vision back again to the Englishman, he saw the reason for it. The Englishman still sauntered along, still glancing furtively from right to left, and the dog still lumbered behind him, but in spite of his amazement, Carlyle knew that he could trust his eye for detail, he was positive that he was not mistaken—the dog had been a deep brindle, he was now a light fawn.

He threw up his window and, leaning out, shouted frantically to the Englishman to stop, but the distance was much too great, and in a moment he realized his folly. So he hurriedly snatched up his hat, and, slamming the door of his apartment behind him, plunged downstairs without waiting for the elevator. As he ran he knew what had happened. The big sluggish bulldog had kept the leash tight, and the man in the black ulster had deftly retained the tension while he shifted the snaffle from the dog he meant to steal to the dog he had brought to replace it. It must have required a tremendous dexterity; a change possible only to the skilled hands of the professional.

In the street he hesitated a moment, in a quandary as to whether he should follow the robber or the robbed. He must act quickly if he was to catch the thief, but on the other hand it would do but little good to recover property for an unknown who had disappeared. He decided to apprise the victim of his loss with what speed he might, and to guide him in the direction the thief had taken, and to help, if possible, in the capture. He could still glimpse the checked fore-and-aft cap in its dignified progress uptown, and with one final glance across the square, where already the black ulster had disappeared, he

turned north, running as fast as the crowded sidewalks would permit.

The chase lasted for almost five blocks, and Carlyle found, even in that brief space, that he was still far below his old form, and when he at last came up with the man he was forced to wait for a gasping moment, until he got breath enough to speak. So he laid a detaining hand upon the stranger's arm, or rather tried to lay it, as the arm was wrenched instantly from his grasp.

"I beg your pardon," he gasped, seeing the surprise and displeasure in the other's face, "but I want to speak to you for a moment."

The man was certainly not prepossessing; for, although he was tall and well made, and carefully—if somewhat outlandishly—dressed, yet Carlyle thought that the face beneath the peaked cap was scarcely that of a gentleman. It was a long face, crowned and framed in a close-clipped stubble of red hair and whiskers, and divided by the meridian of an incredibly long and low-bridged nose which descended from a fleshy ridge between near-set, amber-colored eyes, small and light-lashed under almost invisible brows, until it fairly hung in a loose point over a long upper lip. His mouth was mean and colorless, and his long chin was squared abruptly across and cut by a deep, central cleft.

His eyes played over Carlyle from head to foot, glanced back into the crowd, and for a moment up into Carlyle's face again. "What do you want?" he asked. "I don't know you." He spoke, Carlyle noticed, with a queer lifting of the right half of his upper lip, while the left remained almost motionless.

"You've been robbed. I was looking out of my window, and I saw the whole thing, and I think I should recognize the thief. We may be able to catch him, but we've got to hurry."

"Robbed! What do you mean?" Carlyle saw the hand which held the leash jerk forward until it tightened.

"Just what I say. Look back at your dog. Is he yours? Is he the same one you started with?"

The little eyes glanced back at the bulldog, who was sitting placidly spraddled in the midst of traffic, and Carlyle saw that the stranger's long face flushed a dull red, grew white, and flushed again. But the man's sloth and inactivity were commencing to madden him.

"Come," he cried impatiently, "there really isn't any time to lose. I'm afraid we're going to miss him, as it is."

The stranger hesitated. "You are quite right," he said, "and I thank you; but this is a case for the police. Hold the tike a bit, like a good fellow, will you, while I phone? I'll be with you in a moment." He pressed the leash into Carlyle's hand, and strode into the doorway of a big insurance building.

A minute passed, then another and another, and with the thought of the hurrying black ulster, Carlyle grew more and more impatient, until at last he could stand it no longer, and with the dog following confidently at his heels, he hurried into the great hallway where the stranger had disappeared. Halfway down its length he saw the blue illumination of the public-telephone booths, and made his way rapidly to them. There were fourteen booths, six of them occupied, and through the glass doors he could see the six lighted interiors clearly. But not one of them held the tall Englishman. He turned to the desk and questioned the operator. She disclaimed any memory of such a person as he described. Carlyle's suspicion had been born before he entered the building; now with the memory of the building's construction it became a certainty. The lofty hall was also an arcade, a passageway with an outlet at the other end. For some mysterious reason he had been given the slip; and the victim of the robbery had made off with as nice an agility as if he had been the thief. It was very confusing.

"At least," reflected Carlyle, "I am in one perfectly good bulldog," and he stooped and patted the creature's head. He was fond of dogs and knew a good deal about them. Even a glance told him that this was a fine one and worth a good deal of money.

The dog wagged his twisted stub of a tail in massive ecstasy. "Yes, sir," Neil said to him, "you are a beauty, aren't you; and even if you aren't the right one, I wonder why I was made a present of you."

The thought of the other dog struggling beneath that black ulster came back to him. Probably the Englishman had decided to catch the thief for himself, and this argued that he knew the direction the thief would probably take. But how could he know it, and why had he taken such pains to pursue the matter alone?

Now that he was so fairly launched in other peoples' affairs, Carlyle determined to see them through to a finish. That his assistance was unwished for and even craftily avoided only further piqued his curiosity. He started running again back toward Broadway; and, as he ran, he discovered why the dog had been left with him. It was partly, of course, to give him something to do, to keep him standing in the street long enough to give the Englishman a start, but it was also because although bulldogs are possessed with many amiable qualities, running is not among them. He found this out before he was halfway to the door, and turned and picked up his new possession.

He found that as he ran people stared at him on the street, and wondered with a laugh if they took him for a thief or a dog catcher. At any rate, it wouldn't do—forty pounds was no light weight. He hailed a passing taxicab and gave the man his direction.

"Go downtown three blocks and then turn east at the square and keep going until I tell you to stop."

The chauffeur proved, fortunately, to be one of those breakneck metropolitan experts who could worm his way through intricate traffic at headlong speed. He twisted around trolley cars, grazed under the very nostrils of truck horses, hovered in clamorous palpitation at the tail of a blocking delivery wagon, and shot triumphantly along short, open spaces, until, at last, they came to the narrower but freer streets of the lower East Side.

With every stop and every advance the hopelessness of the chase grew more clear to Carlyle's mind. To find a needle in a haystack would be an actually easy task compared to finding a stranger, seen for a moment, and from a distance; who had been given fifteen minutes' start in a great city, and who, moreover, had probably every reason for wishing to appear inconspicuous, and now was probably making his best speed toward some chosen hiding place. Indeed, the probability was that at this moment he was already safely hidden. As Carlyle made this reflection he suddenly caught sight of his needle.

The black ulster still bulged with the squirming bundle beneath it, and when Carlyle caught sight of it the man was in the very act of unlocking a battered wooden door which had apparently once served as a private entrance to a once prosperous warehouse. The warehouse now was much out of repair, its big entrance was locked, and the whole place had that appearance of dejection which a few months of vacancy give to a city building.

Carlyle rapped sharply on the glass, and the taxicab stopped with a jerk and a squeal of brakes which brought a backward glance from the black ulster. It occurred to him even as he wrenched open the door, that now that he had found his man, he had no notion of how to deal with him; but his good fortune had been so great that now he had no intention of letting it slip through overcautious deliberation.

"Here," he called. "Yes, you, I mean. I want to speak to you." The black ulster, after a first involuntary start, affected not to hear him, but redoubled his efforts to unlock the little, battered door. With a deep satisfaction, Carlyle noticed that the man was very much frightened. He crossed the sidewalk and took him by the elbow.

"Now," he said, "you'll kindly hand over that dog to me."

The man in the black ulster stared at him with widening eyes. "Dog?" he repeated. "Wot dog? Leggo my arm." His short, blue-shaven face was pale,

but it was hard to say whether he was more afraid or more angry.

"The dog you have under your coat. I saw you steal him." Then as the man hesitated: "You had better give him to me, unless you'd rather be handed over to an officer."

The hand that still rested upon the doorknob moved, and with a swift plunge buried itself in the ulster pocket.

"No, you don't," Carlyle cried, and threw both arms about him, pinning his elbows to his sides. In this way he held him, but with some difficulty; for the man was now thoroughly frightened and struggling frantically. They swayed, reeling, across the sidewalk, over the gutter, and out into the cobbled roadway, until they bumped into the waiting taxicab. There Carlyle looked up and saw that the chauffeur had lighted a cigarette and was watching them with all the impersonal interest of a reporter at a prize fight. The sight angered him.

"Here," he gasped. "Can't you do anything but sit there and smoke? Give me a hand with this fellow, can't you?"

"Sure, I can, glad and welcome, but you didn't say nothing about wanting any help, and I'm not one to butt in when two gents has a little matter between them. What do you want me to do—soak him with a wrench, or just hold him for you?"

In spite of his rapidly growing shortness of breath, Carlyle laughed. "No, don't soak him," he said. "I'm not a highwayman, but he's got a dog that doesn't belong to him under his coat. Get him for me—will you?—and then see if he's got a gun in that pocket."

The chauffeur tossed away the butt of his cigarette and climbed down from his cab. "Dog? Where is he?" he asked.

"Right here under my left arm—if I haven't squeezed the poor fellow to death. Perhaps you had better look for the gun first, and then hold this fellow from in back while I get the dog."

"He ain't got no gun, boss, but this is about the healthiest set of 'knuckles' I ever see." And the driver held up a strange contrivance of brass, which looked like four rings welded in convex upon a short T of the same heavy metal. Carlyle saw that the last and smallest ring jutted out from its side a sharp point, like a two-inch metallic thorn. The driver was looking at it with great interest. "French make," he said, at last, as he pocketed it; "ours don't have spikes on them. Now, then, Frenchy!" And he grasped the black ulster firmly by the elbows.

Carlyle relaxed his grip and stepped back, and, as he did so, there was a heave and convulsion beneath the black ulster, and the big brindle dog appeared, sprawling on the sidewalk, looking about him with a heavy air of injured dignity.

Carlyle stooped and picked the dog up in his arms. "Let the fellow go," he said. "I'll take the risk of not having him arrested."

As a matter of fact, this seemed to him the easiest solution. He had no great desire to make a charge at the police station or to be involved in any possible subsequent proceedings. He knew the man was a thief; but thus far he had no reason to think particularly highly of the individual from whom the property had been stolen, and he considered that he had sufficiently served that unknown by recovering his property, and that retribution was beyond his own concern. For all he knew there might be a thousand mitigating circumstances behind the petty crime—the rights and wrongs of the affair surely were not his to unravel. Besides, it occurred to him vaguely, and was as vaguely acknowledged, that in actual truth he had been drawn into the affair rather by an impulsive prompting of excitement than by a deliberate determination to see exact justice done.

The taxi driver released his captive with the same genial indifference that he had shown in grappling with him, but instead of immediately running away, as Carlyle had expected, the black ulster stood hesitating.

"Well," Carlyle asked, "what do you want? You are free, and you ought to be thankful."

"Will monsieur listen? Yes, yes, I

acknowledge it. I was seen to take this dog. I did take him, but I gave a good dog in his stead, and this animal that monsieur holds beneath his arm with a so great danger to himself, this fierce animal is my own. I entreat you, I beg you, I supplicate you, give him me. He has a temper the most evil, the soul of a fiend, if you will; but he is the dog of my wife who is dead, and I have raised him and nurtured him, until it is as if he were to me a child." The short, blue-shaven face seemed to work with a very real emotion.

Carlyle hesitated in a new uncertainty. He did not wish to be unjust, but he was not of a very credulous nature. In his perplexity he glanced at the chauffeur, and saw that gentleman studying with idle interest the brass knuckles which he had taken from the pocket of the black ulster. Carlyle had forgotten them for the moment, and the sight of them eased his mind at a stroke from any anxiety, and for some reason reminded him that this man who now spoke with a Gallic accent and a distorted Gallic construction had answered him a few moments ago in the clipped, hoarse lingo of the East Side.

"I find myself unable to believe you," he said. "You'd better go while the going's good."

"Oh, monsieur, my dog! I cannot; indeed, I cannot! He is mine by right, and I am a poor man; but if it is money that you desire——"

Carlyle laughed and shook his head.

"You wrong me. He is dear to me!" the man wailed; and then, as Carlyle started to move off: "The dog of my wife, I had told monsieur; if you are bent on wrong, if I am to be deprived of my property, the beloved animal who has shared my joys and sorrows, at least, at least you will not leave me without a memory, without some souvenir—a keepsake. Give me just the collar of him; it is worth nothing." He laid a pleading hand upon Carlyle's coat sleeve.

"G'wan!" said the chauffeur, interfering for his patron with a rising disgust. "Beat it, you! If y' gotta blubber, do it somewhere home. You're a hot crook, you are, packing a set of knuckles and sniveling like a pickpocket. We should worry about your souvenirs!" With a double gesture, he pushed the black ulster staggering back across the sidewalk and hustled Carlyle into the open door of the cab.

"Wait a minute," Carlyle said, as the motor began to speed up for a start. He fumbled in his pocket and tossed his card out on the road. "That's my address," he called, "if you want to come to me with references and any proof of your ownership. Now, go on, driver; you may take me home." And he gave him his direction. As they jolted westward again, he leaned back in amused satisfaction in the middle of the broad, upholstered seat, watching the polite curiosity with which the big dogs, sitting gravely on each side of him, looked across him at each other.

"You're making quite a collection, aren't you?" the chauffeur said, as he was paid before the doors of the apartment. "Thank you, sir; thank you!"

When a surprised and rather terrified elevator boy had left Carlyle out at his floor, he put the dogs down in his living room. Neither of them showed any disposition to fight, but stood rather stiffly apart, looking up at him. He patted first the fawn and then the brindle, and each, as if by a prearrangement, wagged a twisted stump of tail and sank with a great sigh contentedly to the floor—dignified, ridiculous, but somehow very admirable and well-bred. "I guess that's about the limit," said Carlyle, aloud. "I wake up dogless, and find myself before luncheon with a fair start toward a fairly respectable kennel. Even that English johnny will have to show cause before I give either of you up. It begins to look as if you both were stolen, and I wonder how I am going to get hold of him."

He lighted a cigarette and dropped into an easy-chair, running over and relishing the whole adventure. "I shall have to advertise, I suppose," he reflected, and then, a little later: "I wonder what that crook's dodge was begging for a souvenir.

"Come here, sir!" He snapped his fingers to the brindle bulldog. "I want to look at you and see if there's anything wonderful about that collar of yours."

He could, however, discover nothing unusual. The collar was merely the accepted broad band of leather, studded with heavy bosses of brass. It was worn and somewhat scratched. Evidently, this request for a souvenir had been made simply for its theatrical effect, was merely a touch to lend color of truth to a thief's sentimental story. The fellow was just a common dog stealer, not worthy of much further thought. Indeed, now that the chase was over, very little of interest remained, except —he had almost forgotten it—the unexplained disappearance of that English tourist who was the brindle bulldog's rightful owner.

But was he the rightful owner? Certainly, for a man who had been robbed of a rather valuable possession, his conduct had been peculiar. Carlyle found himself hoping that he had seen a thief catch a thief, but there might be some "queerness" in the whole affair which would bring it automatically to a stop, and leave him in undisputed possession of his present double booty. He was fond of animals, and these two dogs had come to him in such a strange way, and were so evidently splendid examples of their breed, that, already, he shrank from the thought of losing them, and determined if he should be able to find the rightful owners to make them offers for the dogs which they could not refuse. Of course, he would advertise for the owners and give an address in care of the newspaper for any possible reply. He certainly did not wish every one in the city who had lost a dog besieging the doors of his apartment.

A branch telegraph office, he remembered, was not far off, and as he knew that newspaper advertisements were received there, he took up his hat and stick, and, whistling his burly charges to heel, went out to fulfill his duty to conscience. The dogs followed him with easy, well-bred obedience, but he found it necessary to pick his way through the crowded streets with more than usual deliberation, so that, with the delay of leisurely, precise composition in wording his paragraph for the "Lost and Found" column exactly to suit him, he was gone from his apartment the better part of an hour.

His suspicious attention was first caught by finding his outer door, which he was very sure he had latched behind him, unlocked and slightly ajar. Inside, the place gave immediate evidence of having been visited during his absence. It was in startling disorder; desk drawers torn out and left upon the floor, books and papers tumbled and disarranged, even his bedroom in cyclonic confusion.

It may have been merely coincidence —for why on earth a thief trying to recover a stolen dog should look behind books and in the shallow drawers of a desk was beyond comprehension—but nevertheless it puzzled him. Carlyle could not but believe that this breaking in was connected in some way with his adventure of the morning, and to this belief the behavior of the two dogs lent color. Their polite indifference had entirely disappeared, giving way to a wild excitement; they rushed from sitting room to bedroom and back again, sniffing loudly with their blunt, depressed nostrils, making guttural noises deep in their loose throats, which perhaps were growls, perhaps merely a sort of canine loquacity. Carlyle laughed to see them; but in spite of their absurdity felt their evident and unusual excitement significant. As far as he could see, none of his valuables was missing, nor did guarded inquiries of the hall man and elevator boy result in anything.

Nevertheless, the fact remained that his room had been entered and thoroughly searched by an adroit criminal, and before he slept that night he took the extra precaution of having in a locksmith to reënforce his door with a strong, inside bolt.

With even this additional security against further excitement, he found it difficult that night to go to sleep. He was not given to timidity, and he was certainly not kept awake by any fears

for his personal safety; but his day had been so eventful, and had so violently punctuated his rather commonplace existence that long after its close a turbulent afterglow remained. For an hour he tossed restlessly, almost drowsing at times, only to be wakened to confused consciousness by the soft movement of one of the big dogs, who were stretched on the floor at the foot of his bed. At last with a sleepy exasperation, he got up and ordered them both into his sitting room, and, closing the door of his bedroom behind him, sank finally into dream-disturbed slumber.

But either he slept lightly, or that strange prescience, which calls all of us at times from the various depths of sleep, whispered in his ear; for suddenly he found himself awake, sitting bolt upright, his ears straining to catch again the sibilance of an unfamiliar sound. He knew himself eager to have every sense acute, and yet felt strangely heavy and dull. At last, he realized, with a wave of nausea, a faint and sickly sweet odor in his room. He got heavily from bed and went instinctively to his open window, leaning far out to draw great breaths of the harshly vigorous night air; then he went to his door, and, with his ear against it, listened for the sound which had awakened him. He heard it distinctly now—a queer, uncanny, viciously innocent little noise, as soft and alarming as the hiss of a snake, "Huhss—huhss—huhss!" in regular pulsating beat.

He opened the door and switched on a dimmed electric light. In this room the windows were closed, and the sick-sweet smell rolled against him almost overpoweringly, so that he held his breath, and stole on tiptoe to noiselessly raise the windows. On the floor lay both dogs asleep; their eyelids were a little open, showing a space of bloodshot white, and they groaned softly with each infrequent, struggling breath. He picked them both up and staggered with them into the comparatively fresh air of his bedroom, where he left them close beside the open window, shutting the door after him as he went back to investigate that menacing suffocation.

The light glowed dimly, and at first he was unable to discover anything amiss, any reason for those noxious fumes. His first thought—the natural one to a man awaking half suffocated at night—was that gas must be escaping somewhere; but there was no gas in the electric-lighted apartment, nor did the smell of gas have this strange, sweet quality. Then, suddenly, he knew, and followed the strange sibilance of sound directly to his outer door. He was growing stupid again; but in spite of that and the dim light he saw that a gimlet hole had been made through the panel near the lock, and through this hole protruded tiny twin pipes of nickeled metal—the tip of an atomizer—which still hissed softly as it threw its fine spray of chloroform into the room.

Something must be done about it; his senses were already reeling; he could not stand there in idle contemplation until he lost consciousness, so again he stole to his now open window, where he stayed until he had somewhat recovered and his brain began to work again. Then, holding his breath as he made his preparations, he snatched a flat-mouthed vase from his mantel and crammed into it the sponge which had dryly decorated his desk for weeks against a time which never came for the fulfilling of its destiny in moistening stamps. This hasty contrivance he clapped delicately over the intrusive nozzle of the atomizer, holding the smooth mouth of the vase snugly against the door. It was amazing, as he held it there, to think of all the malevolent effort expended a panel's thickness away from him—expended now with no greater harm than soaking an imprisoned sponge in chloroform. A fine breeze blew in at the window. The room was almost clear of the heavy fumes.

Presently the muffled hissing ceased, and a new sound took its place—the treble snore of a small saw. Carlyle cautiously withdrew the vase and found that already a fine sawdust had begun to coat the inside. The attenuated blade of a keyhole saw flickered like the bright tongue of a serpent in and out of the gimlet hole, biting its way stead-

ily into the panel, curving away in a rough circle, until at last the circuit was completed and the detached round of wood skillfully withdrawn. He stepped hastily back and flattened himself against the wall; for he knew that in all probability an eye would be immediately applied to the opening.

From where he stood he could see the door obliquely in flat, fore-shortened perspective where the circular opening appeared like an attenuated ellipse. Through this a flash of light presently shone, shooting a moving finger of brilliance across the room, which flickered from chair to table, to desk, into obscure corners, like the soft and rapid touch of a blind giant. It was gone as abruptly as it came, and the fingers of a man's hand stole through the little opening, reaching up and up until a space of wrist and arm showed also and the groping hand found the sought-for bolt—that new, infallible bolt, which Carlyle had shot that evening with such a feeling of security and not a little complaisance at his own forethoughtfulness. The bolt was slipped noiselessly back, the doorknob turned cautiously from the inside, and the door itself swung silently inward.

Carlyle found himself waiting with a lively curiosity. Was his visitor to be the red-haired Englishman, or that black-jowled, short-faced fellow who carried knuckle-dusters in the pockets of his black ulster, or some third equally doubtful character, as yet unknown?

He had been waiting tensely, ready to spring on this intruder at the moment of his appearance; but in the shift of a second he suddenly changed his mind. As the man came in he was sure to get him, but he was almost certain that this was the same person who had ransacked his place earlier in the day, and he felt a very keen interest in discovering what on earth it was the man wanted, and this might remain a mystery if he attacked him at once. So in that second of time, while the door was being swung in, and before he saw or was seen, he slipped along the wall to a shallow, curtained alcove, where he crowded in among a collection of overcoats and waterproofs. The place would afford him at least temporary security, and from behind the curtain he could watch whatever was about to take place. The door was only a pace or so away, and he felt that he could reach it first when he had satisfied his curiosity.

The intruder, as he more than half expected, proved to be the man to whom he had flung his card. He had discarded his black ulster, but there was no mistaking his height, or that queer, absurdly short face. As Carlyle, peering out from behind his curtain, first caught sight of him, he seemed already engaged in making some temporary repair of the damage he had done; for he was smearing the edges of that round section of panel he had so skillfully removed with what, from its appearance, might be some preparation of soft wax. When this was done to his satisfaction, he fitted the piece back into the hole from which it had come, and carefully scraped and wiped away the ring of exuding surplus, and pushed the door gently shut. He was so near that Carlyle could see his frown as he glanced at the open windows, which seemed to proclaim the waste of several ounces of chloroform. He was evidently a persevering rascal, however, undaunted by disappointment; for he tiptoed directly across to the bedroom door, listened a moment, and, getting to his knees, started work again with his gimlet.

Carlyle was distinctly disappointed. He had expected his man to make some further search of the sitting room, a search that should be an indication of what he was after. But he had given the sitting room hardly a glance; perhaps he was making certain that he should not be interrupted before he began; perhaps he really was after the dog—although a dog, even of very fine breeding, seemed hardly worth committing a felony for, until safer means had been exhausted. Perhaps—and Carlyle felt a queer, prickly thrill at the thought—he was impelled by some murderous idea of revenge! On the whole this seemed the time to interfere, to put an end to the business, to hand the fellow over to the authorities. Carlyle drew a

long breath and set his hand upon the curtain.

But as he did so he saw the man's head turn as if with a sudden suspicion, saw the gimlet drop from his hand, and his eyes widen in a stare that showed their whites. At their gleam of fixed terror Carlyle drew involuntarily back. Then to his amazement he saw that the man was not looking at his alcove, but at the outer door a few feet to his right. It was impossible not to follow the wild glare of those eyes. The outer door had been swung noiselessly open, and well inside the room stood the red-haired Englishman, very tall and straight, a semaphoric arm leveling a blue automatic at the kneeling figure.

"So, Raoul, it is you!" he said, in a toneless whisper. "I thought so from the first. But it took me some hours to get track of you. I told you when you first tried to cheat me that you wouldn't find life without my help so easy; and, sure enough, you have come down a long way in the world—sneak thief this morning, burglar to-night." He sniffed. "Perhaps murderer, too, eh, Raoul? I have been watching you. It's easy to use too much of that chloroform. Suppose this young man has a weak heart—— How did you hear about them? Have you got them yet?"

The man on the floor shrugged with a spread of his empty hands. "No, chief. I have them not. It is evident—you found me still at work."

"But how did you hear?"

"I heard nothing. I was starving here in New York and went down to see the *Tasmania* come in. There is always a chance for fortune with newly landed tourists. I saw you and your dog"—he got slowly to his feet—"and I suspected. I have no reason to love you, chief. My portion has never been what it should be. And I remembered that at home I still had that so faithful dog with which I made the last carry—own brother to your brindle."

His loose lips parted in a smile which was half snarl. "I thought perhaps you would be glad to receive him again, and—I made the little exchange which this young man here evidently observed. Come, he has both dogs, yours and mine—for in some manner he saw me; I have done half the work, we will divide."

"Divide, you sneak? I will let you go this time, and that is all. You can consider yourself in luck that I'm not handing you over to the police."

"Police!" The man laughed softly. "You call the police, chief, you! Call loud, I'm not afraid."

The Englishman rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Well," he said, at last, "go ahead, get in and get them. I will make a fair cut with you."

Raoul shrugged again, and turned to his gimlet work. "There," he said finally, "it is through. Hand me the atomizer; it is on the table."

Carlyle sensed it before it happened, and it happened in a flash; for, as the Englishman turned involuntarily, the man called Raoul sprang from his crouching position on the floor, throwing his long arms about his heavier adversary and bringing him crashing to the floor. The Englishman was half stunned, and Carlyle saw that the man on his back was fumbling the floor for the automatic; but that weapon had bounded out of reach, striking the rug and slipping across a space of hardwood border, until it lay within a foot of the alcove curtain. As Carlyle reached for it with his bare foot, he saw that the Englishman had ceased struggling, and that the man, Raoul, was slipping something back into his pocket.

"Slungshot, probably," thought Carlyle; for he had heard no noise of a blow. "The man's a walking arsenal." He cuddled the automatic in his palm and pushed aside the curtain.

"Up—put 'em up! That's it. You didn't take long in coming to my address, did you, Raoul?"

"What—what is monsieur about to do? Let me at least go, I beseech you. There is your man upon the floor." His eyes wavered for a moment. "If you let me go, nothing need be said, and you may keep them. Is it not worth it, monsieur?"

"I am going to keep them, anyhow."

said Carlyle, "and I am going to telephone for the police. Stand over there by the telephone with your face to the wall. Yes, yes; I know it is cold, pressed so close against you; but it won't go off if you don't fidget while I'm phoning. I don't care for your trick of fidgeting, Raoul."

Much to his relief, he was given the precinct station immediately, and ten minutes later a sleepy and gaping elevator boy ushered in an officer and a plain-clothes man. With the mutilated door and the atomizer of chloroform the affair did not need much explanation. The officer took notes, while the plain-clothes man stared first at one prisoner and then at another.

"I've seen those guys or their pictures somewhere," he said. "Unless I am much mistaken, they are wanted; but for the life of me I can't remember for what."

He stooped over the Englishman, who was regaining consciousness. "Come on," he said, "get up, youse. We'll check you over at headquarters."

"Just a moment," said Carlyle, as they reached the door. "Send me up a customs inspector in the morning, will you? I want to see him about something. No, I haven't anything more to tell you to-night—only, if there's a reward or anything, fly to it, for it's yours; I'll see to that."

He shut the door in their reluctant faces and shot the fine, new bolt. "So much for them," he thought. "They'll have to break in if they come back."

He opened his bedroom door and peered in anxiously. "Ah, beauties, you're awake again, are you? That's right, sir; that's right. You know your friends, don't you, and I guess I can keep you. You're pretty fine dogs, but I don't think anybody will claim you. Come here, you, Brindle."

He bent and unfastened the brass-studded collar from the dog's neck, snapped on the reading light at his table, and under its brilliance twisted and screwed at one of the brass studs, nodding with an eager satisfaction as it began to turn. It unscrewed smoothly, and, as he had hoped and expected, proved to be the cover of a metal box set in the collar. Within, snugly nestling on a pad of black velvet, a great blue diamond lay, winking fiercely up at him, in such hypnotic splendor that minutes passed before he, at last, set to work on the next stud.

Perhaps already his vocation had come to him.

THE VANDAL ADVERTISERS

THERE is a point on the eastern shore of the Hudson River, just opposite to Fort Lee, where the eye swings to the south on the river for a couple of miles, and to the north for a full half dozen miles, with low banks of green on one side and on the other side the Palisades. No more lovely view could easily be found in the longest of walks than just that view from the viaduct on Riverside Drive. Each day for several years several thousand persons have taken pleasure in that view as they walked, drove, motored over the esplanade.

But that pleasure is no longer granted. O. J. Gude, maker of signs, has set up a sign, level with the eye of men, high enough and long enough to clip the northern and the southern view. With his paint brush and his hammer he has wiped out eight miles of beauty.

In the place of what was cool and lovely, he has painted pictures of "Alfalfa's Canned Goods," "Peacherino Cigars," "Blue Grass Whisky," and "Royal Dew—All Scotch."

The "Prints"

A MOVING-PICTURE COMEDY

By George Weston

CHAPTER I.

TESSIE HAS A HERO.

"SAY, ma," said Tess, "ain't we going to have a turkey this Thanksgiving?"

"A turkey, is it?" demanded Mrs. McGregor, in what is generally described as a raucous voice. "And your father out of work for nearly two months! You'll be lucky, my girl, if you get some fried onions and a rice pudding. Do you think I'm made of money?"

Mr. McGregor, ex-special officer of the East Side branch of the Brewers' National Bank, but now waiting for something to turn up, was warming his feet in the oven.

At the mention of the word "money," he awoke from his reverie and looked over his shoulder with hope upon his countenance; but the next moment he met his wife's glance. Simultaneously hope disappeared, and Mr. McGregor returned to the occupation of warming his feet.

"Turkeys!" cried Mrs. McGregor. She seized the broom and began sweeping under the table with a force which made the legs rattle. "Here's your father out of work for nearly two months and you come in here shouting about turkeys! If this isn't enough to try the patience of a graven image, I'd like to know what is!"

As though in search of information, her broom advanced toward the stove and beat a spirited tattoo against the legs of Mr. McGregor's chair.

"Now, everybody has a turkey for Thanksgiving, ma," said Tess, retreating to the window.

"Thanksgiving!" scoffed Mrs. McGregor. She narrowly missed one of the ex-watchman's feet, and eagerly tried again. "And a lot we've got to give thanks for! Here's your father out of work for nearly two months and——"

"Well, you needn't shout it!" thought Mr. McGregor, who was by nature one of the most patient of men. "I know it, and you know it, and Tess knows it, and the neighbors know it—unless they're all deaf. And it's a pity the girl can't talk about Thanksgiving without having her head snapped off!"

While delivering this silent soliloquy, he had been making a series of facial contortions to the little pigtailed figure by the window, as though to say, "Come over here carelessly, my daughter, but in a surreptitious and clandestine manner. And whatever you do, don't let *her* notice it. I've got something for you."

Obedient to his pantomime, Tess drew near him. Mr. McGregor slipped a nickel into her palm, closed her fingers over it, winked his eye, and pushed her toward the door. A moment later Tess' two pigtails went waving down the stairs in a state of tempestuous excitement. She was going to the moving-picture show.

"If the Prints is only there in the pictures to-day!" she thought, as she passed into the darkened auditorium.

For, truth to tell, Miss Tess McGregor was deeply in love with the actor who took the heroes' parts in the Goetz Company's films. She called him the Prince because he was handsome, tall, and strong, and she loved him with all the faithful devotion which only a girl

of nine can concentrate upon her idol.

It was a chaste and beautiful passion, resembling that of a poet who writes all his sonnets to the moon.

There was not a motion of her hero's eyebrows, not a tooth of his smile which had not been photographed upon Tess' heart. She always sat breathless through his adventures, and whenever he knocked down the villain and some of the audience applauded, Tess would look around her, as though to say, "Well, what else did you think he would do? And, say, he doesn't belong to you! Pick somebody else to applaud. This one's mine."

"If he only comes on this afternoon!" she thought, with a great longing, as she found a seat halfway down the hall.

But though she wished it ever so keenly, she prepared herself to suffer at the sight. For Tess hated the heroines in the Prince's pictures even worse than she hated the villains. When the villain was cruel to the heroine, Tess' short legs swung under her seat with secret pleasure. She had discovered that by shutting her eyes she could escape those episodes which harrowed her feelings the most, but curiosity always compelled her to open one eye almost immediately. And there she would sit, a very diminutive Cyclops, one eye shut and the other eye glaring at her rival.

Tess had hardly settled herself in her seat when a Goetz Company film was thrown upon the screen. "Now, if the Prints is only in this!" she thought, leaning forward in her chair. And he *was* in it! All thoughts of Thanksgiving and turkeys vanished from Tess' mind. In the picture the hero was a civil engineer. The first scene disclosed him squinting through a theodolite and waving his hand at an assistant in the background.

"Say, he knows everything!" sighed Tess, in perfect happiness.

The next scene showed a country schoolma'am going home through the woods. "Just like a teacher!" sniffed Tess to herself. "She knows right well the Prints is there; and look at her pertendin' not to notice him! Heh! Dropping her books, too, just when she's passing him!"

The next scene was the interior of a country schoolhouse, where a lot of overgrown boys were raising Merry Ned. "Goody!" thought Tess defiantly. "Anybody that can't carry books home without dropping 'em hadn't ought to be a teacher, anyhow!"

One of the biggest boys threw a paper wad across the schoolroom, and when it missed its aim and smote the teacher instead, Tess gave expression to a loud shout of derisive laughter, which caused many in the audience to turn around and look at her. When the surveyor burst into the schoolroom and whipped the crowd of overgrown boys, Tess smiled with ineffable bliss. But when the teacher thanked him, poor Tess shut her eyes, and, though her right eye opened at once, it pleased her to think that the Prince was looking over the teacher's shoulder, and that with a glance charged with sympathy and love he was gazing right squarely at Miss Tessie McGregor! She waited until she had seen that picture twice, and then she made her way out into the street in a state of exaltation.

"Seemed to be looking right at me!" she thought, with a heavenly sigh. "Seemed to be——" Suddenly Tess stopped. A touring car was rolling slowly in and out of the crowds of children who were playing in the streets, and, in the tonneau, scrutinizing the folks on the sidewalk, was Tess' hero, the Prince! Yes, though Tess pinched herself to make sure that she was awake, there he was—even to his wide-brimmed Fedora, his cigarette, his slowly moving eyebrows! His glance swept along the sidewalk. It drew nearer and nearer to Tess, whose heart was emulating the well-known tail of the dying lamb. Her hero's glance was nearly upon her! It was on her! Ah-h-h-h! It had passed over her, and the next minute his car had turned the corner.

"And, say," thought Tess, in a blissful daze, "I've seen the Prints, his very own self, and he's handsomer than his pictures!"

CHAPTER II.

THE HERO PICKS HIS VILLAINS.

Granville, which was the name of Tess' hero, leaned over and touched the chauffeur on the shoulder.

"Turn to the right here, Bill," he said, "and go around to those gas tanks. We may find what we're looking for there." He sat back in his seat again, scowling.

It's a pity there was no attentive lens there to record that scowl for the benefit of posterity, but it may be sufficient to say that Granville's scowl was like that of a hostess whose cook and waitress have gone on strike on the eve of a dinner party. The Goetz Company, in which Granville was a partner, had made arrangements to take a film to be entitled "The Taxicab Bandits," and at the last moment the bandits had gone over to a rival film company.

"Of course, they were a lot of dubs," Granville had said to the manager, "but we don't want somebody else to get that picture out first."

"What are we going to do about it?" asked the manager.

"I'll get some better bandits and we'll rush the picture through," said Granville. "That bunch didn't know anything, anyhow."

"They're all the same," said the manager.

"No," said Granville. "I'm going out and see if I can't pick up a couple of regular, eighteen-karat bandits who'll act like the real thing."

Accordingly, he had told the chauffeur to drive him to the poorest quarter of the city, and that was the neighborhood where Tess lived. And then, as we have seen, he had turned toward the gas tanks, which was a very tough section, indeed.

Opposite one of the tanks was a tumble-down stable that looked as though it had been slowly asphyxiated by the gas, and next to the stable was a saloon that looked as if it had been placed there as a perpetual first aid to the injured stable.

The rear entrance of the saloon could be reached from three streets; and the stable, which sheltered a collection of battered moving vans and trucks, had as many turns and angles as the legend on a Chinese laundry ticket.

In front of the saloon two men were talking, and when Granville saw that whispering duet he softly called out: "Whoa, there, Bill!" The car stopped, and Granville jumped out.

"Good afternoon!" he said to the two men in front of the saloon. "Would you boys like to make a little money?"

The first boy was a beetle-browed youth of forty. In the sharpness of his glance and his quick movements he reminded Granville of a lean and famished crow. "Anything that looks like money," he said, "looks good to me."

The second "boy" had gray hair and a gray stubble on his cheeks, but he still preserved, amid the signs of misfortune, the grandiose air of an old legitimate tragedian. "Thou dost snore distinctly," he remarked to Granville, with great dignity of manner. "There is meaning in thy snores."

Granville looked at him with interest. "Shakespearean rôles?" he asked.

"Foh!" exclaimed the other. "A fico for the phrase! But, nevertheless, I rejoice in the name of 'The Ham.'"

"And what's your friend's name?"

"Oh, 'The Nut' will do as good as anything else," said the other. "But you said something about money, didn't you, before you started taking the census?"

"How feelingly he speaks!" quoth the Ham.

"I'm in the moving-picture business," said Granville. "And I want a couple of men who look like bandits to help out on a picture. If you two want to try it, and can give satisfaction, it means five dollars for each of you."

"Five dollars is a small, green citron," grumbled the Ham, who had folded his arms at the mention of moving pictures. "It was picked before it was ripe."

"It's five or nothing," said Granville decisively.

"You Banbury cheese!" muttered the Ham to himself. "I thank thee for that

humor!" He remained silent, then, for a time.

The Nut took up the conversation. "What do you want us to do?" he briskly asked.

"You're to be taxicab bandits," explained Granville, "who plan to rob a jewelry store. You are driven to the scene in a taxi. There you get out, go into the store, and hold up the proprietor. You snatch a tray of diamonds and rush back to the taxi. Next, the chase. Up hill and down dale. Over a wooden bridge, which you throw in the stream as soon as you've crossed it. The pursuers send their cars flying through a ford in the river. And, finally, there's a fight in the woods, and you're captured by the cops. That's all."

"All this for five dollars!" muttered the Ham. "Oh, but I am horribly in love with a stick to beat his pate!"

"Captured by the cops, eh?" said the Nut. A number of others had come out of the saloon, and were listening to the conversation. It was evident that the Ham was their favorite actor, and they watched him with rich anticipation.

"Captured by the cops, eh?" echoed the Ham. And, making a burlesque motion, he cried: "Satan, avoid! I charge thee tempt me not!"

"But don't you understand?" said Granville, with an involuntary smile. "They're fake cops."

"Now, let's get this straight," said the Nut, who had been thinking it over. "Everything is to be real except the cops; is that it?"

"That's right."

"That tray of jewelry," said the Nut carelessly. "Will that be real, too?"

"The tray will," said Granville; "but there won't be any real diamonds on it. Not so you could notice them. There'll be a pint of real glass beads for the diamonds."

A shadow of disappointment darkened the Nut's face, but one of the Ham's eyelids fluttered down for a moment. "All right," he said to Granville. "You can count us in on this." After they had made an appointment for the following morning and Granville's car was lurching away in the distance, the Ham looked after it, exclaiming in a deep voice: "Hapless Ægeon, whom the Fates have marked to bear the extremity of dire mishap!"

And, turning to the group behind him, he said: "I have in mind a honorable kind of thievery, which you shall hear to-morrow. But the Nut and I must now be gone. Sweet Valentines, adieu!"

CHAPTER III.

A CLEVER PLOT.

The Ham and the Nut used their eyes and wits to the limit of effort the next day. The first scenes were set on the stage of the Goetz Company's studio factory, where the Ham's experience as an actor kept him in the center of the picture. The later scenes were photographed in public, and the robbing of the jewelry shop, the escape with the plunder, the chase, and the capture went through without a slip.

"You boys are all right," said Granville to his two protégés, when they had returned to the city. "I'm going to give you ten dollars each instead of five, and if you'll let me have your addresses I'll drop you a line when I need you again."

"That's all right," said the Nut hastily, "our address is the Gas Tanks. Any time you want us, come around and give us a call." As soon as they had left the factory he turned to the Ham with a hungry look. "Well?" he demanded. "Did you see through it?"

"I have a good eye, uncle," quoth the Ham. "I can see a church by daylight."

"With one of those moving-picture cameras to back us up, we could get away with anything in this world."

"But we could only do it once," said the Ham with a look as hungry as the other's. "We must pick something fat."

"The best there is," agreed the Nut. And with regret in his voice he added: "We shall need the gang, too."

They discussed the problem in its varying phases until they reached their headquarters. There they found four

of their friends awaiting them, and they immediately went into executive session in the stable.

"If we have an auto and a moving-picture camera," said the Nut, after he had briefly described their experiences of the day, "there isn't a trick in New York we couldn't pull off, because everybody would think we were a moving-picture crowd. We could hold up a whole block, and even the cops would turn away and laugh!"

"And can you get hold of a moving-picture camera?" asked one of the four friends.

"Sure we can," said the Nut. "That's not worrying us. All we've got to think about is this: Where can we land the most at one big haul?"

"There's nothing like money," said another of the four sententiously. "We ought to go after money and nothing else."

"And the best place to get money," said the third, "is out of a bank."

"And it's got to be somewhere convenient," said the fourth, who had the hands and leggings of a chauffeur. "We don't want to get in a crowded street where we would be held up by a string of trucks or a traffic cop."

"I know a place," said the Nut, nodding. "The Brewers' National Bank has got a branch over on Avenue F. Most of the big factories around here go there."

"And on Saturday morning, when they go to get their pay-roll money, there has to be a lot of dough in the paying teller's cage," said the man with the leggings.

"Do not, Porpentine; do not!" muttered the Ham. "My fingers itch!"

"All right, then," said one of the others. "Suppose we tackle that."

"And the best of it is," said the Nut, "to-morrow's Saturday. We'll look the place over, and then we'll give it a strike as soon as it opens in the morning, and if we don't get fifty thousand in good, clean money, it's funny to me. First of all," he said, "we'll need an auto and a chauffeur."

"That's me," said the man with the leggings. "You come and hire me and I don't know anything about it. I take you for a crowd of moving-picture actors, and if I get pinched that's the story I tell."

"Next," said the Nut, "we need a fake cop. Dougherty, here, looks more like a cop than anybody else—when he's had a shave. So it's up to you, Dougherty, to keep the crowd back and make yourself useful. You'll be a fake cop, but you'll have a real club, and if anybody tries to interfere, you'll hit 'em over the bean and the crowd'll shout 'Hurray!'"

"Leave it to me," said Dougherty.

"Next," continued the Nut, "we want a comedy man to wear a rainbow suit and a green plug hat that I saw to-day. He'll have his nose painted red, and he'll turn the handle of the camera. Then if there's anybody who has the least suspicion that everything isn't all right, he'll forget it as soon as he sees the comedy make-up. Catfish, you'll be the comedian."

"As long as I get my share," said the moody gentleman addressed as Catfish, "I'll be anything you like."

"Then we'll need a business manager. If a real live cop comes along, the business manager has got to run up to him and slip him a ten-spot, and ask him to turn his head around because the show will soon be over. Then the cop'll think we are just violating a city ordinance about causing a crowd to collect and he'll fade away to soft music. Bull, that's up to you."

"It'll take nerve," said Bull, frowning at his cigarette.

"But it won't take as much nerve as going in the bank and coming out with the money," said the Nut sharply. "If you'd rather have that job, I'll be the business manager."

"Oh, I ain't kickin'," said Bull. "I only said it would take nerve. No harm in that, is there? Sure, I'll be the business manager."

"That leaves me and the Ham to go in and get the goods," said the Nut. "We'll go on ahead, and you'll be waiting at the corner in the machine. As

soon as you see us go up the steps of the bank, you drive the taxi up to the curb, jump out, and begin turning the camera. Dougherty swings his club and keeps the people back, and Bull looks out for the cops."

"But, look here," said Dougherty, "you say I've got to wear a cop's uniform. Where am I going to get it?"

"We'll get it from the moving-picture factory," said the Nut. "They've got a room full of things like that."

"But how are you going to get 'em?"

"Swipe 'em! How did you suppose we were going to get 'em? The Ham and me has got it all piped out."

"And how about the green hat and things?" asked Catfish.

"Swipe 'em! As soon as it gets good and dark, we'll go over there and help ourselves. I loosened one of the window catches in the dressing room this morning."

"And how about the camera?"

"Swipe it! Can't you get anything through that big bean of yours? Everything we need, we swipe. That's the joke."

The Ham, who had been sitting in silence, suddenly cleared his throat. "And now, gentlemen," he said, in his deepest voice, "let us rehearse our little comedy. This stall, you understand, is the entrance to the bank. This open space is the sidewalk and the street. You wait over in the corner until you see us enter the bank. Then the machine comes briskly forward, and out you jump. Our piscatory friend gets out first with the camera. He sets it on the steps of the bank and begins turning the handle like this——"

He drilled them until they were perfect in their parts, gently crying from time to time: "Ye debile wretch!—A murrain on't!—Oh, you full dish of fool!—'Batee, I beseech thee, Widow Dido!—Most excellent; most excellent, i' truth!"

"Great work," nodded the Nut, after the rehearsal had come to a successful conclusion and the final details had been planned. "Now, let's get something to eat, and then we'll go over with the taxi and get what we want from the moving-picture factory."

"Hope is a curtal dog in some affairs," quoth the Ham; "but if I am not about to be revenged upon the moving pictures, then never again will I believe in unicorns!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE CASE.

When Granville reached the studio factory of the Goetz Film Company the next morning he found the place as excited as a Home for Old Ladies when the cat has caught a mouse.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Had a fire?"

"No," said the manager, with the enthusiasm of an artist. "But we've missed a corking good picture!"

"What picture?"

"The place was robbed last night. That's the picture we missed."

"Did they get away with anything?"

"We're still looking. The clothes in the dressing room were mixed up, and there may be something missing there. One of the cameras is gone, too."

"A funny business," laughed Granville. "We've been through a lot of holdups in our time. Too bad we missed a real one. How did they get in?"

"The dressing-room window was open. I guess they came through that."

Granville had been the hero of many a detective drama, and he set his mind to work after the most approved methods. "Those windows are always locked," he said. "If one was opened, it must have been opened from the inside."

"Sherlock Holmes has nothing on you," grinned the manager. "So you think it was an inside job; do you?"

"Yes, Watson, I do. Some one who used that dressing room must have been in league with the thieves."

"Your deductions, my dear Holmes," said the manager, "overlook one important possibility."

"What's that?"

"The window might have been

opened from the inside by the thieves themselves."

"By George!" exclaimed Granville.

"What is it, Holmes? A clew?"

"You remember those two beauties that we had in yesterday for the taxicab robbery?"

"I remember the Ham," said the manager. "In fact, I doubt if I shall ever forget the Ham. I'll bet you he was a grand old actor in his day."

"And I'll bet you he knows something about this robbery business. But why the dickens did they take a camera?"

"Perhaps they're going to join the other bandits and start in business for themselves," suggested the manager. "Everybody's doing it now."

"Then why didn't they take half a dozen cameras?"

"Perhaps the famous Mr. Sweeney can tell you, my dear Holmes."

"That old actor's a card, all right," grinned Granville. "I would like to know what he's up to—just out of curiosity. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll take Bill and we'll go around to the gas tanks and see if our friends of yesterday can give us any information."

But when Granville reached the saloon next to the stable, nobody there could tell him anything about the bandits of the day before. His questions were received in such a hostile manner that Granville told the chauffeur to drive slowly around the district in the hope of meeting one or both of the missing pair. They were turning the corner of one of the busier streets when Bill turned his head. "Look who's here!" he said.

On the sidewalk opposite the entrance of the Brewers' National Bank a moving-picture camera was being steadily cranked by a comedian in a green hat. A six-foot policeman was holding back a crowd of delighted spectators, and a businesslike young man on the steps was looking briskly up and down the street.

"That's a queer outfit, Bill," said Granville to the chauffeur. "Why have they got the cut-up turning the machine?"

"Maybe the operator's got a kink in his arm," said Bill from the side of his mouth.

"Drive slow. Say, Bill, haven't you seen that green hat before somewhere? Didn't Kelly wear a hat like that in 'The Merry Masqueraders'?"

"That's right," said Bill, as the car crawled forward toward the scene of operations. "Higgins had painted the top of it red, and when Kelly found it out he nearly spoiled the film."

"Wait till he turns around, and—— Great Scott! He's turning the handle backward! Hey, you bonehead with that machine!"

Hearing Granville's indignant hail, Catfish turned around, and Granville saw that the top of his hat was a bright red. "This is the gang, Bill!" he cried. "Pull up!"

At the same moment the Ham came hurrying out of the bank. He was carrying a tin box, and the Nut was covering his retreat in a masterly manner.

"By jingo!" exclaimed Granville, springing from his car. "They're holding up the bank!"

Breaking through the crowd, he leaped upon the Ham and hurled that astonished Thespian to the sidewalk. The tin box fell beneath them. The next moment Dougherty and the Nut jumped upon Granville to the accompaniment of rhapsodic applause from the spectators. The chauffeur of Granville's car was running to the center of hostilities when he was met, head on, by a heavy wrench in the hands of the chauffeur of the taxi. The Ham, who had been temporarily dazed, scrambled to his feet and tried to pull the tin box away from the struggling vortex on the sidewalk. The Nut was holding Granville down, and Dougherty grasped his club more firmly in order to stun the interloper into a pleasing state of submission.

"Soak him!" hissed the Nut.

"Soak him!" cried the crowd.

"Wait a moment!" said the Ham, tugging at the box.

Dougherty raised his club.

"Now!" cried the Ham.

CHAPTER V.

A WOMAN'S INTUITION.

"Ma," said Tessie, "shall I fetch the milk for the rice pudding? To-morrow's Thanksgiving, and the stores won't be open then."

"Rice pudding, is it?" demanded Mrs. McGregor, in a voice that would have curdled the sweetest of milk. "Here's your father out of work for nearly two months——"

A groan arose from the patient figure who was warming his feet in the oven.

"What's that?" demanded Mrs. McGregor. "What's that?"

"For Heaven's sake," said Mr. McGregor, astonished at his own boldness, "didn't we have enough of that yesterday and the day before without starting it all over again to-day?"

"Well, haven't you been out of work for nearly two months? Isn't it the truth I'm telling?"

"But I can't help it; can I?" protested Mr. McGregor, in open defiance. "If the Board lays off its day watchman, I can't help it; can I?"

"No! But you can go out and hunt another job. Here you've been out of work for nearly two months——"

With an ominous air Mr. McGregor arose, and, in an equally ominous silence, he put on his shoes, his hat, and his coat.

"Where are you going?" asked Mrs. McGregor anxiously.

"Out!" cried the master of the house.

"Out where?"

"*Out!*" repeated Mr. McGregor. "Isn't that enough for you? You've druve me to it, at last! I'm going *out!*"

He banged the door, and Mrs. McGregor, swallowing hard for a moment, suddenly lifted her apron and burst into tears.

"Aye, dear!" she sobbed. "Never have I had such a Thanksgiving in all my life! Here's your father gone in a raging temper, and no telling when he'll come back or what he'll do! Tessie!" she said, hurriedly drying her eyes. "Run after him and see where he goes—there's a good girl. And on the way back you can get the milk. Let him see you with the bottle if you can—he's as fond of rice pudding as you are, and that may bring him to his senses. Hurry, now!"

Tess flew down the stairs with the milk bottle in her hand, her pigtails tempestuously swinging. When she reached the street, Mr. McGregor had disappeared. She ran to the nearest corner and thought she saw her father half a block away; but when she caught up with the hurrying figure she found it was some one else.

"Perhaps he's gone to the bank," thought Tess, and, with her legs going like two little high-speed pistons, she ran toward the Brewers' National. In front of the bank she saw a large crowd.

Tess had often heard her father speak in uncomplimentary terms of "The Board." "Gracious!" she thought. "Maybe he's fighting the Board!" She dashed madly forward and wormed her way through the crowd.

"Hit him again!" shouted a laughing spectator. "Yes, he's fighting!" thought Tess, with a catch in her throat. She bobbed her way through the innermost line of the audience, and there, one glance was enough for Tess.

"The Prints!" she gasped. And vainly the camera cranked around, and vainly Catfish wore his green plug hat. In vain the business manager, the laughing crowd, the six-foot policeman, the waiting auto—— "The Prints!" gasped Tess. "They're killing him!" She gave one look. The Nut was holding Granville down; the Ham was tugging at the tin box, and Dougherty had raised his club.

"Now!" cried the Ham. As though it were a signal, Tess flew forward and brought the milk bottle down full force upon the Nut's head. She threw up her other hand to stop the descending blow, and caught it full force across her arm.

Tess was vaguely conscious then of the crowd surging forward, of a number of men running out of the bank, of Granville arising and grappling with Dougherty, and then she found herself in the Prince's arms. Her arm was

throbbing with a pain which brought bright flashes in front of her eyes. She pressed her head tightly against the Prince's shoulder, and the shouting and the excitement quickly droned away into silence.

When Tess opened her eyes again she was in her room at home, and her throbbing arm was bound in bandages. If history can be trusted, her room resembled a morning reception by Madame du Barry. On one side of her bed were her father and Granville. On the other side were her mother, the doctor, and one of the men who had run out of the bank.

"Do you feel better now, Tess?" asked the Prince gently.

Tess nodded, smiled, and held out her hand to her father. "I didn't know it was you," she said, her eyes upon her hero. "At first I thought it was him—fighting the Board because they bounced him——"

"I've been out of work for nearly two months——" Mr. McGregor started to explain, when the man from the bank interrupted him.

"Don't you worry about that, McGregor," he said. "You're back on the pay roll, and you'll get your back pay, too. We need a day watchman more'n I thought we did."

Tess anxiously beckoned her mother. "Then maybe we'll have a turkey, after all?" she whispered.

"And don't you worry about turkeys, my dear," said the man from the bank, "either this Thanksgiving or any other Thanksgiving." And, speaking to Granville, he said: "You know it all happened in a few seconds. That old actor came in and said he was staging an act of a moving-picture drama in front of the bank. We have only a small force at the branch, and while we were looking out of the windows the actor asked the paying teller if he would give him one hundred dollars in bills for one hundred dollars in dimes. He handed up a valise that was supposed to hold the dimes, and the teller opened the wicket. They choked him then and took his cash box. If it hadn't been for this little lady, they would have gotten away with it, too. So don't you worry about Thanksgiving, my dear," he said, turning to Tess. "I'll see that you have a Thanksgiving that you'll never forget as long as you live."

"No," said Granville. "I'm the one who is going to look after Tessie. She may have saved your money, but look what she did for me! We'll celebrate our Thanksgiving here together; won't we, Tess?"

Looking at the smiling faces around the bed, Tess shyly held out her hand to "The Prints," the pain in her arm forgotten.

"You bet we will!" she sighed, in perfect bliss.

A GOVERNMENTAL FUNCTION

WILLIAM T. S. DOYLE, a large and husky Irishman, is a prominent official of the department of state in Washington, and he gets many letters from persons who are convinced that they know infinitely more than he does about foreign affairs.

One morning his secretary brought him a letter which said, among other things:

I am an Irishman like you. But if I were as big as you I'd go to war with the Japanese right now and settle all this talk about the yellow peril.

"What shall I do with this communication?" asked the secretary.

"That letter," explained Doyle, "is merely another illustration of why the government furnishes us, free of cost, with waste-paper baskets."

One-Thirty-Three—Ringside

By Charles E. Van Loan

Author of "Inside the Ropes," "The Lucky Seventh," Etc.

It is easier to hale a multimillionaire before an investigation committee than it is to get a champion of the world into the ring with a fighter who has an even chance to defeat him. Van Loan tells how the holder of the lightweight championship was forced to fight with a husky opponent who had difficulty making the weight—133 ringside.

CHARLES FRANCIS HEALY, known to all the world as "Young Sullivan," sat on the edge of his bed and stared incredulously at Billy Avery, his manager, press agent, and bosom friend.

"Naw," said Healy, shaking his head, "you don't mean that, Billy. You're only kidding."

"It ain't what *I* mean, Charles," said Avery, discouragement showing in the dispirited droop of his shoulders and the flat tones of his voice. "It's what Badger means that cuts the ice. I talked to him for four hours—the obstinate mule!—and that's the very best we get—one-thirty-three at the ringside."

"But, man alive," wailed the little fighter, "that's murder in the first degree! He'd be getting me in the ring so weak that a featherweight could lick me!"

"Yes," said Avery, "and he knows that as well as you do. That's what he's playing for—a cinch."

"The public won't stand for it!" stormed Healy.

"The public be damned!" said Billy Avery, unconsciously quoting another and greater public character. "It stands for anything—everything. We're on the wrong side of this weight question, Charles. Badger has got the champion, and it's just our confounded luck that Cline can do one-thirty-three and be strong. Cline won it from Fisher at one-thirty-three ringside, and Badger says that every man who fights Cline for the title must make the same weight—the lightweight limit."

"Huh!" snarled Healy. "There ain't any such thing as a limit! I notice that they called 'Young Corbett' a champion after he licked McGovern, and Corbett couldn't get within a city block of the featherweight limit! They make me sick! It's the champion that makes the weight limit—not the rules!"

"All true," said Avery; "and that's exactly why we're up against it. Cline can do the weight. Badger opened up and talked straight off his chest, Charlie. He says he isn't anxious to fight us because he's got softer matches in sight where Cline won't have to take a chance. He thinks that this weight restriction will stop us bothering him with challenges and chasing him around the country with certified checks and things. I hollered like a wolf for one-thirty-five at three in the afternoon, and he only laughed at me. 'We're not fighting welters, this season,' he says. 'One-thirty-three ringside, or nothing. Take it or leave it.' The Shylock!"

"Well, leave it, then!" said Healy angrily. "If Mike Badger thinks I'm sucker enough to cut off an arm and a leg, just to get a fight with that hunk of cheese that he's managing, he's got

another guess coming. I'll go into the welterweight class first!"

"Y-e-e-s," said Avery slowly, "and there isn't a welter in the country to-day that would draw a two-thousand-dollar house. I suppose we'll have to go back to the six and ten-round no-decision things, splitting the money even, and agreeing to box easy! Yah! A fine game, that is!"

"I suppose you think I ought to grab this fight with Cline?" It was more than a question; it was an accusation.

"Well," said the business manager, looking at the ceiling, for he had no wish to meet Young Sullivan's eyes just then, "the bank roll ain't very fat, Charlie. We could use a few thousand, you know, and there's more money in losing to Cline—don't get excited, kid; let me talk—than we could get by winning from a flock of pork-and-bean welters. That fight would draw forty thousand if it draws a cent. If you *win*—and it's no cinch that Cline will be as good as he was two years ago—we can clean up a fortune the first year, like shooting fish!"

"If I win!" said Healy bitterly. "I tell you, it'll *murder* me to get down to one-thirty-three! I'd have to cut the meat right off the bone to do it. You know I made one-thirty-five for Kelly, and it was all I could do to outpoint him in twenty rounds when I should have stopped him with a punch!"

"The loser's end ought to be eight thousand, at least," said Avery, still looking at the ceiling. "And in case you don't get him, you've got a fine alibi—the weight stopped you. It was your stomach that bothered you in the Kelly fight, remember that."

"See here, Billy," said Charles Francis, "you want me to fight Cline, don't you? Even at one-thirty-three?"

"We need the money," said the manager simply.

"I'll gamble you!" said Healy, producing a silver half dollar. "Heads, I fight him; tails, I don't. Will you stick by it, Billy, if it comes tails?"

"Sure!" said the manager. "Will you go through with it if she comes heads?"

"It's a promise!" said Healy.

The coin spun, flickering, in the air, struck the carpet, and rolled to the fighter's feet.

"Heads!" he groaned. "I lose, Billy!"

Whenever a sporting writer had reason to rake over his vocabularly for the sort of an adjective which should best fit Mike Badger, manager of "Biddy" Cline, the choice usually lay between two words. The scribes who liked Mike selected "astute." The other said he was "obstinate." Both were right.

To be absolutely fair in the matter, Mike was neither better nor worse than any other manager. Only wiser. When he made a business contract, he was prudent enough to demand at least seventy-five per cent the best of the bargain, and tenacious enough to hold out until he got it. Mike simply did what the other fellows would have done if they had been given the opportunity, and every one knows what an unprincipled course that is to pursue. One fight promoter, hoping to secure certain concessions and smarting under Mike's steady refusal to recede from the original proposition, burst out thus:

"Ain't you got any sportsmanship in you at all?"

"Not a stitch," answered Mike. "Sportsmanship and business are two different things. I'm a business man, and you know my terms. I've got something to sell—buy it or let it slide."

In the "good old days," which some of the scarred bare-knuckle veterans still mourn with sorrowful pride, a fighter needed no business manager for the excellent reason that fighting was not then a business. It was a habit. With the era of large purses and profitable theatrical engagements came the shrewd business man, and Mike Badger was the shrewdest of them all. He could smell a five-dollar note farther than a bird dog can smell a glue factory.

A champion is the greatest asset a wise manager can have—and vice versa. The very word, "champion," is a valuable trade-mark. It means easy money, free advertising, and, last and most important, the right to dictate terms. Every ambitious fighter dreams of win-

ning a title some day; the man who has one dreams only of keeping it until the last dollar has been squeezed out and then retiring undefeated.

It is because of the financial value of this trade-mark that championships are so carefully guarded. It is easier to hale a multimillionaire before an investigating committee than it is to get a champion of the world into the ring with a fighter who has an even chance to defeat him. All sorts of tactics are used in order to side-step dangerous matches. Managers of heavyweights, lacking poundage restrictions, often bid the ambitious challenger good-by until such time as he has secured a reputation, fondly hoping that in the process he will be soundly licked and eliminated. Managers of bantams, feathers, and lightweights insist that husky aspirants shall "do the weight, ringside." Many a man has saved his title by starving an opponent for a week before a match. The old-time bare-knuckle warriors sneer at this sort of thing. They were used to making matches, "give or take ten pounds," but, as has been pointed out, they were not business men. The slogan, "May the best man win," has been changed to "May the best-managed man win."

Biddy Cline was a great little fighter —probably the greatest at his weight that the ring had seen during his generation. He was no boxer, but a sturdy, willing, courageous chap, who began fighting when the bell rang and continued to fight as long as the other man could stand in front of him. His record was black with knock-outs, though Biddy was not the typical one-punch fighter. His victims succumbed to the cumulative effect of a thousand blows as well as the terrific pace they were compelled to travel. It was a very strong lightweight, indeed, who could play Cline's game with the champion and hear the gong at the end of the fifteenth round. Biddy's best fighting weight was slightly below one-thirty-three, he had held the championship for three years, and, under Mike Badger's careful guidance, expected to hold it for three years more.

Charles Francis Healy had been a large, sharp thorn in the champion's side for some time. He was a dashing, sensational performer, a clever boxer, a hard, clean hitter, and a tremendous finisher—the very ideal of the average fight follower. He had beaten nearly all the men whom Cline had defeated—most of them in shorter fights—but this was only natural, as Healy's best fighting weight was close to one hundred and forty pounds. When he trained below one hundred and thirty-eight he was sacrificing strength and stamina, and one hundred and thirty-five pounds at three in the afternoon was the lowest notch he had been able to make with any degree of safety. In spite of this, Billy Avery challenged the champion once a month with clocklike regularity, and was as frequently informed that the holder of the title had other pressing matters on his hands. The end of Avery's campaign had been the private conference with Badger and the latter's ultimatum:

"One-thirty-three, ringside, or no fight."

Then, with the hardihood of a man who gambles when he knows he cannot afford to lose, Healy had risked certain defeat on the flip of a coin.

The match was made with a tremendous thrumming of journalistic tom-toms, and sporting America sat up cheerfully, for this was the one great fight it really wished to see. When the articles of agreement were drawn up—a queer document, half legal, half sporting in its phraseology—Mike Badger dropped a large fly in Billy Avery's ointment. It came with the dictation of the forfeiture clause—Mr. Badger speaking:

"For weight, five thousand dollars; for appearance——"

"Hold on, there!" yelled Avery. "Who ever heard of a weight forfeit of five thousand dollars?"

"You did—just now," said the imperturbable Mike, with a grin. "I'm going to make it an object for your man to do one-thirty-three. I've had fighters forfeit their weight money on me before this."

Avery argued and Healy glared across the table at Biddy Cline, who glared back, such conduct being customary in the presence of newspaper men; but Mike was firm as Gibraltar.

"Here's the point, gentlemen," said he, ignoring the sputtering Avery. "I don't want this man to come into the ring weighing a ton. This fight is to be for the lightweight championship of the world, at the lightweight limit. If we are overweight, we shall expect to forfeit five thousand dollars. If Avery's man can't do one-thirty-three, I want to know it now. If he *can* make it, why should he object to a large forfeit? Come on, Avery. Now's your chance to spring some of those certified checks you've been flashing around the country so recklessly!"

In the end Mike Badger won out, as was his habit. Billy Avery had the added worry of knowing that his entire fortune, as well as the sweepings and scrapings of Healy's bank roll, was forfeit unless the challenger reached the lightweight limit.

"We're hooked," said Avery gloomily, when he was alone with his warrior. "If the weight forfeit had been a thousand bucks or so, we could have let it slide and still made money; but now it's one-thirty-three or bust!"

"Bust is good!" said Healy. "We bust if we don't, and we bust if we do. You might have known that Badger would slip one over on you somehow. A fine mess you've got us in, Billy!"

"Me?" exclaimed the manager, virtuously indignant. "Say, what's the matter with you? Who offered to toss the coin? Whose idea was that?"

"Shucks!" growled Healy. "I only did that because I knew you intended to make the match anyway."

"You took a chance——"

"Yes; and so did Steve Brodie," interrupted the fighter. "He ought to have had his head examined for doing it, and I'm worse, because Steve had a chance to win and I haven't. I was kind of figuring on forfeiting my weight money if I saw I couldn't get that low without trouble; but now I've got to hang up my hat in a Turkish bath joint for a week before that fight, and I'll be as weak as a kitten! You're one swell manager, you are!"

"And you're a grand squealer," said Avery. "Your own proposition and now you blame me."

Thus, with mutual reproaches and a general disarticulation of family skeletons, the challenger and his manager set out to secure training quarters for the coming event, the shadow of which loomed dark about them.

II.

"Can Healy do the weight and be strong?"

This momentous question agitated every sporting center in the country. It was discussed as far away as London, Paris, and Melbourne. Men wrote about it, talked about it, argued about it; and all agreed that the outcome of the match hinged upon the correct answer, and nowhere was there such uncertainty as in Healy's training camp. There were only two men who really knew, and they were not committing themselves. Even the trainer was excluded from the daily weighing process.

The newspaper men urged that the public had a "right to know"; spies from the other camp nosed about daily; betting men begged the low-down and on-the-level; curious ones sought to satisfy their curiosity; close personal friends went away disappointed. Billy Avery would talk about everything but the weight, and when that subject was mentioned, he became an oyster, gripping tight the pearl of information. Healy had but one answer: "See Billy about it."

The best judges had no chance to form an opinion, for they never saw Healy stripped. Whenever he appeared in the gymnasium he was loaded down with sweaters and woolens.

Public opinion was divided. Half the fight followers inclined to the belief that Healy could not make the weight and was therefore secretive; the other half pointed out that Avery might

be preparing an unpleasant surprise for the opposition.

"He's keeping Cline guessing," said the optimistic ones. "If he couldn't make the weight, he'd have been a fool to post five thousand bucks."

At the end of three weeks Mike Badger received a telephone message from Billy Avery. He hung up the receiver with a hard little edge of a smile, for he had been expecting something of the sort.

"They're on the run, Biddy," he remarked to his champion. "Avery wants to see me to-night—on the strict Q. T. I knew that big sucker couldn't do the weight, or anywhere near it!"

"Did he say so?" asked the literal Cline.

"Bonehead!" retorted Mike. "He didn't have to *say* it. What else could he want to see me about? I'll call the turn now—he wants to rat out on their forfeit. A swell chance he's got!"

"Serves 'em right for going around the country trying to make a rum out of me!" said Cline feelingly. "Hand it to 'em good, Mike!"

"That's the best thing I do," remarked Mr. Badger.

The real heart-to-heart business of the fighting game is transacted without witnesses, and it shrinks from publicity. The newspaper men were not invited to attend the moonlight conference of the managers, and the meeting was as secret as if they had been preparing to dynamite a national bank.

"Hello, Mike!" said Avery. "Have a cigar?"

"Thanks! Well, out with it! What's on your mind?"

"I wanted to have a chat with you about this weight proposition," said Avery.

"Haven't you got a copy of the articles of agreement?"

"Yes," said Billy.

"Well, if I remember," said Badger calmly, "it says there that the men are to do one-thirty-three, ringside. Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"That's all there is to it," said Badger. "Have you just found out that Healy can't get down that low?"

"He can get down there, all right," said Avery, "but it'll weaken him pretty bad. Chances are it won't be a very good fight. Can't we get together somehow and—and give the people a run for their money? Suppose we should come in a pound or so overweight. You wouldn't grab that forfeit, would you?"

"Why wouldn't I?" asked Badger grimly. "That's business, ain't it? A contract is a contract, and it ain't my fault that you went into this thing without knowing whether your man could do the weight or not. You came to me and asked me for this match. I wasn't anxious to make it, but I turned down some good theatrical offers and signed up. You mustn't expect me to lose money on your mistakes. My dough is posted, and I'm going to carry out my part of the contract. You must do the same thing. I wouldn't let you come in a pound over, or an ounce over. One-thirty-three, ringside, and you'll do it, or I'll claim your five thousand."

"Looking for a cinch, ain't you?" sneered Avery.

"You bet I am; and if you had a champion you'd be looking for cinches, too! Now, I'm going to tell you something else: Don't pull any of that moth-eaten stuff about breaking a hand or an arm or a leg, and having to call off the match. I won't stand for it. I'll claim your appearance money, and I'll show you up from one end of the country to the other."

"Won't you listen to *reason?*" begged Avery.

"I haven't heard any, yet," said Badger, "and, what's more, I've said all I'm going to. Better have your man down to weight if you want to save that forfeit. I never make any agreements on the side, and when I sign my name to a thing I go through. Good night."

Avery went home, talking to himself. Healy was waiting for him.

"What luck?" asked the fighter anxiously. "Would he do business?"

"Of course, he wouldn't! He's got

us, and he knows it. Shylock was a piker beside this guy!"

"I can break my leg," suggested Healy hopefully.

"Yes, and he'll send out a flock of doctors to examine you, and they'll all be from Missouri. It'll take something more than a lot of bandages and a crutch to get by this bird. He'll snatch our appearance money and put us in Dutch all over the country."

"But we've got to do something!" There was a note of desperation in Healy's voice. "Typhoid fever might bring me down to weight; but it's a cinch sweating won't do it. One-thirty-nine to-night, and I've done enough work already to sweat an elephant to a shadow. I simply *can't* make it, and that's all there is to it. You know what the doctor said—that this excess baggage is due to natural growth. It's in the bone and muscle, and it won't come off! Why the devil didn't we think of that before we got hooked in so strong?"

"Give me a chance to think," said Avery. "I may dig up a way to wriggle out of this match and save the appearance money, anyway. You tear into the hay and leave it to me."

"I wish you'd done your thinking before we made this match!" sighed Healy.

"There you go again!" mumbled Avery. "Always putting it up to me! Didn't you toss a coin, and——"

"I've heard all that before," said Healy. "By the way, there was a man here to see you about eight o'clock. Says he'll be back about ten."

"Another nut!" growled the manager.

"Not this fellow," said Healy. "He looks like class, and he's got a letter for you—from Jim Quinn."

"Quinn!" said Avery. "Holy cat! I wish Jim was here! He might think of some way to get us out of this jam."

Promptly at ten o'clock the stranger returned. He was small, neatly dressed, of middle age, and wore a close-trimmed beard and nose glasses. He presented Quinn's letter without comment:

DEAR BILLY: I don't know how you're fixed on the weight proposition, but the last time I saw Healy he was falling away to a mere cartload, and I don't think he can do one hundred and thirty-three ringside without the aid of a saw. On the chance that you've got a bad match on your hands, I am sending Mr. George Harden to see you. George is an expert in his line, knows how to keep his mouth shut, and you can bank on anything he tells you being right.

Of course if Healy can do one hundred and thirty-three without weakening himself, you won't need Harden. If he can't, put Harden on the job. I can't explain here, for obvious reasons, *but Harden can make your man a winner, and save you the weight forfeit.* Wire me three days before the fight whether I can bet on Healy or not. Yours in haste, JAS. QUINN.

Billy folded the letter and placed it in his pocket.

"This listens well," said he slowly. "What's the idea?"

"The idea is that I can put your man in the ring as strong as he is now and save you the weight forfeit. It'll cost you five hundred dollars."

"It would be worth it," said Avery. "My boy is having trouble getting down to weight. We didn't figure that he has put on several pounds by growth and development, and it's coming off hard."

"I'll take him the way he is," said Harden, "and make him weigh one-thirty-three—on any scales they pick out."

"A fake?" demanded Avery suddenly.

"Yes, and a darned good one," said Harden.

Avery shook his head.

"Mike Badger is a pretty wise bird," said he. "He's seen the chewing-gum trick and the little chunk of lead, and all that. I'd hate to try and get by him with a weight-stealing device."

"Has he seen this, do you think?" asked Harden, drawing something from his pocket.

"What is it?" demanded Avery, staring at what appeared to be a stiff black thread in the palm of Harden's hand.

"Nothing but an innocent little piece of horsehair," said the visitor quietly. "Do you think he's seen that?"

"Horsehair is a new one to me," said Avery. "How does it work?"

"That's *my* business," said Harden. "Leave me alone with your weighing machine for a few minutes and I'll give you a demonstration."

"Fair enough!" said Avery, leading the way.

Three days before the fight Billy Avery presented himself at the office of the promoter of pugilistic events—a wise young man of Hebraic extraction.

"Moe," said Billy, "have you made any arrangements about the scales the men are to weigh in on?"

"Not yet," said Goldstein. "Why?"

"Well, this is a special occasion," said Avery, "and I want a pair of scales that there can't be any question about. I've got a lot of money up and I can't afford to take chances."

"You don't want to use your own, do you?" asked Moe slyly.

"No, and I don't want to use Mike Badger's, either!" snapped Billy angrily. "We're going to be at weight, right enough, but we'll just barely make it and that's all. It'll be so close that there won't be any fun in it, and that darned Shylock says that if we're an ounce over he'll grab the five thousand. Now, I wish you'd write a letter to some reputable hardware concern and ask 'em to send you a brand-new weighing machine to be used at the ringside. They probably have an expert, too, and they might be willing to send him along. I want the scales tested by a government official and balanced by a man who hasn't the slightest interest in the fight either way. I'm not going to monkey with 'em myself, and I want Badger to keep *his* hands off. There ain't much that fellow wouldn't do for five thousand bucks! Is that a fair proposition?"

"As fair as a June day!" replied Goldstein. "I'll write a letter to Messmore & Jones immediately."

Avery smoked a cigar while the letter was written, and after that he chatted about the coming fight, the advance sale, the probable "cut," and kindred topics. When he rose to go, he picked up the envelope containing the letter.

"I'll drop this in the mail chute when I go out," he said.

The next day the office boy brought Mr. Goldstein a neatly engraved business card, bearing the name of a firm of national reputation as manufacturers of scales. In the lower left-hand corner appeared these words:

"Presented by Mr. Henry C. Darling, Western Representative."

Goldstein tossed the card over to Mike Badger, who happened to be present.

"Let's see what he wants," said Goldstein.

"Mr. Henry C. Darling" proved to be a dapper little person, with a close-cropped beard and nose glasses. He spoke with the crisp, incisive tones of a business man, and Mike Badger, surreptitiously running his thumb nail over the pasteboard which he held, was impressed. An engraved card, to ninety-nine men out of one hundred, is a convincing argument; an embossed trademark in three colors in the upper corner clinches matters.

"Mr. Darling—Mr. Badger," said Goldstein.

"I beg pardon—I didn't quite catch the name," said the visitor. It had to be repeated, and even then it was evident that it meant nothing to the Western representative, who turned immediately to Goldstein.

"I happened to be calling on Mr. Messmore when your letter arrived," said Darling. He produced Goldstein's letter and laid it upon the desk. "Mr. Messmore suggested that as you needed an expert, it was more in my line than his. I will be very glad to accommodate you, and if you will tell me where you wish the scales delivered and when, the details will be attended to."

"I wouldn't want to take up your time——" began Goldstein.

"Oh, that's all right!" chirruped Mr. Darling. "It will be a pleasure to do it, I assure you. As a matter of fact, I am —ah!—rather interested in the manly art myself. My son is an amateur boxer—you may have heard of him? Peter C. Darling, Chicago Athletic

Club? No? Only sixteen years old, but clever as they make 'em! I like to see a good bout when I can."

"Of course!" said Moe. "Why not?" He reached into his desk and brought forth a ticket. "Here's a box seat for the show Friday night."

Mr. Darling fairly gushed thanks as he put the ticket carefully away in his pocketbook.

"Very, very kind of you, I'm sure!" he said. "Now, it is understood that I am to furnish a new weighing machine which shall be tested and certified correct by the Board of Weights and Measures on Friday afternoon. I will then take charge of it myself and deliver it at the fight pavilion that night. Is that satisfactory?"

"Suits *me!*" said Badger, thumbing the card.

Mr. Darling paused at the door, and there were traces of nervous hesitation in his voice when he spoke.

"May I suggest—ah—that the name of my firm—or my own name—does not appear in the newspapers?" he asked. "This is—ah—rather an unusual service, and——"

"I understand!" said Moe heartily. "You'll be kept under cover, all right. Only three people need to know who you are—the other one is Avery."

Mr. Darling seemed immensely relieved.

"If you are interested in seeing the scales tested," said he, "come to the Bureau of Weights and Measures at four o'clock on Friday afternoon."

"I'll be there," said Mr. Badger. "Moe, you notify Avery."

Mr. Goldstein looked after his visitor with a grin.

"Ain't it funny what some people will do for a free fight ticket?" he remarked. "There's a traveling man whose time is worth money, yet he's willing to go to fifty dollars' worth of trouble to get a twenty-dollar seat! Can you beat it?"

"It saves paying him a fee," said the frugal Badger. "And did you get that about not wanting his name in the paper? I'll bet he's a deacon in a church or something, when he's home!"

III.

The official testing of the scales took place on schedule time. The shiny, new weighing machine—of the portable platform variety—balanced to a hair. Mr. Badger almost precipitated a fight by remarking over and over again that an ounce might mean five thousand dollars, and every time he said it Avery snarled.

"Now, gentlemen, if you are satisfied," said Mr. Darling, "we will ask that the scales be placed under lock and key here until I shall call for them this evening. I guarantee that they will not be out of my sight from that time until you are ready to use them. Is that satisfactory?"

"Perfectly!" said Mike Badger, and Billy Avery mumbled something under his breath.

"Well, old top," chuckled Badger to Avery, as they left the room, "my man is under weight. How's yours?"

"We may have to sweat him a bit," answered Avery shortly, "but I'd cut off one of his legs before I'd let you have that five thousand!"

"Cut off his head, instead," suggested Badger pleasantly. "He never uses that when he fights!"

"You make me sick!" growled Avery.

The weight of the contender was still a mystery, but there was an unconfirmed rumor that Moe Goldstein—sworn to secrecy—had been present at the Healy camp on Thursday afternoon and had seen the challenger raise the beam at one hundred and thirty-four pounds. This may have had something to do with the flood of Healy money which appeared as if by magic.

Shortly after the doors of the fight pavilion were opened an express wagon drove up to the main entrance and the weighing machine was carefully unloaded, under the personal supervision of Mr. Henry C. Darling. Moe Goldstein, who was standing in the door, cheerfully contemplating the long line of humanity stretching away from the general-admission window, waved his cigar at Darling and grinned.

"You're here early enough, I see!" remarked the promoter.

"Better early than late!" said Mr. Darling. "Is there a room where we can lock this thing up until it's wanted? I have made myself personally responsible for it."

"Put it in the first dressing room," said Moe. "You can't lock the door, though, except from the inside."

A few minutes later the "Western representative" was alone with the weighing machine, behind a locked door. In two seconds he had the wooden platform unshipped and set aside, exposing the levers underneath. These levers, sensitive to the touch as human ingenuity can make them, are V shaped and meet in the center, forming an X, the short lever passing underneath the long one.

Mr. Darling whipped a black horsehair from his pocket, tested it carefully for strength, and then bound it about both arms of the short lever, some three inches above the point of contact in the center. Instead of tying the hair in a knot, he fastened it with a dab of beeswax, replaced the floor of the platform, weighed himself carefully, nodded approvingly, and left the room. The entire operation had consumed less than a minute. The next time that Moe Goldstein looked in that direction Mr. Darling was standing in front of the closed door, like a sentinel on guard.

Two tremendous roars announced the entry of the gladiators, naked, save their socks and bath robes. Behind them came four strong young men, carrying the weighing machine, Mr. Darling trotting behind and urging them to handle it as they would a crate of eggs.

Biddy Cline, grinning in his corner, looked up at his manager.

"Here's where we get that five thousand!" he said.

In silence and breathless curiosity the house waited the weighing-in ceremony. Mr. Henry C. Darling, fussy and important, fluttered about like an old hen, commanding every one to stand back while he demonstrated that the scales balanced to a hair. At a signal, the fighters rose from their corners and climbed through the ropes, their handlers trooping after them.

"Stand back, everybody!" chirped Mr. Darling. "We must have room here! Stand back! You observe that the scales balance perfectly. I will set the bush poise exactly at one hundred and thirty-three pounds—no more and no less. On the dot. So! Now, then, gentlemen, who goes first?"

Charlie Healy, who had been removing his socks, slipped his bath robe from his shoulders and stood forth, naked.

"Might as well get it over with!" he said.

Mike Badger, his thin arms folded over his flat chest, flashed a keen, appraising glance at the challenger, as if anticipating the verdict of the scales. Healy's face was lean and leathery, and his cheek bones stood out prominently, but he had not the haggard, drawn appearance of a man who had sapped his vitality by making an unnatural weight, and his muscular armament bulked large under his smooth, pink skin.

"In great shape!" thought Badger. "But he's heavy, good Lord, he's heavy! He ain't anywhere near one-thirty-three!"

Healy stepped gently upon the scales and dropped his hands at his sides. Mike Badger bent forward, his gimlet eyes fixed upon the notched beam. He expected it to rise with a bump, instead of which it trembled slightly, rose half an inch, and remained there, quivering.

"Just exactly!" chirruped Mr. Darling. "Next!"

Charlie Healy threw his hands over his head with a wild yell of triumph.

"By golly, I made it! I made it!" he shouted; and then, as if carried away by an excess of feeling, he jumped six inches in the air and alighted upon his heels with a jar that made the weighing beam leap and rattle, and brought a sudden, sharp strain upon the concealed levers—enough of a strain, let us say, to snap a strand of horsehair and allow it to fall to the floor. Healy's action was natural enough, but it was his jump which roused Mike Badger to action

and crystallized his suspicion. He had seen that sort of thing before.

"No, you don't!" howled Mike. "You ain't going to put anything like that across on me! I want to look at those scales!"

The "Western representative" bristled with sudden anger, strutting about like an enraged bantam rooster.

"Preposterous!" he said. "Examine them yourself!"

He pushed the weighing machine over toward Badger. Mike removed the wooden platform in a twinkling and bent over the levers. That was the reason he did not see Mr. Darling place the sole of his foot upon a dab of beeswax and the horsehair which clung to it, thus removing the only bit of evidence.

Sweating and swearing, Mike Badger sought earnestly for wads of chewing gum or other extraneous matter, after which fruitless quest he demanded that Healy weigh again. By this time the challenger was in his corner, calmly partaking of a bowl of beef tea.

"Well, I should say we won't weigh him again!" said Avery. "You've examined the scales, and they're all right. My man has got a pound of beef tea in him by now. He made the weight at the time set, and we won't weigh again. Ain't that right, Goldstein?"

The promoter nodded.

"Go on and weigh your man, Badger," he said. "The crowd is getting restless."

"But I tell you we've been jobbed!" wailed Mike. "Why, *look* at that fellow! He's as big as a house!"

"Forget it!" growled Avery. "My boy has been at weight for the last three days! You saw him weigh yesterday, didn't you, Moe?"

"That's right, Mike," said Goldstein.

"I dare you to put him on the scales again!" raved Badger. "I'll give you a thousand dollars if you'll weigh him *now!*"

"And him full of beef tea? I should say you would! G'wan and get your champion on there!"

Mr. Henry C. Darling, still bristling in a quiet, gentlemanly manner, stepped forward to adjust the plummet on the notched bar, but Mike swept him aside.

"That'll be about all for you!" he said brusquely. "I'll attend to this myself!"

And Billy Avery was so well pleased with the turn of events that he allowed Mike to weigh his own man. The bar did not rise for Cline. He was safe by a full pound and a half.

He was far from safe after the fight started, however. Biddy Cline, tough little battler that he was, found himself as helpless as a toy in the hands of the challenger. In the clinches, which was Biddy's specialty, Healy worried him and tossed him about like a rag doll.

"This guy is strong as a middleweight!" panted the champion, after the third round. "See the way he hauls me around? It's a job, Mike, as sure as you live!"

"We can't help it now," said Badger. "You've got to lick him if it kills you!"

Let it be placed to Biddy's credit that he did his honest best to follow out instructions. He set a slashing, whirlwind pace, fighting with the desperation of one who feels his laurels slipping away from him; but Healy met him considerably more than halfway, and after the tenth round the most rabid Cline sympathizer in the house was forced to admit that the end was only a matter of time.

The championship of the world passed in a spectacular manner toward the end of the fifteenth round. Cline, knowing that he had been badly beaten thus far, summoned every ounce of his reserve strength and hurled himself upon the challenger in a hurricane rally, hoping to turn the tide with one lucky blow. Healy, cautious, cool, and steady as a boxing master, waited until the opening came, and then shot his right fist to the point of the chin. The little champion reeled, his hands dropped at his sides, and a vicious short left hook to the sagging jaw ended the uneven battle.

Biddy Cline took the long count for the first time in his life, and a dapper gentleman in a box seat smiled through

his nose glasses and played with a bit of horsehair in his pocket. Such a trivial thing had changed the pugilistic map.

According to custom, the conqueror offered his hand to the conquered before he left the ring. Biddy would have taken it, but Mike Badger restrained him.

"Don't shake with him!" said Mike. "You've been licked, but it was by a welterweight."

"You think anybody will believe that?" cackled Healy.

"I'll make 'em before I'm through," said Mike grimly.

IV.

The new champion ceased in the midst of the pleasant duty of inscribing his name and title upon photographs.

"Badger!" he said. "What does he want, Billy?"

"Don't know. He's coming right up."

Mike Badger entered and helped himself to a chair.

"You're a nice pair of burglars, ain't you?" he demanded.

"You're a sorehead," said the new champion cheerfully. "Are you still harping on that weight business? Everybody in the country is giving you the laugh!"

"Oh, you think so, do you?" said Mike. "I've been doing a little detective work lately. That fellow—that Darling—I've been on his trail, and I know all——"

"I didn't have a thing to do with him," protested Avery quickly. "Goldstein wrote a letter to a hardware firm and——"

"And *you* posted it," said Mike. "Remember that? I happened to keep his business card, so yesterday I wired his firm asking for information. Here's the answer." He tossed a telegram across to Avery.

"It says there," remarked Mr. Badger, "that no such man is known to the concern. It was a smooth trick, Billy, but it won't do. I'm going to show you fellows up from one end of the country to the other, and I'll never quit hounding you until you give us another match—at the proper weight. And, what's more, we still claim the championship." He picked up one of the new photographs and read the inscription scornfully. "Lightweight champion of the world!" he said. "You ain't a lightweight any more'n I am!"

"Well," said Charlie Healy softly, "they're still pointing me out on the street as the man that licked Biddy Cline! That's good enough for me."

"EASY PICKING" is the title of Van Loan's next story for the POPULAR. It will appear, two weeks hence, in the December month-end number, on sale November 23rd.

FINANCIALLY EMBARRASSED

DANIEL G. REID and Judge W. H. Moore, the capitalists, are known in financial circles as the Siamese twins of Wall Street. They wandered over to Jersey City one day to attend an annual meeting of the American Can Company, in which both are heavily interested, and from which both are said to have reaped millions. Returning to the ferryhouse on their way back, Mr. Reid strolled up to the ticket window and calmly said: "Two."

After going through all his pockets he turned to Moore. "Judge," he said, "you'll have to blow to the tickets. I'm broke."

"How much?" said the judge.

"Six cents," answered Reid.

"Gad," said Moore, "that's a life-saver. I've got just one dime."

"The Rosary" and Little John

By B. M. Bower

Author of "The Uphill Climb," "The Flying U Stories," Etc.

It is all very well to say that music hath charms to soothe the savage breast, but when you are alone in a cabin with a man who plays the violin "by ear" and whose favorite air is "The Rosary," you are apt to feel not soothed but as peeved as Little John, the cow-puncher, whose grim experience is set down here.

LITTLE JOHN, whose legal signature was John Little, heaved a long sigh which a sensitive person would have read for endurance strained to the breaking point, and glanced across the cabin at Carl. But Carl not being a sensitive person, the sigh held for him no meaning whatever. Little John scuffed his boot soles nervously upon the board floor like a boy who is studying grammar during recess, while baseball is being played uproariously outside the open window. He pushed his hat so far back on his head that it slid off and narrowly escaped the hot stove behind him, and he ran his fingers distractedly through his hair.

He slid three cards off the diminished pack in his left palm, and unthinkingly laid a red five down across the middle of a black seven—which is no way to play solitaire—and went on without observing the blunder. He picked up his cigarette from the corner of the table, sucked, and found it cold and flabby, and cast it into a far corner. He sat perfectly still for a minute, glaring at the wall; then, so suddenly that Carl jumped, he flung the cards after the cigarette, brought both fists down hard upon the table, and called aloud upon the God who made him.

"Old sol beat yuh again?" Carl inquired sympathetically after a minute, and felt for the lump of unrefined resin in the pocket that had no hole.

Little John dropped his hands inertly to his thighs and shook his head slowly from side to side, acknowledging defeat or helplessness. He did not say a word. And Carl, giving him a long glance of mild puzzlement, tightened the hair one more twist in his bow, tucked the fiddle under his unshaven double chin, and began to play.

Carl was playing "The Rosary," and it never once occurred to him that there was any connection, however remote, between his playing and Little John's emotional outbreak. Carl was Dutch, and his soul was full of music, and daily went through the pangs of disembodiment trying to get the music out. He drew the bow firmly down across the D string, slid the tone uncertainly up to an approximate E, and began all over again. Carl loved music. But he had paid four dollars and sixty-seven cents for his violin, and the D string was a shade flat, and he played by ear, and his ear was not keen for nice distinctions of tone; it couldn't have been, since he did not notice the flatness of a string. And he was playing "The Rosary." Figure the result out for yourself.

Carl drew out the last note of the second bar as long as the hair was in his bow. And the face of Little John

puckered as if he had inadvertently bitten into a sour pickle. Little John made no claim to having a musical soul, but he had a sharp ear for flatted notes and discords. When Carl slid over to the A string and fumbled half tones there of nerve-wracking inaccuracy, Little John's palms flew protectingly to his ears.

"Oh, for the love of Mike!" he implored. "Cut it out!"

Carl, from sheer astonishment, brought "The Rosary" to an abrupt halt. "What's eatin' on *you?*" he demanded. "There ain't nothing the matter with that piece, is there?"

Little John snorted, as if his vocabulary fell far short of his need.

"That's the swellest piece that was ever made!"

"Not the way you butcher it, it ain't," Little John retorted unkindly.

"Some folks can't tell good music when they do hear it." Carl, conscious of having music in his soul, spoke in a superior tone. "I s'pose," he added, with much sarcasm, "you'd ruther listen to 'Turkey in the Straw'!"

"I would not. I'd ruther listen to that old wolf up on the pinnacle howl a while, if it's all the same to you. I ain't heard a yeep out of him for four days. I'll bet you scared him plumb outa the country with that caterwauling."

"A feller's got to practice," Carl pointed out aggrievedly. "The swellest player in the world had to learn how first, didn't he? I've been trying to git that piece down pat ever since I come home. I don't see why you make a roar now. I've got it."

"You've got it bad," amended Little John acrimoniously.

"Aw, what do you know about music? That's a swell piece. It was played by a swell or*ches*tra, lemme tell yuh. I went and listened to it three times, when I was up to the Falls. And when yuh consider I had to carry it in my head three days before I got a chancet to try it——"

"That's what ails it, maybe. It got spoiled on the way down. It's plumb rotten, now. Take it outside." Though coarse and inelegant, that thrust was effective.

Carl was very much offended. He laid the instrument down on the calico-covered pillow of his bunk, grabbed his cap and mittens, and went out, sulking. Little John, he considered, could be pretty blamed insulting when he got started. Kicking because a feller tried to play something that had real music into it! Some folks he knew couldn't tell good music when they did hear it. Long as he sawed out dance tunes, Little John would set all day and never say a word against it; but just let him start something swell—something *classical* —— You will see that there was nothing to be done with Carl, since he had acquired a taste for "classical" music.

Left alone and in blessed silence, Little John gave a grunt or two of disgust and relief combined. He picked up his hat and the cards he had flung across the room, wiped the trey of diamonds on his sleeve to remove the print of Carl's departing boot toe, and went back to playing solitaire.

Before he had the cards spread, the ill effect of those excruciating, flatted half tones lessened, and he began to feel ashamed of his outbreak. Carl, he admitted to himself, was a good-hearted cuss, even if he didn't know when he was fiddling off the key. It wasn't every day you found a fellow that would build fires on cold mornings without beefing around a lot about it; or chop most of the wood without kicking. And he sure did seem to get a lot of comfort out of that fiddle.

Little John, after five minutes of uniform good luck, found himself with empty palms, and "old sol" beaten before him on the mottled-brown oilcloth. He forgave Carl those agonizing, flat notes, and was pleasant almost to the point of placation when Carl returned, half frozen and filled with gloom.

But on the next night, and the next, and the night after that, when he was forced to sit shuddering over Carl's interpretation of a "classical piece" that deserved a better fate, no amount of appreciation of Carl's good qualities

could atone for the outrage upon Little John's nerves. He did not become accustomed to it; he grew so supersensitive that even the fairly true notes set his teeth on edge, and he grew hot within him whenever Carl tucked the cheap fiddle under his chin and turned his round, blue eyes upon vacancy.

Have you ever observed how cumulative is resentment; until it breeds bitter antagonism and worse? Within ten days Little John's resentment grew to the point where he hated Carl and all that Carl said or did. He hated the way he leaned over his plate, and he hated the way he sat in the saddle, and his manner of beginning every argument with, "Aw, what's eatin' on yuh?" Never in his life had he felt such a disgust for a comrade—and for so slight a cause.

And they two were living alone in a little cabin twelve miles from any other habitation, and their duties were monotonous and their diversions few. Even so there had been harmony between the two until Carl acquired a swollen jaw and a grinding pain in his wisdom tooth, and made that trip to Great Falls which resulted in his bringing "The Rosary" home in his head.

They might better have disagreed on politics or religion; better even if they had loved the same girl, for then they would have had something worth fighting over. As it was, Little John was handicapped with a fair working sense of justice. He knew in the heart of him that Carl had just as much right to play the fiddle as he himself had to spend whole evenings playing solitaire. He even recognized the justice of Carl's assertion that a feller had to practice. But no sense of justice could prevent a nervous wincing when Carl tightened the hair in his bow, wriggled his coat sleeve loose upon his arm, and began to play—with the D string nearly always flat.

There was a day when Little John's emotions warred with and nearly overthrew his sense of justice. He seized the violin—or better call it a fiddle—after Carl had laid it down and gone sulking outside, and he meditated violence. The cast-iron cookstove came near having four dollars and sixty-seven cents' worth of fuel added to its fire in one lump. But Little John had a swift mental picture, just as he lifted the stove lid, which made the deed impossible. He put the fiddle back on Carl's bunk, and made shift to ease his emotions by swearing at Carl when he returned.

Carl had bought that fiddle with money earned hardly and saved under difficulty. He nearly wore out a Sears-Roebuck catalogue choosing, and longing, and hesitating over the purchase. Carl sent half his wages every month to his folks in the old country, and four dollars and sixty-seven cents looked pretty big to him—with the express rate on a violin from Chicago to Montana added. It was Little John himself who had persuaded him at last to send for it, because he only had one life to live, anyway, and it would be all the same a hundred years from now. You know the argument.

Little John remembered, and he could not burn the fiddle. He, therefore, vented his animosity with renewed vigor upon Carl. And Carl was Dutch; and not without reason was born the saying about getting one's Dutch up.

Carl's Dutch got up to the extent that he would play "The Rosary" or die trying. He played it in the morning while he was waiting for the teakettle to boil, so that Little John woke with a start to its dismal wailing. He practiced on stormy days until Little John would stay out in almost any weather rather than sit in the cabin and listen. He played it evenings until Little John could not play a straight game of solitaire to save his life, nor speak without an oath and a growl. And there was just one course left open to Little John if he felt he could not endure it any longer. He could quit—and in midwinter he could whistle for another job. Little John had endured other unpleasant companions before now, for the sake of keeping his name on a pay roll.

One morning he awoke with a bad taste in his mouth and a headache. Carl was sitting humped before the

stove, with his coat buttoned up and his cap pulled over his ears, waiting for the fire to burn, and he was playing "The Rosary." Little John opened bloodshot eyes and stared at him with hatred in his heart. There was no good in swearing at Carl; he had proved that beyond all doubt in the last week. And because he stood a good five inches taller than the player, and weighed forty pounds more, he could not assault him, and retain any shred of self-respect. And Little John was not a "gun fighter." He heaved a sigh and covered his head with the blankets.

He did not get up to breakfast, for when one is fully occupied with a sick headache one does not crave bacon, and sour-dough biscuits, and black coffee, and stewed prunes. Nor to his dinner, for the very smell of the bacon frying nauseated him. Carl ate sulkily because his inquiry as to how Little John was "stacking up" had elicited a lot of bad language and no information. He went out and threw a little hay to the horses, came in and stacked the dirty dishes in one neat pile, and, while he waited for the dishwater to heat, he got his fiddle and began to practice. You know what he played.

Little John endured the thing to one soul-disturbing finale, and he endured it in silence. But when Carl, without pause, began at the beginning again, he rose up among his blankets and commanded the player to stop that infernal yowling, or—he mentioned several unpleasant penalties.

"Aw, yuh will, ay? Well, I'd like to see yuh start in and try!" Carl wriggled his sleeve loose upon his right arm and began again, for pure cussedness.

Little John got hastily into his pants and his boots, and went for Carl as if he did not give a hang for his self-respect. He grabbed the offending fiddle, and, in trying to wrench it from Carl's dogged grasp, he twisted the neck loose. Carl's fingers relaxed in sheer dismay, and once more the stove came near receiving higher-priced fuel than had ever been its portion.

But again something inside of Little John forbade that act of vengeance. He looked at the mutilated instrument in his hands, and then at Carl's round, horrified gaze upon it. The thing could torment him no more, but he still hated Carl beyond all reason. He threw the fiddle on Carl's bunk, put on the rest of his clothes, and left the cabin; and the closing of the door behind him loosened a quantity of mud chinking between the logs.

The exertion of doing what he had done sent agonizing pains through his head, and he staggered a little when he walked down the path through the deep snow to the stable. There he was compelled to wait, half sitting on the manger rail, until the throbbing eased a little, before he could saddle his horse.

And when he finally rode past the cabin he went slowly, because every jolt was like a hammer on his brain. But his determination held firm. He was going to "call for his time," and he didn't care whether he got another job before spring or not. He wouldn't stay overnight with that pop-eyed Dutchman again for all the jobs in the country. He hated Carl; he felt that he could watch him die slowly and painfully, and feel no pity.

The day was cold with slow-drifting, gray clouds, and a nipping wind out of the north. The horse he rode was restive under the restraint of the bit, and much inclined toward shying at perfectly well-known objects beside the trail; whenever he jumped sidewise Little John would shut his eyes and groan. He was sick enough to be in bed with darkened windows, and a wet cloth over his eyes, and with some woman to change the cloth frequently, and kiss him softly on the lips when she had finished her ministrations; but, being a cow-puncher, and having no woman who cared enough to fuss over him, he considered himself perfectly competent to ride the twelve miles to the home ranch—because a cow-puncher will never own himself unable to ride if he can get his leg over the saddle.

He was riding with his eyes closed, because a sunbeam had fallen through a hole in the clouds, and was dancing

briefly on the snow, and he could not bear the dazzle. While he was riding loosely and unguardedly, with his hand pressed over his eyes, his horse scared a jack rabbit out of a bush within five feet of him, whirled suddenly from the trail, and took off across the open as if he were in fear of his life.

Little John yanked instinctively upon the reins almost before he opened his eyes, and without noticing what sort of place they had rushed into. His horse swerved on the brink of a cut bank, broke through an overhanging crust of loose earth and snow, reared once desperately—and the two went down together.

Presently Little John took off a glove and dug the snow out of his ears and from inside his collar where it was melting unpleasantly, lifted his head, and looked to see what kind of a mess he had made of things. His horse was heaving great breaths, and making occasional, half-hearted attempts to get up; and when he settled back, the weight of him came on Little John's right leg, which hurt abominably.

Little John's senses cleared rapidly. He laid a hand against the horse's shoulder, and when next the animal made an attempt to rise he pushed as hard as he could, and managed to pull himself back a little. He did that twice, holding his breath and pinching his lips tight together; and because the snow was deep and yielding, he managed to pull himself from under his horse. Then he sat for a while with his face dropped forward upon his hands, and almost forgot just where he was.

The air was growing colder when he finally lifted his head, and the bright spot in the clouds was so low down in the west that he knew he must have lost track of half an hour or so. Little John was a healthy, perfectly normal, young man, and the instinct of self-preservation was strong within him. He straightened up, felt of his leg carefully, and decided that it was not broken, but that his knee was twisted badly. He dragged himself forward a few feet, got hold of the bridle reins, and called to the horse to get up. It struggled futilely, and sank back. With its hip "knocked down"—dislocated, that is—it was more helpless than its master, and if he had had his gun, Little John would have shot the brute in mercy. As it was, he could not even remove the heavy saddle; he had to save his energy for himself.

Little John, glancing anxiously at the bright spot in the clouds, set himself to the problem of getting back to the cabin he had left so eagerly. He managed to get back up the bank, and into the trail by dusk; it was not far, but his face was clammy with sweat when he had accomplished the feat, and his hands shook like an old man's when he groped for his handkerchief. He waited a minute and rested, and looked up and down the lonesome stretch of faintly marked snow which was the trail, and knew that if the thing were done he must do it alone. It might be days before any man rode over that trail. Carl might, to-morrow, or the day after that; but to-morrow——

Little John stuffed his handkerchief back into his coat pocket, swung painfully about in the trail until he faced the bleak, gray sunset, and began to hop in that direction. Hop, hop—and then stop a minute to get his balance and let out the breath he had been unconsciously holding. Did you ever try to hop four miles upon one leg?

Little John tried it doggedly for a quarter of a mile or so. But his other foot, that he was trying so hard to keep off the ground, would persist in attempting to do its work in spite of him; whereupon he would swear vehemently and stand until the pain in his knee settled to the grinding, burning ache which he could feel in the ends of his fingers. But he hopped for more than a quarter of a mile, nevertheless.

Then he tried crawling on his hands and one knee. He had tried it before, getting up into the trail—but time dulls the memory, and he tried it again. Two rods of that was a-plenty. It had been a succession of bumps for the twisted knee, and he lay in the snow and gritted his teeth at the agony, and wondered how a trail that seemed smooth

enough when one is riding, could conceal so many hummocks under the snow; and wished he had a broken leg to drag, instead of that knee. He believed it would have been less painful. He spent a few minutes digging the snow out of his sleeves, and then he pulled himself upright beside a half-buried rock, and once more he began to hop slowly toward home.

It was dark long ago. Little John, careful as he was, hopped out of the trail into loose snow, and fell headlong. That gave his knee a frightful jolt. He was too sick to move, until the fear of freezing to death drove him again to the fight for existence. He groped with his hands until he felt the inequalities of the trail, and by sheer, dogged nerve he managed to get up and go on. He was not the sort of man, you perceive, who dies easily.

He was resting, balanced precariously upon his well leg, when he heard the wolves begin to howl, a half mile or so behind him. He shivered, though he knew they were not after him; and he wished, while he stood and listened to their wild, hunting call in the bleak dark, that he could have sent a bullet into the brain of his horse before he left him. He knew just how the poor beast was struggling futilely in the snow back there in the hollow, and when he went hopping slowly down the trail again, his pity was not all for his own plight.

He came finally to a place where the trail wound downhill, and the first dip of it was rather steep. He stumbled, wabbled drunkenly in a desperate attempt to keep his balance—for life within him knew that it was not strong enough to pull him out of the snow many more times—and then he went down. As he fell he had a queer vision of a twinkling, yellow light bobbing along in the distance below him.

After a space—minutes he could not measure—he drew himself wearily up on his elbows and opened his eyes apathetically upon the night. Life was fighting feebly now; Little John did not care so much about hopping that four miles. But he opened his eyes, and he was faintly surprised to see again the queer, bobbing, yellow light. "Looks like a star had pulled its picket pin," he muttered, watching it dully for a minute. He heard the wolves, too, and he said sadly, "Poor devil," and did not mean himself. But wolves and stray stars could not hold his interest for long.

He lay down again, with his face on his folded arms to keep it from the snow. He was watching how the pain gripped his knee, and then sent out thin little ribbons of fire up his side to his armpit, and from there down to his finger tips; and how another ribbon of fire slid down his leg to his toes. And he wondered how it was that the pain which traveled upward reached his finger tips at the same instant when the downward pain reach his toes; he thought it was queer, seeing one had so much farther to go than the other. He tried to remember what he had learned in school about the nerves, and the circulation of the blood, and he wondered whether it was his nerves or his blood that carried those pains. He studied them in a curious, detached way, and tried to time them by the beating of the blood in his temples. If they rode in his blood, they could not travel any faster than it; that seemed perfectly reasonable—irrefutable, even. He would know, as soon as he got the rhythm of that beating in his temples straightened out. Of course, if it was his nerves——

He was interrupted just as he felt himself near the final answer. He opened his eyes and found himself blinking against that yellow light, which was not a star strayed from the sky, but a lantern that smelled vilely of coal oil. The lantern was sitting in the snow close by his face, and it was tilted sidewise so that his first impulse was to reach out and set it straight; which is exactly what he did with his first conscious movement.

"Look out, damn it!" he growled next. "I got a game knee. Think you're tailing up a cow?" He should not be blamed—he was just coming back from the world of nightmares.

"Ketch a-hold of my neck, then," Carl advised. "Maybe I can git yuh up better that way." And he bowed his thick, Dutch neck so that Little John might clasp his arms about it; and after that he straightened slowly and steadily, and Little John gritted his teeth and helped himself all he could. So that presently he was standing once more on his good foot, leaning heavily against Carl and panting, too sick to swear.

"Can yuh stand up whilst I get my horse?" Carl asked, after a minute. Little John managed it, just as he had managed before—from sheer, dogged nerve. Carl sometimes did the right thing instinctively. He did not lead his horse up to Little John, but to the lower side of a three-foot bank that he somehow discovered near. Then he helped Little John hop to the bank, and boosted him into the saddle without too much torture. The horse was gentle—Carl never rode any other kind—and did not move until he was commanded to do so. They set off briskly, Carl leading the horse and carrying the lantern that set shadows dancing grotesquely around them as if they were being followed by a company of gnomes.

The cabin was like heaven to Little John when Carl helped him in and eased him down upon his bunk. Little John lay for a time with his eyes closed, not caring for anything except the miracle of his being there. When he opened them, Carl was busily tearing a flour sack into strips, and sewing the strips together with long, awkward stitches and No. 8 black thread.

"Say, how did you happen to run across me, out there?" Little John asked curiously.

Carl bit off the thread at the end of the seam, and picked up another strip of dingy, unbleached cloth with raveled, puckery edges.

"Why, I seen yuh ride off down the trail," he said simply. "I knowed you wouldn't go off to stay, without saying something about it, so when yuh didn't come back to supper I had a hunch something musta happened. This snow on the ground makes bad ridin'." He stopped to bite the thread again, and to consider whether the bandage were not long enough.

"You was out hunting for me?" A queer look came into the eyes of Little John.

"Why, sure, I was huntin'. When it come dark and you didn't show up I knowed something musta happened. You'd missed two meals t'-day," he added, as if that clinched the argument. "I thought mebby your horse had stepped into a hole or something. Kin yuh stand it if I rub the Three H onto your knee? Or had I better just pour it onto the cloth and let it soak through? It's liable to blister, either way."

"Uh-hunh," assented Little John, somewhat ambiguously, still regarding Carl with that queer look in his eyes. To himself he was calling Carl a darned fool, but it was with a glow of gratitude and shame strangely mixed. Carl had "knowed" Little John would not leave without saying something about it—and had suspected an accident when Little John failed to return for his supper! Little John felt so mean that he mentally called Carl a darned-fool Dutchman, and he was on the point of repeating the epithet aloud when Carl began to bandage the knee. Then Little John fainted and forgot to say it.

Carl finished the bandaging to his complete satisfaction before he brought Little John to with water that had particles of ice in it. Then he gave him a cup of strong coffee, freshly boiled, and some very decent toast. Little John presently dropped into a pain-troubled sleep, during which he moaned frequently and muttered disconnected sentences.

Carl, sentenced to wakefulness, sat by the fire and wondered at the grit of Little John, to walk a mile or more with a knee the size of your head. He thought a doctor ought to have a look at that knee; it was more than sprained, if Carl was any judge; he believed it was knocked plumb out of joint—though he had been careful not to mention that belief to Little John. And to hop a mile or more on one foot! Little John seemed to be sleeping more soundly than at first; Carl wondered if the

fiddle would wake him up. He thought not, if he was careful and played real easy. Carl had spent the whole afternoon with the broken fiddle and a spool of wire he had found on a shelf, and he had managed somehow to wire the neck into its place. His fingers itched now for the feel of the strings; he didn't believe Little John would wake up, if he played real easy.

Little John dreamed that he was watching a cage of mice fighting. They squeaked continually while they fought. He listened a long time to the *week, week, week* of them, and then he opened his eyes, and the cage of mice vanished instantly. Carl was sitting before the red-hot cookstove, with his fiddle tucked under his chin, and the bow squeaking in a queer, whispery way upon the strings.

Little John lay and watched him, his own face hidden in the shadows. Whenever Carl forgot—as he did occasionally—and brought the bow down strongly across a string, he would stop guiltily and glance anxiously toward Little John. Little John, at such moments, lay very still, with his eyes closed, until Carl, reassured, returned to his playing. But he did not play "The Rosary," and for a short time Little John wondered why; and then, all at once, he knew.

"The darned chump!" he thought resentfully. "Does he think I'm swine enough——" He scowled, and swallowed a lump that came unexpectedly into his throat, and bit his lips, and watched Carl with a shine in his eyes.

"What you think you're doing?" he inquired grimly, after a while. "Playing mouse-in-the-corner? Sounds like it."

Carl jumped. "I didn't mean to go and wake you up," he apologized, taking the fiddle from under his chin. Carl must have had a most forgiving nature, with something sweet and splendid in him in spite of his musical soul and his inaccurate ear for half tones. He could not feel anything but admiration for a man who had grit enough to walk a mile with a knee onto him like that; certainly he seemed unable to hold a grudge against Little John.

"Why don't you cut loose and play, if you want to?" Little John demanded harshly. "I can't sleep, anyway, with this knee hurting like it does. Go on and play something."

So Carl took up his fiddle again, scraped his bow across the lump of resin, twisted a key tentatively, sawed a preparatory flourish, and began to play his level best. Secretly he felt hugely flattered because Little John had actually asked him to play. Flattered, and grateful, if you please! I suppose that was because he had music in his soul—certainly not because he was overburdened with good sense. He played two waltzes and a two-step, and then a "regular breakdown"—and Little John, lying there in the shadows, gritted his teeth at more than the pain his knee gave him, and repented him of his deed that afternoon. For twisting the neck off a four-dollar-and-sixty-seven-cent fiddle, and then wiring it into place does not improve its tone. The D string was not the only one off key, and a wire somewhere about the thing occasionally touched a string and made it buzz abominably.

Little John was only a plain, ordinary cow-puncher, with nerves and a temper none too sweet. But he had some of the qualities that go to the building of heroes.

"Say," he snarled at last from his shadowy corner, "why 'n hell don't yuh play that thing yuh brought home in your head?"

Carl ought to have been kicked for the look of abject gratitude he gave Little John. He blushed, tightened the hair in his bow one more twist, and played "The Rosary" three times through without stopping. And Little John set his teeth and tried to think of his knee or something pleasant.

"You want to look out, or you'll get so you can *play* that piece!" he bantered deceitfully when Carl mercifully desisted. And who shall say that his debt to Carl was not with that one misleading sentence paid in full?

The Time That Was

BEING A TALE OF THE LOST LEGION

By Francis Whitlock

Author of "Stokeyne of the Lost Legion," "In Quest of the Fountain of Youth," Etc.

One man in his time plays many parts, but to few of us is it given to play the part of a king. This happened to a young American, a wealthy scion of Knickerbocker burghers and a Welsh tin-plate manufacturer. Whitlock tells the romantic story with all the vigor and charm that distinguished his former tales of the Lost Legion.

CHAPTER I.

IF I WERE KING.

MR. JABEZ COOPER could hardly be ranked as a conservative capitalist; for most of the peculiar enterprises which he financed would have been classed as extra-hazardous risks by the most reckless manipulators of get-rich-quick speculations with the money of confiding widows and helpless orphans. But, as Mr. Cooper never employed outside capital in his ventures, never found it necessary to negotiate loans, and invariably maintained large credit balances in several prominent banks, he was always treated with respect, and often regarded with envious eyes by the solid pillars of the financial world.

And, despite those comfortable bank balances and the comforting fat bundles of gilt-edged, interest-bearing securities which reposed in the massive vaults of his luxurious offices and the armor-plated treasuries of many safe-deposit companies, the most valuable of Mr. Cooper's assets and his steadiest income-producing property was never considered by the commercial agencies when figuring out his financial rating. Habitually that property gathered—when not actively employed far afield in his enterprises—about the tables in a modest little restaurant in a quiet downtown street; an immaculately clean, homelike eating place presided over by a soft-voiced, kindly-eyed Frenchwoman who sat from morning until night on the small platform behind the white-topped counter.

Looking at them as they discussed with healthy appetites the sometimes curious and mysterious but always delicious dishes which Adolfe so skillfully prepared for their delectation, one might hesitate to describe them individually or collectively as any man's property; for, while they formed a curiously assorted and nondescript collection of humanity, there was not one among them who was not obviously and unmistakably stamped with that subtle hallmark of independence which only absolute fearlessness, inborn resourcefulness, and unquestioning self-reliance warrant.

Their eyes were the eyes of men accustomed to looking over the vast spaces of the world; their bearing that of freemen who wear no master's collar, and yet they were, one and all, the bond servants of Jabez Cooper. Perhaps that is hardly accurate; they

might more aptly be called the slaves of the Lamp of Adventure; but, after all, that would be a mere juggling with words; for, as Mr. Cooper was the genie whose magic touch rubbed that lamp to activity, it amounts to pretty much the same thing in the end.

This is the age of specializing, even in great financial ventures, and Mr. Cooper had watched one group of magnates consolidate vast industrial enterprises, another accumulate a monopoly of New York's transportation franchises, a third appropriate the tremendous tribute of the worshipers of Madame Nicotine, without even attempting to tap the main which conveyed the water that their financial alchemy transmuted to a solution of near-gold. For, while they were juggling and transmuting, Mr. Cooper had quietly started to form a little monopoly of his own; a monopoly in which he had no associates and very few rivals; for he specialized in the financing of enterprises which to the average unimaginative capitalist presented only an unlimited field for hazardous adventure and a very precarious possibility of pecuniary profit to the naked eye. And so it happened that in the course of business so many curious and strange propositions were submitted for his consideration that no story which contained a kernel of truth, no matter how fantastic and bizarre might be the outer shell, could be sufficiently startling to strain his credulity or disturb his placid equanimity.

No risk to either life, limb, or treasure did Mr. Cooper consider prohibitive if in the project he could discover a commensurate possibility of gain; but, being of a sedentary habit of life, his personal hazard in such commissions as he accepted was invariably limited to the advancing of a liberal expense account to a trusted and active agent. And as his peculiar business grew and expanded until he needed such agents for work in many far corners of the world, he had gradually enlisted in his service that curious assortment of adventurers which gathered in brief periods of relaxation about the tables of the Taverne de l'Escargot d'Argent.

Naturally, as the responsible employer, Mr. Cooper always appropriated the lion's share of such financial reward as accrued from the success of his missions and the efforts of his missionaries; but for faithful service he paid with a liberal hand, and, although his was a business in which no casualty company would have insured his employees, there was rarely a dearth of recruits to fill the inevitable and not infrequent vacancies in the ranks. Romance did not die with the troubadors, and love of adventure for adventure's sake has survived the falling into innocuous desuetude of the once popular profession of knight-errantry. Men no longer incase themselves in sheet-iron habiliments, and go jangling across the landscape in search of enchanted castles and fire-breathing dragons; but so long as the stars run their appointed courses, men who are predestined to follow the out-trails and to know far places in satisfying their lust for such excitement as only weird adventures can afford will continue to be born into the world. And of such were Mr. Cooper's retainers; members of that mysterious Lost Legion which has had so much to do with making history while rarely appearing in its chronicles; men who dallied with danger as unconcernedly as a New York smoke-eater carries a line of hose to the fifth story of a blazing box factory and who envisaged grim death without the batting of an eye or the quiver of an eyelash.

Of unimpeachable personal probity were these adventurers, and Jabez Cooper did not possess enough millions to tempt one of them to commit a breach of the criminal law; but none of them was finicky about little matters of international jurisprudence. Any one of them who might find a package of thousand-dollar bills on the street would unhesitatingly turn it over to the proper authorities to be returned to its lawful owner, and with equal lack of hesitation would cheerfully accept the management of a semipiratical fili-

bustering expedition against the peace and prosperity of any chocolate-colored dictator who controlled the destinies and absorbed the revenues of a supposedly friendly alleged republic. In fact, there is one foreign colony in Paris in which the mere mention of Mr. Jabez Cooper's name invariably calls forth a chorus of sonorous and picturesque profanity in liquid Spanish, for the foundations of his fortunes were laid in the tropical regions of the Spanish Main, and his legionaries had assisted in putting the prefix "ex" to the titles of many of the dictators who had ruled and ruined portions of that unstable area.

But in time the business had grown and extended far beyond the banana belt, until there was hardly a country or a corner of the earth which had not known the tread of the wandering feet of his emissaries, and in more than one instance a legioner had departed gayly from the Taverne de l'Escargot d'Argent with Madame Hortense's cheery: *"Au revoir; à la bonne heure!"* following him, only to find at the end of his journey that bourne from which no traveler returneth. That was all a part of the game, however, and no tear from the eye of Mr. Cooper blotted the page of the ledger on which he charged off the failure to profit and loss, nor did the news of the adverse fortune of war unduly affect the careless gayety of the frequenters of the little restaurant.

Of late, business had been exceptionally brisk with Mr. Cooper; for a wave of unrest had swept over the face of the earth, and it was always in troublous times that he reaped his richest harvests. The revolution in China had presented opportunities which furnished occupation for a half dozen of his adventurous employees; the land-grabbing expeditions of France and Italy in northern Africa had made the running of contraband of war into Morocco and Tripoli exceedingly popular, and not without profit; and the bursting of the war cloud which has so long hovered over the Balkan peninsula had presented problems which taxed the resources of his very complete and elastic organization. But, no matter how many great enterprises Mr. Cooper had on hand, he never refused to consider new business, and there was a welcoming smile on his face as he greeted Mr. Sturtevant van Winkle Beekman Stuyvesant van Twiller Jones-Morgan in the privacy of the inner sanctum of his offices.

It was not the collection of Knickerbocker cognomens on the card which had favorably impressed Mr. Cooper, for he estimated the importance of a name by its value when signed in the lower right-hand corner of a check, and in this particular instance it was the hyphenated Jones-Morgan portion of the signature which represented real money. From his maternal ancestors Sturtevant van Winkle Beekman Stuyvesant van Twiller had inherited an attenuated solution of that cerulean, juniper-tinctured fluid imported in the veins of the rotund Dutch burghers who put the tan in the hides of the original aboriginal owners of the island—and very little else. But from his father, David Lloyd Jones-Morgan, a canny Welshman who sold his string of tin-plate factories to the trust at his own figure, had come the numismatic collection which made the son persona grata in the sanctum of Jabez Cooper.

Jones-Morgan was not a bad-looking young chap by nature. He was tall, broad-shouldered, and narrow-hipped, and the usual complement of features was pleasingly distributed and arranged in his countenance. But brooding over his face was a settled and fixed expression of melancholy and ennui, and Mr. Cooper's smile of welcome brought no answering reflection to the chronically drooped corners of his lips.

"Mr. Cooper, you may not have suspected it—for it is not generally known beyond the family circle—but I am an Albanian," he said, after the preliminary courtesies were concluded.

The capitalist glanced again at his visitor's card, and bowed.

"Yes, I suppose that you could be accused of that," he admitted sympathetically. "The original Van Twiller

estates extended up the Hudson River as far as——"

"No, no; not that kind of an Albanian!" interrupted Jones-Morgan languidly. "It isn't as bad as that, Mr. Cooper, or I should not waste your time by asking for assistance. I'm a little hazy on my geography, but I believe there is an indefinite, undefined chunk of territory called Albania lying around loose in the neighborhood of the Balkans."

Again Mr. Cooper examined the calling card, and there was a puzzled expression in his eyes as he looked up from it.

"I know that requires a little elucidation, and I'm prepared to furnish it," continued his visitor. "It's just this way: You see, my governor was long on the acquisitive faculty when it came to dollars, but he was short on known ancestors, and he grew weary of having my mother's relatives put it all over him on the subject of family trees, so after he sold out to the trust he employed his leisure in the study of ancestral arboriculture. Now, in London there are six different establishments supported principally by Pittsburgh millionaires and Chicago pork packers who want certificates that they are the direct descendants of William the Conqueror, Messalina, Joan of Arc, or Queen Elizabeth. The governor was no piker, and he employed the whole six, giving them instructions to dig up a collection of progenitors that would make the Van Twillers and the rest of his in-laws hush their noise.

"Well, judging from the results, each one of those genealogical sharps—or sharpers—struck an entirely different trail leading from the birthplace of David Lloyd Jones-Morgan back through the reverberating echoes of the past centuries. Eventually they all arrived at the same source—old Noah. They couldn't get beyond that, for the antediluvian parish registers were all destroyed in the flood; but they sailed six separate and distinct courses in getting back to Ararat. In due time the results of their investigations were forwarded in six volumes of engrossed and illuminated pages of parchment; the vellum covers embellished with armorial bearings, quarterings, bars sinister, and things like that. The contents differed in details, but they were unanimous in one decision, for they all proved conclusively that my late lamented parent was descended from most of the nobility, gentry, royalty, and other privileged grafters who have lived on the unearned increment accruing from the sweat of the brows of the European peasantry from the time the water of the Deluge receded until the French Revolution.

"The governor coached up on all that romance, and at the next family reunion, when the proud descendants of the old Dutch bootleggers commenced their usual disparaging remarks about 'nouveau riche' and parvenues he unbelted, and before the evening drew to a happy close he had every one of them but Aunt Gretchen van Schoonhoeven Beekman Stuyvesant van Twiller plumb buffaloed. Every time they would tell some little anecdote like the story of Hans van Twiller acquiring a shipload of beaver pelts from a sad-eyed savage for a square-faced bottle of gin and a Waterbury watch, he would come back at them with the authenticated chronicle of how his great-great-grandfather six times removed, Alberto Magnus Morgano, was made the Peripatetic Groom of the Back Stairs of the Castello San Angelo for saving the life of the Hospador of the Rialto at the famous battle of the Rubicon, or a hot one like that. They'd hand him one about old Piet van Schoonhoeven importing a dozen cargoes of niggers from the West Coast in his own ships, and he'd cross-counter with a detailed account of the lock of auburn hair which was handed down in the Jones family from their noted ancestor, Sir Francis Drake, who received it from the Virgin Queen as a slight token of her regard for georgedeweying the Spanish Armada.

"Mr. Cooper, as I said, it worked like a charm with all of 'em except Aunt Gretchen; but he couldn't faze her, even with his royal connections,

although he proved conclusively that it was one of his indirect collateral ancestors who first put the Morgan in morganatic. She was an old maid, the great-great-great-granddaughter of Jonkeer van Winkle, the Patroon of Albany. Now, it seems that a patroon was some pumpkins in those days. The ordinary Dutch emigrant when he landed at the Battery received full liberty and license to swindle, flimflam, and bunko the Indians out of their pelts and peltries, and to commit petit and grand larceny against their territories, lands, and chattels; but a patroon was a sort of kinglet with his private gallows in his front yard, and possessed of the right to draw, quarter, and otherwise maltreat the populace.

"The governor went through his six volumes of assorted genealogy with a magnifying glass and a fine-tooth comb, but he couldn't find anything which looked good for a knock-out punch for the Patroon of Albany, so he cabled to all six of those London concerns to get together and send him the necessary dope. And did they? Well, I guess yes! Mr. Cooper, on the first steamer they forwarded to him an engrossed certificate with about ten pounds of red sealing wax on it, which recited that by direct descent from Peliopolis Q. Telemacus, last Grand Hammam of the Villayet of Mezzotintoretto, David Lloyd Jones-Morgan was entitled to all the habiliments, embellishments, and appurtenances appertaining to him as Hereditary Sublime and Grand Perpetual Pretender to the Throne of Albania!"

Mr. Cooper began to see a light in the relation which had seemed at first inconsequential and irrelevant to specie payments, and his left little finger crooked significantly.

"And did he succeed in impressing Miss Gretchen van Twiller with that?" he asked.

"Did he?" exclaimed Jones-Morgan, his mouth threatening for a moment to relax into a smile. "Why, Mr. Cooper, when the governor pivoted with that after she had put over a few about the way the patroon manhandled his feudal retainers, the old girl went down for the full count. He never needed to flash it the second time, and I had forgotten all about it until I ran across it in a safe-deposit box yesterday."

"Well?" said Mr. Cooper interrogatively as his visitor hesitated.

"That's why I have come to see you, Mr. Cooper," answered Jones-Morgan. "I have noticed in the newspapers that the sultan has lost his grip on my hereditary domain, and I came around to see if you thought you could fix it so I can realize on that document. I may say that money is no object."

Mr. Cooper started involuntarily. "My dear sir, it *is* with *me!*" he protested. "I may say that it is the only one which promises to make the pipe dream of those English genealogical grafters come true. According to the best of my recollection, Albania is a sparsely settled region, producing principally brigands and massacres; but if you have a hankering to boss the country I expect that I can manage it for you for a price."

The younger man promptly produced a check book. "How much?" he asked.

Mr. Cooper made a rapid mental calculation, and as a precautionary measure he multiplied the final result by two.

"Well, as a first payment to cover preliminary expenses——"

"Bunch it! How much for the job complete?" interrupted Jones-Morgan gloomily.

Now, Mr. Cooper sometimes made mistakes in his calculations, but they were never in favor of the other fellow, and he almost blushed as he named the total amount. A moment later he figuratively kicked himself for his moderation, for Jones-Morgan filled in the check without question, ticking off on the fingers of his left hand the items of his signature as he affixed them with his right. The finished product he deposited with a sigh of relief on the capitalist's desk.

"I'm going to call myself Adam, rex, when I climb on that throne," he said, as he scowled at the elongated signature.

Mr. Cooper looked at him a little

pityingly after he had deposited the paper in his safe.

"I don't often let curiosity intrude in my business affairs, but I confess that you have got me guessing," he said. "So far as I can see, you have got about everything that a young fellow could want. You have great wealth, exceptional health. You have won the amateur middleweight championship, you are an acknowledged crack shot, you would be on the international polo team if you cared to take the trouble. I'll be hanged if I can see why you want to bother with the rulership of a two-by-four principality like Albania."

Jones-Morgan shrugged his shoulders wearily. "That's just it," he answered. "I've inherited too blamed much, and I want to get rid of a lot of it. I reckon those Albanian brigands will trim it off."

His manner was so much like that of a would-be suicide that Mr. Cooper congratulated himself heartily on the advance payment which he had received.

"It is a maxim of the French to look for the woman when they are confronted by a puzzling problem," he persisted.

For the first time the rigid lips of Jones-Morgan relaxed; but the result was a savage grin, rather than a smile.

"They wouldn't have to look very far in this case," he admitted. "They couldn't miss her, for she is Miss Gretchen van Schoonhoeven Beekman Stuyvesant van Twiller."

An exclamation of surprise came from Mr. Cooper's lips.

"But, my dear sir, that is not what I meant!" he protested. "She is your great-aunt, she is old enough to be your grandmother, and——"

"She's worse than that!" exclaimed Jones-Morgan vindictively, as he scowled at his own calling card, which lay on Mr. Cooper's desk. "She was low down enough to take advantage of a helpless, squalling infant at his baptism. Mr. Cooper, she was my godmother—and Aunt Gretchen isn't in the fairy class."

CHAPTER II.

"DOWN TO GEHENNA, OR UP TO A THRONE."

The appearance of a note-bearing messenger boy at the Taverne de l'Escargot l'Argent always caused a hush of expectancy to settle over the little restaurant until Madame Hortense had deciphered the superscription on the envelope. From the expression of madame's face the older campaigners could often guess where the lightning of adventure was about to strike, for the first portion of Mr. Cooper's advance was always devoted to settling outstanding scores on her books, and she fairly beamed when the summons was addressed to one of the legioners whose indebtedness had reached large proportions. Accordingly, Doleful Dick Redgreave, lately returned from locating a long-lost Inca gold mine in Peru; Jenkins, who had landed that morning from a fruit steamer after stage-managing the last successful revolution in Santo Domingo, and Syllable Simpkins, fresh from China, where he had been engaged in smuggling out the priceless heirlooms of a Manchu prince who had lost his hereditary job when the republic was proclaimed, went on unconcernedly with their meal and conversation after one glance at her suddenly radiant face. They were still flush, and madame's smile proclaimed that the summons was for one of her guests who had been so long unemployed that the money he had risked so much to earn had been dissipated, for it was only the patron of the organization who was sufficiently provident to profit permanently by its winnings.

It was to Rankin, familiarly known as "Runt"—for the obvious reason that he stood six feet four in his socks, and was broad and deep in proportion—that the note was addressed, and after glancing at its contents he departed hurriedly, and in an incredibly short time reached Mr. Cooper's office. The capitalist looked him over critically.

"Let me see, Rankin; the last work you did for me was that little matter of removing Abdul Hamid's harem

from the Yildiz Kiosk, and preventing the distribution of the ladies among the amorous Young Turks, I believe?" he said interrogatively.

Rankin grinned and shook his head.

"If I hadn't done anything since then, I should have been dining in the bread line for the last six months," he answered. "The last job was in Teheran."

Mr. Cooper found it necessary to refresh his memory by consulting the card index on his desk.

"Oh, yes; that had slipped my mind!" he admitted. "That was one of the Oil Octopus matters. They found it necessary to depose the shah, who was flirting with the Teutonic Monopoly, and replace him with a ruler more friendly to American interests. I had forgotten that you arranged those little details. Well, Mr. Rankin, I have need of your peculiar talents again—on the usual terms; expense money in advance, and the customary percentage when you deliver the goods. Ever since the newspapers have advertised the fact that Albania was to be made a separate state, I have been receiving applications from impecunious princes and penniless pretenders who desired my assistance in annexing the job of king. Several of them occupy prominent positions in the Almanach de Gotha and Burke's Peerage; but I failed to discover their names in either Dun's or Bradstreet's, so I gave their applications little serious consideration. This morning I received another application, however, which I look favorably upon. The gentleman has a document as imposing as a dog license, which seems to give him the right to a look-in. His other reference was entirely satisfactory; the cashier certified it without the slightest hesitation; so I wish that you would attend to this little matter for him. You can drew the customary advance in the outer office. Good afternoon, Mr. Rankin."

The legioner hesitated.

"Your instructions are perfectly clear, sir; but you neglected to mention the gentleman's name," he suggested.

Mr. Cooper smiled as he held out the visiting card of Mr. Sturtevant van Winkle Beekman Stuyvesant van Twiller Jones-Morgan.

"This is my busy day," he explained, and as Rankin's broad shoulders passed through the door to the outer office he dismissed Albania and its destinies from his mind, and turned his attention to the consideration of the application of one Juan da Cruz Ferrera y Santos, who ardently desired to become the provisional president of Mexico.

The underlying secret of Mr. Cooper's success was his shrewdness in judging human nature. He never wasted time nor energy in trying to fit a square peg into a round hole, and he never accepted business, no matter how tempting the prospective rewards, unless he had ready to his hand the human instrument capable of carrying the details through to a successful conclusion. His confidence was never lightly bestowed; but once given it was absolute, and in their peculiar missions the legioners were never hampered by instructions. They were expected to deliver the goods; but it was left to their own ingenuity to acquire them. And, so wisely had Mr. Cooper judged his men, never once had he listened to a hard-luck story of failure. Not all of their adventures had been crowned with success; but none of the infrequent failures was due to the dereliction of his agents, and their faults were buried with them.

Runt Rankin was peculiarly adapted to the task to which he had been assigned. In spite of his great size and tremendous strength—or, perhaps, because of them—he was essentially a man of peace. Once aroused, he was as disturbing and uncomfortable to have about as a volcano in active eruption; but he always exhausted the *suaviter in modo* before resorting to the *fortiter in re*. Underneath a good-natured and smiling exterior, which would win the heart and confidence of a child at sight, there was a grim resoluteness and an inflexible determination which had extricated him from many a tight corner during his adventurous career. A smile came more readily than a

frown to his face, and there was habitually a twinkle in his blue eyes; but with sufficient provocation that twinkle could become a flash, and the square chin grow so aggressive that a Jeffries would have hesitated to push a fist against it. A congenital restlessness of spirit unfitted him for the paths of conventional and conservative business; but while he entered light-heartedly and gayly into Mr. Cooper's adventures without a second thought for his own safety, he was as scrupulously careful in guarding the interests of his employer as he was careless of his own.

Jones-Morgan took to him at first sight. Himself a man of inches, he appreciated at a glance the wonderful physical proportions of the legioner, and there was something so infectious in the good humor of the twinkling blue eyes and the half-quizzical smile which seemed to hover perpetually about the corners of the kindly mouth that his own habitual discontent and ennui seemed to melt partially away. And underneath the chronic boredom of manner of the scion of the Knickerbockers, Rankin was shrewd enough to discern the makings of a man after his own heart; a good comrade in time of peace, a dependable ally in time of war.

Upon receiving his commission and the card of many names from Mr. Cooper, he had been minded—after the custom of the legion—to carry the matter through single-handed, sending the man who was footing the bills to wait at some convenient point until he had arranged the throne for him to sit upon. The ambition had seemed so preposterous, the string of names so ridiculous, that he had expected to find a vapid, washed-out, and degenerate specimen of humanity of which to make a king.

But when he looked into the clear, fearless eyes almost on a level with his own, and felt the firm, strong handclasp which told of finely conditioned muscles and good red blood, he knew that his plan would have to be amended. This was no man to let another fight his battles for him, to sit in safety while another risked his skin. More than ever he wondered at his strange ambition; but that was none of his business—the wherefores and the whys. It was his part to do everything humanly possible to realize it for him.

"I didn't enter into details with Mr. Cooper, but I assume that you are the gentleman whom he has selected as leader of the expedition which is to restore my ancestral rights, and place the royal diadem upon my kingly brow?" said Jones-Morgan interrogatively.

Rankin's eyes twinkled. "I am rather more than that; I am the whole blooming expedition," he replied. "Of course, there will be adherents flocking enthusiastically to your standard, and all that sort of thing—if I can get away with it; but so far I am the whole push. How soon will you be ready to start?"

For a moment Rankin doubted the accuracy of his intuition which so rarely failed him in his judgment of men; for at his surprising announcement Jones-Morgan looked at him with a dazed amazement which closely simulated fear. He was quickly reassured, however, as he saw him draw his check book from his pocket and look at the figures on the stub from which the check for Mr. Cooper had been detached.

"I'll do my best to make you think that I'm cheap at the price," he said, smiling, and his confidence was as infectious as his good humor, for Jones-Morgan actually smiled in return as he extended his hand.

It was less than a month later that the two men watched together the precipitous and forbidding coast line of Albania as they skirted it on a little Austrian steamer. They had sailed from New York without a definite plan of campaign, and even now they were little farther advanced; for definite information as to the real conditions in the Balkan peninsula was hard to come by.

Little Montenegro was still hammering doggedly at the walls of Scutari; but the real Albania was apparently indifferent to the fate of the Turkish garrison in the capital, and looked on in ominous silence at the protracted siege, prepared to offer the same resistance to

the Montenegrins and their Serb allies, should they be successful, as they had offered to the bashi-bazouks of the sultan for the past three centuries. Scutari, nominally the capital of the mysterious country, the Turks had occupied in force since the old Slavonic empire was smashed on the field of Kossovo; but the sultan's authority extended hardly a league beyond its walls.

Within two days' journey from Rome, hidden away in those dark and forbidding mountains, lie the cities of Gusinje and Plava—the shrines of Albanian patriotism and independence; shrines which the fierce mountaineers have so jealously guarded that none but Albanian eyes have beheld them for two generations. Lhassa has been visited and described by dozens of explorers; Mecca is no longer forbidden to globe-trotting tourists; but for more than a half century no foreigner has won to within sight of the minarets of Plava and Gusinje.

In solemn conclave the ambassadors of the great powers allotted those towns and the surrounding territory to Montenegro when the treaty of Berlin reconstructed the map of the Balkan peninsula; but they neglected to provide means to insure their delivery. Mahommed Ali, the sultan's favorite pasha, was sent to notify the Albanians of the nominal change of rulers. He reached the little town of Jakova, some fifty miles from Gusinje, where he was met by representatives of the tribesmen. They listened in grim silence to the reading of the Irade, and as the last words fell from Mahommed Ali's lips they seized him, cut off his head, and dispatched it to Constantinople with a message of defiance to all the world. And from that day they have made the defiance good, for no foreigner has penetrated beyond the small border towns, and a veil of mystery is drawn between the mountain strongholds and the civilization of the twentieth century.

"And it's just that veil that we have got to penetrate," said Rankin as they watched the cloud-capped panorama from the steamer's deck. "An army of a hundred thousand men could never do it; but two men can travel by paths an army could not follow."

"'Down to Gehenna, or up to a throne!'" quoted his companion; but Rankin shook his head.

"My dear man, we should not stand one chance in a thousand of making you the ruler of Albania if we accepted that poet's philosophy," answered Rankin. "I was out this way"—he included most of the Orient in a sweeping explanatory gesture—"on another little matter a few years ago, and in the course of business I happened to get a peculiar side light on a few Mohammedan customs and prejudices. I suppose you know that your future subjects are mostly followers of the Prophet?"

"Yes, I understood that they have done their best to exterminate their Christian compatriots," assented Jones-Morgan.

"And, although they defy the temporal authority of the sultan, they never question his spiritual leadership," continued Rankin. "For centuries they have refused to contribute a piastre toward the imperial revenues; but just as punctiliously as they have shot the tax gatherers, they have anteed up every year the recruit for the imperial harem—supposedly the most beautiful girl in the country. That was a tribute to the Sheik-ul-Islam as the direct representative of the Prophet, not to the sultan. All the other Turkish provinces did the same thing, and during his rulership Abdul Hamid had accumulated about eight hundred women in his harem, and he was partially reconciled to his banishment by the thought that it would enable him to shed a good share of his matrimonial responsibilities. The Young Turks allowed that fifty or so would be a sufficient number for an ex-sultan living in retirement. Abdul agreed that that was a generous allowance; but he was terribly worried about the quality which would be sent to him if the Young Turks were permitted to do the selecting.

"There was a good deal of wrangling in the negotiations, and that was the

first Ottoman complication on record that the ambassadors of the powers did not butt into. A few of the military and naval attachés were anxious to volunteer, but their offers were rejected. Finally the Turkish ambassador in Washington applied to Mr. Cooper, and he sent me to Constantinople to straighten things out and to try to satisfy everybody concerned. Well, before I finished that job I understood why the ambassadors had been unanimous in passing it up. I had a good deal of sympathy for old Abdul; he'd kept things in the East stirred up, which had furnished considerable employment to friends of mine; and I tried to do my best for him."

"Great Scott, do you mean to say that you were permitted to inspect the houris of the imperial harem?" exclaimed Jones-Morgan incredulously.

"Permitted? Why, I was hired to do it, and I'll tell you right here that I earned my money," answered Rankin, in a matter-of-fact tone. "It's worth something in the line of damages to have your illusions shattered, and a lot of mine went to smash. I discovered the real reason for the eunuch guardians, the high walls, and the grated windows of the harem within ten minutes after I got inside. They are not to prevent the flight of the inmates—who are too fat and lazy to walk; they are just part of the flimflam and bunko which go to make up that gorgeous hocus-pocus which is called 'The Mystery of the East.' It's just like those veils the women wear over their faces—there's a reason. Well, as I said, I wanted to give Abdul a square deal, so I got down to business and picked out the ten best lookers in a hurry and forwarded 'em to his place of exile, a seaside palace at Salonica. Out of eight hundred it wasn't difficult, and I considered that first draft a pretty good one; they were nearly all comparatively fresh arrivals, on whom Turkish delight and nougat hadn't had time to get in their deadly work.

"There was Zuleika, a tall, willowy blonde from Circassia; Nadriola, a graceful little Macedonian maiden; an Anatolian brunette named Fatima; a half dozen others of equal quality from the scattered provinces. The one I considered the prize pippin of the lot was Natalika, a beautiful Albanian of the last vintage, who had arrived at the Yildiz Kiosk only a couple of days before. Taking 'em by and large, they measured up pretty well to the show-girl standard, and Kiralfy or Ned Wrayburn would have put the whole bunch in the front row to amuse the tired New York business man. Well, I shipped the lot off to Salonica under escort of a strong guard of eunuchs, and the least I expected was a jeweled cigarette case or some trifle like that by return mail.

"What I got was a little different; it was a hurry-up call on the long-distance phone, and the man at the other end was using some language. It was Abdul Hamid, and what he said to me would have made the Bulgarian atrocities and the Armenian massacres look like pink-studio teas. The Turkish language is particularly adapted to telling a man what you really think of him, and the ex-sultan had it pretty well exhausted before the wires melted. Right there I got wise to the fact that there was a difference in the Oriental and Occidental standards of perfection for feminine pulchritude, and I revised my scale of points. It made it a lot simpler, for I had the eunuchs bring a platform scale into the harem, and adjust the beam at two hundred pounds. Then we prodded and rolled those odalisques over the platform, and any one of 'em that didn't make the beam go up with a dull thud wasn't put on the eligible list. Two hundred and eighty-seven pounds was the average of the forty, and when I got 'em all boosted into the cars of the Salonica express I knew that I had been working.

"I wasn't taking any chances on shrinkage, so I traveled with 'em to Salonica to be sure they were fed and watered at all stops, and incidentally to collect any little matter of baksheesh that Abdul Hamid might be disposed to hand out after they had been weighed

in to his new harem. And I got all that was coming to me, for as a slight token of his appreciation that unspeakable old Turk presented me with the first ten houris I had selected, and they were delivered at my hotel before I could get out of town. Now, I'm not going to unload a hard-luck story on you, but when I tried to unload that bunch I found that the slave dealers wouldn't consider anything under an 'average forty-two' in measurements, and from the size of my hotel bill I realized that they weren't so displeased with their future prospects that they were indulging in hunger strikes. I won't go into the harrowing details of the final dispersal of the assortment. Some of 'em I educated in the mysteries of the tango and turkey trot so that they could get engagements as cabaret performers, and I got the hotel proprietor to frame up a kidnaping of Zuleika and Nadriola by the Greek brigands. I understand that he has been busy, ever since, explaining why the ransom isn't in sight. Fatima eloped with an itinerant phonograph salesman, and the last I heard of her she was dancing the hootchie-kootchie to an accompaniment of canned music in the Cairo bazaars. That left only Natalika, the last Albanian tribute; but she was more of a problem than all of the rest combined. She was only sixteen years old; she was as homesick for her native mountains as the only Teddy for the White House, and as domesticated as a jungle-bred lion after a three days' fast.

"I knew that Abdul Hamid was deriving a good deal of amusement from my difficulties—Mahmoud, the chief eunuch, told me that he hadn't known the old boy to laugh so heartily since he read the casualty list of the Armenian massacres as he did when they told him about Natalika chasing me up to the roof when I suggested that I had enough pull with Cuss & Banghammer to land her in the chorus of the number-four company en tour with 'The Pride of the Harem.' She had pulled the same knife on Abdul Hamid when they tried to make her kotow, and he was quick to see the point. I couldn't think of anything which pleased her; the only thing she wanted was to get back to Gusinje, and that was against the rules of the game. It would have given offense to the Albanians to have their tribute returned to them, and I never saw anything more touching than the tender solicitude of the Turks for the feelings and *amour propre* of those sensitive highlanders. They had a way of sliding down the mountainsides and laying waste the adjoining provinces when they were peeved.

"I explained the difficulties to Natalika; I was perfectly willing to restore her to her own fireside; but the Turks wouldn't stand for it. They put a strong guard around the hotel when they learned what I proposed to do, and talked unpleasantly of decapitation for me and bowstringing for her. Well, Natalika had one saving grace—the infinite patience and absolute disregard for time of the true Oriental. She announced that she was fairly comfortable in the hotel, and that she proposed to stay there until they would permit her to return to Gusinje. And from the fact that Ornithopulus & Schmidt, the proprietors of the Grand Hôtel d'Athène et Zurich, have promptly forwarded to me their weekly bill for her board and lodging since I left her there, I reckon we'll find her still holding the fort when this packet lands us at Salonica."

Jones-Morgan had listened at first incredulously; but, fantastic as the recital might have seemed had he heard it in the smoking room of a transatlantic liner, the atmosphere in which they traveled contributed a substance of verisimilitude to it. The little steamer on which they had embarked at Cattaro was the first to clear for Salonica after that Turkish fortress had fallen into the hands of the Serbs and Greeks, and it was uncomfortably crowded with passengers representing all the races and nationalities of the near East. The ship was comparatively modern; but the passengers might have been recruited from the pages of the Arabian

Nights and that, perhaps, softened the sharp contrasts between the fierce Eastern traditions of jealously guarded harems and the practical modern business methods of Jabez Cooper which the story presented.

"Rankin, if our little scheme goes through, I'll see that you are relieved of further responsibility for the young woman's hotel bills," he said. "I'm still strong on that 'travel-alone' proposition, though. I think we shall be busy enough without taking on any side issues."

Rankin's eyes twinkled as he turned to him.

"My dear boy, unless Natalika has changed considerably I hardly believe that you will call her a side issue after you have seen her," he answered, with a significant grin. "As a matter of fact, I was counting upon her being pretty nearly the whole thing in the way of getting us to Gusinje. There won't be any Turkish soldiers left in Salonica to prevent her from leaving, and the quicker we get to Gusinje the quicker I shall collect my commission on that check you handed to J. Cooper. If we wanted to commit suicide I could suggest no surer method than by trying to annex the Albanian crown by knocking at the border outposts and asking that it be handed over. Once inside of their most jealously guarded stronghold it will be a different matter; for, unless all signs fail, fighting men are going to be at a premium in Albania inside of the next three months. The girl is plumb crazy to get back to the old homestead, and I reckon that our only chance of getting across the frontier and through the mountain passes to Gusinje is by making use of her knowledge of the country. That's why I suggested taking this packet for Salonica."

Jones-Morgan shook his head.

"Not any of that in mine, Rankin!" he protested firmly. "I don't suppose that there is one chance in a million that I shall ever sit on the throne of Albania; but the odds are a lot longer than that against my ever stealing the crown by hiding behind a woman's petticoats."

Rankin's eyes still twinkled; but there was a sudden accession of squareness to his jaw at the suggestion of rebellion.

"My boy, there is not the slightest chance of such a thing," he answered quietly. "Natalika is an Albanian to the backbone, and—conforming to the immemorial custom of the country—she wears trousers."

CHAPTER III.

A GIRL WITH A HISTORY.

Mr. Jones-Morgan received a distinct jolt when he was formally presented to Natalika. From Rankin's description he had expected to find a half-civilized Amazon; but he was received by an extremely beautiful young woman, who greeted him in excellent English, and with all the *savoir-faire* of the most experience mondaine. Truth to tell, Rankin was no less surprised than his companion, for he could hardly believe that this dignified and entirely composed young person who received them so graciously was the same girl that less than four years before had attacked him with the ferocity of a wild cat when he had ventured to make the least suggestion which displeased her.

Only her costume served to remind him of his earlier acquaintance, for she had clung tenaciously to the Albanian mode which has remained practically unchanged for centuries. A fez of red velvet with a long golden tassel was perched coquettishly on her glossy curls, a sleeveless zouave jacket of dark-blue velvet heavily covered with gold embroidery partially concealed the loose blouse of white silk which formed her corsage. The voluminous trousers of soft habutai were gathered about her slender ankles with bands of turquoise-studded gold, and her very shapely bare feet were only half concealed by the embroidered, heelless slippers into which her toes were thrust. About her waist a sash of parti-colored silk was gracefully arranged, and Rankin smiled as, peeping from its folds, he recog-

nized the handle of the dagger with which he had become only too familiar when he had tried to provide for her future.

A long, shapeless cloak and a cloud of veiling thrown carelessly on a divan suggested that Natalika conformed to the Mohammedan custom of swaddling herself beyond recognition when she went abroad; but in the privacy of her own apartment she met them unabashed, without the suggestion of a yashmak to conceal the beautiful contour of her face.

Rankin looked about that apartment with amazement, for while the hotel bills which his improvident good nature had led him to pay had been sufficiently large to tax his limited resources, they could certainly never have been stretched to cover such luxury. The bare hotel salon had been transformed into a charmingly homelike and refined boudoir; rare Persian carpets of the prized antique weave and coloring covered the tiled floor; a half dozen good paintings and as many water colors of merit hung upon the walls, which had been tastefully and by no means cheaply redecorated. In the corner was a grand piano of the very best French make; beside it a harp with an exquisitely carved frame. Luxurious divans piled high with embroidered cushions, screens of the finest and most intricate *mushabiyah* work, and taborets bearing handsome vases and bowls for flowers, silver boxes for cigarettes, and trays for the cloying Oriental sweets and bonbons were ranged and scattered about; but, most surprising of all, a row of shelves which covered a half of one side of the room was filled to overflowing with the best recent books of Germany, France, and England.

"I fear that I have changed more than you have, Mr. Rankin," she said, disclosing two rows of beautifully white and even small teeth by the smile which his very evident surprise called forth. "It is nearly four years—and that is a long time in Salonica."

"It's a mighty short time to have worked such a miracle!" answered Rankin, making no effort to conceal his admiration. "I can't understand it. I left you—if you will pardon my frankness—a willful, headstrong young savage; practically illiterate, and able to speak even Osmanli very badly. I have every reason to believe that you have never left this wretched town of Salonica, and yet I find you an accomplished linguist with the manner of a princess of the blood, and surrounded with every evidence of the refinements of the most modern civilization."

"But still retaining all of my original independence, and the means to defend it!" she said, laughing, her eyes sparkling with mischief as she significantly touched the hilt of the dagger in her sash. "It is fortunate for you that I have acquired a veneer of civilization, or I should be chasing you up to the roof again, for you have neglected the very obvious opportunity to pay homage to my personal charms. Are all of your countrymen so obtuse, Mr. Jones-Morgan?"

"Madame, he is no countryman of mine," answered the young New Yorker eagerly. "He is merely a crude, rough American, and from the moment I entered this room I have foresworn allegiance to the land of my birth. I am now, henceforward and forever, an Albanian!"

Natalika laughed; but underneath her merriment there was a suggestion of seriousness.

"I only wish that my poor country might entice many such as you two gentlemen within her boundaries," she said. "Of adventurers, men who would be kings, there are swarms intriguing in the courts of Europe, and trying to curry favor at the borders; but of men —pouf!" She made a contemptuous gesture with her hands, and it was as well for Jones-Morgan's peace of mind that she had turned to Rankin as she spoke, for his face had flushed to a very uncomfortable and vivid red. But for the moment she seemed to have forgotten him, and she looked long and earnestly at the legioner, as if appraising every inch of his great frame according to some private standard of her own needs. Apparently he was not

found wanting in the balance, for she walked over to him with outstretched hand.

"Will you forgive me for fooling you —for imposing upon your good nature and generosity for the past three years?" she asked contritely. "I have known of the money you have sent every week."

"My dear lady, there is nothing to forgive; but my death from curiosity will lie at your door unless you will be good enough to explain," he answered. "The high cost of living can't have struck Salonica if that little allowance was sufficient for all of this." He looked about the luxurious apartment significantly, and Natalika smiled and shook her head.

"Not a penny of your money has gone to pay for these things," she said quietly. "Isolated as my country seems from the outside world, there is always a way of communication. News of my plight speedily reached Gusinje and Plava, and you had not left Salonica two days before men of my family arrived. It is a long story, gentlemen, but I will tell it to you if you wish to hear, and will assure me that I may rely upon your discretion?" She looked inquiringly from one to the other, and both of the men made eager protestation of interest and secrecy.

It *was* a long story which she told them—a tale which had its inception back in the Dark Ages, on that bloody field of Kossova which gave the victorious Turks dominion over all of eastern Europe. To Rankin, whose many missions for Mr. Cooper had been principally in Oriental countries, and who had lived more romance than Sir Walter Scott wrote, there was nothing startling nor incredible in it; but Jones-Morgan, the unimaginative descendant of practical Welshmen and stolid Dutch burghers, found it a condensation of all the tales of the Thousand and One Nights. The atmosphere in which it was told was absolutely Oriental; the very air was redolent of the strange perfumes of the East, and Natalika, sitting tailorwise on a divan, with her small bare feet only half concealed beneath the filmy folds of her fantastic costume, might well have been the reincarnation of that Scheherazade whose glib tongue kept her head upon her shoulders.

A month earlier Jones-Morgan would have listened to it with perhaps more amusement, but certainly less of conviction; for it squared in its details with none of the experiences of the life of an idle, young, rich American which he had led. But in the short space of time since he had first embarked on this mad quest he had learned much, for underneath the appearance of languid ennui there was hidden a faculty of sharp observation and as much native shrewdness as any of his Knickerbocker ancestors had ever displayed in dealing with the Indians. In two days at Cettinje he had looked on mankind freed from the mask of modern civilization; for little Montenegro was fighting for bare existence against vastly superior odds, and when a man or a nation fights for life the conventions are forgotten.

On the little steamer which brought them to Salonica he had herded with those strange adventurers who follow stranger trades along the Mediterranean littoral, men who lived by their wits and accepted the favors and buffets of fortune with equal equanimity, who risked their lives for a song, and at the end usually died peacefully in their beds. Dozens of stories of their lives Rankin—who seemed to have at least a bowing acquaintance with every one east of Palermo—had told him during the voyage; the mildest and most commonplace of them filled with more real romance and strange happenings than all the chronicles of the Round Table, and all of them carrying his imagination to realms and regions of which he had never dreamed.

But all of those narratives were tales of selfishness; or tremendous risks run, of incredible hardships endured, of unspeakable villainies perpetrated and atrocious crimes committed for personal gain and advancement. Natalika's relation was no less replete with incidents of danger, with instances of horrible

tortures stoically endured, of gruesome deaths met with smiling faces, of pain and poverty borne without murmuring; but the shadows were contrasted by the high lights of a pure patriotism, the sufferings and sacrifices justified by the glorious independence they had sustained.

The young American listened as a man fascinated; for woven through that story were the names with which he had become familiar through his perusal of those volumes which the English genealogists had compiled in tracing the family tree of David Lloyd Jones-Morgan. In New York those volumes with their heraldic blazonry had seemed ridiculous, and never for a moment had he regarded seriously the claims to royal or noble ancestry which they made for his father's people; but every step he had taken since he left the practicality of New York behind him had seemed to lead along the road to Yesterday, and in her story he reached the inevitable end of that path, the Time that Was.

The story lost nothing in the telling, for Natalika spoke from her heart. Rankin listened attentively, but with as little emotion as a banker betrays in reading the weekly trade review which will influence his loans and discounts. The dramatic element in it made no appeal to him, but he was alert to note every point which might be of use in the interest of his employers, for he looked at the business in hand purely as a business proposition. But Jones-Morgan, who had known no greater adventures than he had met with in the shooting of big game, no more strenuous effort than a hard-fought polo match, and no graver perils than attacks upon his inheritance, found in it a new world, and yet a world which seemed vaguely familiar. The names of those old crusaders, soldiers of fortune and mercenaries who had fought against the advance of the Crescent, and whose descendants still maintained the old feudal strongholds in the mountain fastnesses of High Albania, had been bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh if dependence could be placed upon the researches of the modern genealogists, and as he listened the very flattering results of their labors seemed less and less apocryphal.

"And I, as you knew me when you first saw me in the harem at the Yildiz Kiosk, was the logical product of all of this history," she continued, after a most graphic description of the long struggle which had maintained the virtual independence of her wild country. "Shut off for centuries from intercourse with the outside world, my people have stood still. But with the inventions of modern civilization arrayed against them the mountaineers could not hope to maintain the isolation which had been their safety. There could be no holding of the passes against modern artillery, and we learned that in Constantinople they were planning to send an army corps against us. That is why I was selected for the yearly tribute to the Yildiz Kiosk; I, the daughter of the most powerful Christian house in Albania. Abdul Hamid was the strong man of Turkey; with his removal the Ottoman empire would be a house divided against itself, and in those dissensions lay the safety of our country. And I was chosen to be the agent of that removal, to gain entrance to the harem—the one refuge where he felt safe from the assassination of which he lived in constant dread—and to win liberty from attack for Albania with one stroke of my dagger."

Rankin smiled grimly as he watched her; for for the moment she was the Natalika he had known—a beautiful but primitive girl clutching at the hilt of the dagger in her girdle as instinctively as a timid child clings to its mother's skirts at a suggestion of the bogey man. She caught that smile, and a flush came to her face as she quickly dropped her hand from the weapon.

"I should have played that part to the tragic end if circumstances had not made it unnecessary," she continued frankly. "Between the time I left Albania and my arrival at the Yildiz Kiosk, the political revolution had accomplished the task to which my dag-

ger was consecrated. The Young Turks had deposed Abdul Hamid from power, and were too busily occupied in wrangling over the spoils of their victory to think of the conquest of Albania. The weapon which was to have served Albania was valuable only to protect Albania's daughter, and you can testify that it served its purpose. Abdul Hamid quailed before it, and it gained me a quick release from the horrors of his harem. You have cause to remember the rest, Mr. Rankin."

"I have a very vivid recollection of the dagger," admitted the legioner, grinning. "But of the real story all of this is only the prelude, Natalika. Will you tell us how this miracle has been accomplished?"

She laughed as she nodded assent.

"I imagine that you have guessed much of it—it is so simple," she answered. "As I told you, you had hardly left Salonica before representatives of my people arrived. It would have been perfectly simple for them to have smuggled me back to our mountains; but they were shrewd enough to realize that it was the part of wisdom to take advantage of the conditions as they found them. Except as a despotism the Turkish empire could not exist, and it was evident that when it crumbled the Crescent would be driven from Europe. And then, if little Albania was to retain its autonomy, and not be parceled out to the Balkan states as the spoils of victory, it must come from under the Turkish yoke as an independent state. The different tribes were united only in opposition to invasion from without; differences in origin and religion separated them widely in internal affairs, and no one of them was strong enough to conquer the others. It was inevitable that the future ruler should be chosen from outside its boundaries, for only an outsider could hope to win the allegiance of all the different factions.

"And so, gentlemen, it was decided that I should remain in Salonica, and be educated in the affairs of that great outside world of which my countrymen know so little, that when the time came to make that selection we should not be entirely in the dark as to the qualifications of the aspirants. The almost farcical circumstances had made it easy; I was ostensibly the property of an American, and the Turks believe your people capable of any madness and eccentricity. Their spies had heard Mr. Rankin tell the hotel people that he would be responsible for my bills, and they believed that it was his money which was paying for everything. And so for nearly four years I have remained here, an exile from my country, that I might learn to serve her in her need. My people ransacked Europe to find the best teachers for me, and until the Greeks invested Salonica every hour of every day was occupied with one or the other of those instructors. I have been diligent, and, I hope, successful, and now——" She paused abruptly, and looked searchingly from one to the other of her auditors.

"And now?" they exclaimed in unison. Natalika laughed, and slipped gracefully from the divan on which she had perched. She disappeared for a moment behind one of the *mushabiyah* screens, and when she came back she held out to Rankin a leathern bag whose weight taxed the strength of her wrist.

"I must pay my indebtedness before asking favors," she said, as he took it. "You will find that correct, Mr. Rankin; it is the money which you have sent to these rapacious hotel keepers. I have had quite a time with them about it; they claimed that they were entitled to it in payment for the board of Zuleika and Nadriola, whom you neglected to ransom before you left. The brigands have sent a collector regularly every week, and threatened to send the girls back unless their board was paid. Ornithopulus & Schmidt chose the lesser of two evils, and paid the bills."

Rankin grinned as he deposited the bag of sequins on a taboret.

"Good old brigands!" he said admiringly. "I'm glad to know that there is some one who can even up with Greek and Swiss hotel keepers. I shall attend to them later. But first your business, Natalika?" She hesitated for a mo-

ment, and again her keen eyes searched their faces.

"Gentlemen, I wish to return to Albania," she said quietly. "Now that Salonica is in the hands of the Greeks that may seem simple; but there are complications which I wish to avoid. I have told you that there are many applicants for the throne of Albania, and more than one of them knows that when the time comes I shall have no small share in making the decision. Already I have received a half dozen offers of escort; but they were all made by those with axes to grind; supporters of one or another aspirant for the crown. I have refused them all; but it is impossible for a woman to travel alone through the country as it is today. Outside of the garrisoned towns it is chaos; there is no government, no order. The country is overrun by brigands and the disbanded Turkish soldiery, and beyond Monastir there is no law but the will of the strongest. Outside of Scutari, all of Low Albania is held by the Montenegrins and Servians, and neither King Nicholas nor King Peter would willingly let me reach our frontier.

"I shall be quite frank with you. By scheming and playing one against the other with the rulers of the Balkan states—who each and all have a pretender for the Albanian throne—I could open a free and safe path for myself to the frontier; but I should reach it compromised by promises. It would be even more embarrassing to accept the personal services of any one of the many ambitious men who have volunteered. But you two gentlemen are Americans; there can be no possible suspicion that you are working for selfish ends, and I had hoped that you might perhaps——"

There was a most charming and significant smile of invitation upon her lips when she paused; but it faded, and a look of perplexity came to her face; for, instead of the eager proffer of services which she had anticipated, the two men maintained an embarrassing silence. They were as confused and shamefaced as a pair of youngsters detected in a surreptitious raid on the family jam closet, and looked neither at her nor at each other.

"Can it be possible that all I have heard of America and its people is false?" she asked, with just a touch of scorn in her voice, after waiting vainly for them to speak. "Is it not true that there every woman is a queen, and every man as gallant as a Galahad?"

Rankin was the first to find his tongue.

"Well, we've sure got a few queens over there; but, owing to the trusts, the high cost of living, and a few things like that, most of our young men are too busy scratching for dollars to go galahading around," he explained apologetically. "It has to be business before pleasure, and that's just my fix. There is nothing I should enjoy more than bucking the center of that brigand and disbanded soldiery aggregation to take you back to Albania; but I've been paid in advance for another job which looks as if it was pretty nearly man's size. I'm not at liberty to——"

"Hold on, Rankin!" interrupted Jones-Morgan. "We can't let our private affairs interfere when there is a lady in the case. Without the slightest mental reservation, I'm willing to call our little business off."

Rankin shook his head sorrowfully.

"It takes two to make a contract, and I happen to know the other party to yours," he objected. "You couldn't get J. Cooper, Esquire, to loosen up on a dollar of that money you have paid over. He reads the Waverley novels and G. P. R. James when he is hungry for romance, and——"

"Jabez Cooper! Why, man alive, Jabez Cooper will not be born for another three hundred years!" exclaimed Jones-Morgan, and the legioner turned to him quickly, startled as much by the change in his voice as by the absurdity of his statement.

He stood there, a man transfigured; the last lingering trace of ennui had vanished from his face, and his eyes were eloquent of a new-found joy of living.

"No, not for three hundred years, at

least," he repeated gayly. "Jabez Cooper and all his works belong to the prosy, commonplace twentieth century; but in the service of Natalika we shall destroy the history of three hundred years, and return to feudalism!"

Perhaps Rankin might have raised further objection had he been given opportunity; but Jones-Morgan made it impossible to retract. Immensely relieved, Natalika had impulsively extended her hand to him, and, dropping to one knee, he imprinted upon it the kiss which consecrated him to her service.

"And right there is where that 'Down to Gehenna' proposition blows up," grumbled Rankin to himself; but when Natalika smiled at him, and held out the other hand, it seemed entirely natural that he should follow his fellow adventurer's example.

CHAPTER IV.

LEFT FOR DEAD.

It was not an easy matter to obtain permission to pass the military cordon which the victorious Greeks had drawn about the captured city, and it was even more difficult to obtain transportation on the little, single-track railroad to Monastir over which the allies were hurrying troops and munitions to the Montenegrins before Scutari. But Rankin was a veritable wizard in smoothing out difficulties and overcoming apparently insurmountable obstacles, and knew to a hair's weight the value of a gold piece in obtaining favors from those who had the power to grant them. The capture of Salonica had been rich in glory, but poor in material reward, for it was too much under the eyes of the civilized world to permit of the looting which had been practiced in the interior, and the Greeks are avaricious.

Even gold in the quantity which Rankin was prepared to scatter was powerless to purchase luxuries where no luxuries existed, however, and it was in a freight car attached to a long troop train that Natalika and her two cavaliers left the coast for the mysterious interior. Half of the car was occupied by three very serviceable little mountain horses which the legioner had purchased; but Natalika accepted the equine companionship and the primitive traveling accommodation with complete sang-froid and good nature. Jones-Morgan, accustomed from his cradle to such luxury as only a rich American knows, seemed equally oblivious to the lack of comfort, and Rankin watched him even more curiously than he did the girl. From the time of that first interview with Natalika he had undergone a strange change; a transformation which the legioner could not understand. The chronic boredom with which he had been afflicted had disappeared; but he was curiously absent-minded and silent. He seemed like a man struggling to adjust himself mentally to an entirely changed environment in which he found just enough which was vaguely familiar to confuse him.

In all of the bustle of preparation Rankin had naturally been the man of action. His mastery of the language and his knowledge of the people with whom it was necessary to deal had given him a tremendous advantage, and in the necessary consultations with Natalika his companion had been practically ignored by them both; but two or three times he had volunteered suggestions which were wonderfully helpful, and which seemed to come to him as if by inspiration; for they could have been prompted by no previous teaching of experience. They were too busily occupied to attach significance to that at the time; but once the difficulties in Salonica were overcome, and they were safely beyond the Greek lines, there was nothing that they could do but resign themselves to inactivity until the tiresome journey was completed.

Three days were required for that journey which in ordinary times consumed six hours; for they could travel only in daylight, and every few miles the soldiers were turned out to rebuild culverts and relay portions of the track which the fanatical population of the

country had destroyed during the night. And during that time Rankin found himself as much ignored as Jones-Morgan had been in Salonica, for Natalika and the young New Yorker seemed to be mutually fascinated with each other. There was apparently little of sentiment in that fascination, but each seemed to be studying and watching the other and tentatively reaching for a bond of common interest of whose existence a subtle instinct warned them.

With an amazing facility Jones-Morgan was picking up from her a smattering of the Albanian speech; not that mongrel conglomeration of the lingua franca, Italian, and German which is spoken on the Montenegrin and Austrian borders, but the pure Albanian of the highlands. More than once the girl was startled by his readiness and aptness in catching the very difficult pronunciation and strange construction, and there was something almost uncanny in his quick and sympathetic understanding of many of the medieval customs and traditions of her people which foreigners ordinarily dismissed as unpleasant survivals of a barbarism which the outside world had long outgrown.

Of the written law Albania had none; but in a country where every man is a walking arsenal of deadly weapons when he goes abroad there must naturally be a rigid code to prevent extermination of the entire population, and in Natalika's tales of her people it stood revealed as a crude survival of the unwritten laws of medieval chivalry. Even Rankin, whose large experience in semibarbarous Oriental countries had taught familiarity with many gruesome things, was a trifle aghast at some of the details which she related of the habits and customs of the mountaineers; but Jones-Morgan accepted them as commonplaces, without betraying the slightest wonderment.

During that long railway journey to Monastir there was nothing to be gained by planning ahead, for they were ignorant of the conditions which confronted them beyond the former Turkish fortress at the railway's end. The object of their expedition was to reach the tribe of Zatriejebac, an Albanian clan which had persistently clung to Christianity in spite of Moslem fanaticism and persecution, and which for centuries had held the passes which gave access to Gusinje and Plava from the Montenegrin frontier. Natalika had assured them that once under the protection of the men of Zatriejebac she would be entirely safe, and Rankin had thought of nothing beyond placing her there; perhaps because there was a little matter of two mountain ranges inhabited by hostile tribesmen to be crossed and the Servian and Montenegrin armies to be outwitted before it could be accomplished. Jones-Morgan, however, apparently gave no thought to the immediate dangers and difficulties ahead of them, seemingly taking it for granted that Rankin would pull them through unscathed; but under the influence of Natalika's stories of her fatherland he lived in a world of the future curiously mingled with a world of the past; a world to which the first jealously guarded pass of the Albanian highlands was to be the portal.

And, hopeless as winning through looked in prospect, and incredible as their adventures seemed afterward in retrospect, Rankin did pull them through; not entirely unscathed, perhaps; but without serious damage. Once outside of the outposts of Monastir they were in a land where every man's hand was against them, and their only chance for safety lay in quick flight when numbers were overwhelmingly disproportionate, and in savage fighting when flight was no longer possible. In the zone where the allies had fought the Turks there was comparative safety, for vultures and carrion crows were the only living things. The miserable villages had been so thoroughly ravaged by the soldiers that there was nothing left for the gleaning of the human jackals who invariably hang about an army's skirts. Those villages were things of horror which they soon learned to avoid, for the victorious Christians, with the memory of centuries of Moslem atrocities in their

minds, had out-Heroded Herod in the cruelties of their reprisals, and only heaps of distorted, mutilated bodies and blackened ruins of houses remained.

In such a progress there could be little deference paid to sex, and Natalika played a man's part, using the weapons to which she had been trained from childhood quite as effectively as her masculine companions did theirs when they were obliged to fight, and bearing stoically the discomforts and hardships of the dangerous journey. The country which they traversed was strange to her, but in crossing the ranges her mountaineer instinct was invaluable to them, discerning practicable passes where they could find nothing but impenetrable walls, leading them by goat paths up the faces of sheer cliffs, and urging her sure-footed little horse down declivities which in contemplation appeared suicidal.

Rankin was tacitly accorded leadership in the ordinary circumstances, which resulted in Jones-Morgan and the girl being thrown very much together; but, while Natalika was even more attractive in her rough and masculine campaigning costume of fustanella than she had been in the filmy silks, and the young American was sufficiently good looking to find favor in most feminine eyes, there remained always that strange lack of sentimental interest which such close propinquity might reasonably have been expected to breed.

It is true that after Rankin had bribed their way through the Servian lines, Jones-Morgan thrashed to a frazzle the young hussar lieutenant who escorted them to the outposts, and attempted to ravish an osculatory tribute from Natalika's lips in addition to the American gold pieces which jingled in his sabertasche. But, while he administered that beating in a most workmanlike and masterly manner, he went about it as dispassionately as he had fought his way to the amateur championship in the squared circle, and looked for no guerdon of reward from her eyes. Also, he was invariably as deferential as circumstances would permit of, and made no secret of his strong desire to be as much as possible by her side; but there was no suggestion of tenderness in his attitude toward her.

In fact, he was usually a silent listener when they were together, and never as interested and happy as when she was relating some romantic story from that half-legendary history of Albania which has come down by word of mouth from generation to generation; tales of the mysterious Lek Dukaghani who ruled the warring factions with an iron hand and a wise head when the crusaders, hurled back from Palestine, found refuge in the black mountains; chronicles of Skanderbeg, the last Albanian ruler who had been strong enough to impose his will on all the clans.

Rankin, whose every waking moment was filled with anxiety for the safety of the expedition in the present and the immediate future, was frankly bored by those relations of the barbaric glories and atrocities of the past, and usually dropped off to sleep during the narrations; but in Jones-Morgan Natalika had an untiring, eager, and appreciative auditor. Almost unconsciously she came to use more and more Albanian words and phrases as she told them, and when, after nearly two months of close companionship, only the Montenegrin army lay between them and the outposts of the Zatriejebacs, the American had so far mastered her language that when they were alone together they rarely spoke English.

And then, after escaping incredible dangers from the brigands in the mountains and the roving bands of deserters and outlaws in the lowlands, the three travelers were brought to an abrupt halt and overwhelmed with disaster on the very edge of the promised land for which they were striving. The clansmen of the hills had held aloof from the fighting between the troops of their nominal ruler, the sultan, and the followers of King Nicholas, watching from their mountain airie the hardy Montenegrins drive before them the Turkish garrisons of Low Albania to the protection of the walls of Scutari.

When opportunity offered they swooped down on a commissary or ammunition train from Cettinje to the besiegers, and to guard against those predatory raids the Montenegrin commanders found it necessary to maintain strong patrols along the line of communication between their capital and the front.

Trained for years in the treacherous and fierce warfare of the border, the soldiers of those patrols were adepts in concealment, and, in spite of all their precautions—or, perhaps because they were just a trifle careless in their eagerness—the trio rode unsuspectingly into an ambuscade within sight of the outposts of Natalika's people.

One glance sufficed to convince Rankin that escape was impossible, for every bowlder had served to conceal a Montenegrin, and although they were more bandits than soldiers in equipment and appearance they closed in on their captives with a system which told of discipline Every man of them was a sharpshooter, and a dash for liberty on their exhausted horses would have invited annihilation. With a sharp word of warning to his companions, Rankin threw up his hands in token of surrender, and in obedience to a harsh command from the Montenegrin officer dismounted from his horse.

Natalika was equally prompt to obey. Tears of disappointment came to her eyes as she looked longingly at a blockhouse perched on the mountainside above them, a little outpost fortress which she knew was held by her own people; but against such odds resistance was useless. Diplomacy and bribery might obtain them safe passage later; but resistance now meant inevitable destruction, and she yielded with what grace she could muster.

Only Jones-Morgan remained in the saddle, and only the fact that he sat impassive saved him from instant death. All that day since the mist-capped highlands of Albania had been visible on the horizon he had been curiously silent and absent-minded, and now he sat quietly on his horse, his eyes fixed on the blockhouse which guarded the first of the passes, like a man in a trance. From lips which scarcely moved came a low, crooning chant, which sounded almost like an invocation, and he was evidently oblivious to the savage, threatening faces about him, and the impatient orders to dismount.

Natalika looked at him anxiously, for she knew the temper of the Montenegrins, and understood the import of their threats; but when she caught sight of his transformed face, and heard the words of the half-barbaric incantation, she started forward impulsively, her dark face suddenly blanched, her eyes dilated, and a cry of wonder on her lips.

Rough hands seized her and dragged her back; but her cry had carried and roused the young American to a sudden fury, without awakening him to the sense of the futility of resistance. With a shout of defiance he wheeled his jaded mount, and urged it against the squad of soldiers gathered about the girl—an exhibition of chivalric madness for which the Montenegrins were totally unprepared. Two men went down before the impact, and then, rearing to avoid them, the wiry little horse received in its own brain the bullet from the officer's revolver which had been aimed at the head of the rider. Together man and beast came to earth almost at Natalika's feet; the flying hoofs in the poor beast's death agony scattering their captors as Jones-Morgan quickly extricated himself from the entangling stirrups.

The quarters were too close for shooting, but the Montenegrins were well schooled in actual hand-to-hand fighting, and quickly recovered from the surprise of the unexpected resistance. Rankin, while cursing the folly of his companion, was not the man to remain quiet when that companion was in action, and with a joyous whoop he had jumped forward to assist him; but, despite his size and strength, he had been overpowered by numbers, and lay prostrate beneath a cursing, struggling heap of his captors. Even Natalika had endeavored to help; but a grinning Montenegrin had deftly removed the

weapons from her sash, and without them she was as powerless as a babe.

No personal courage could avail against such odds, and even though Jones-Morgan seemed possessed of the strength which comes from madness, the number of his adversaries was bound to conquer. The Montenegrins realized that, and were generous enough to hold their hands while they called to him again to submit; but even as he struggled to his knees he struck out savagely at those within reach. Only half erect, he had reached out, and with a sinewy hand grasped the throat of the officer who had shot at him; but the grip suddenly relaxed, for one of the soldiers had gained sufficient elbow-room to enable him to bring his heavy rifle butt with a cruel, crushing force against his unprotected head. Without a sound he pitched forward, and lay face downward at Natalika's feet, and a wail of sorrow came from her as she saw the fingers, which had clutched convulsively at the sparse grass, cease their twitching, and become ominously still.

The whole struggle had occupied but a minute of time, and it required not much longer to reduce Rankin to submission, for after one glance at the prostrate figure of his companion he stood unresisting and with bowed head. Mad as the resistance had been, the Montenegrins paid to their fallen adversary the tribute which bravery always wins from the brave, and without relaxing their vigilance they offered no objection when Natalika and the legioner gently disengaged themselves from their grasp, and knelt on either side of the prostrate man. With practiced fingers Rankin felt for the merest flutter of a pulse, and then, without speaking, turned the motionless body on its back, and with tender reverence straightened the distorted limbs.

Natalika, her face set and white, assisted him, and it was her finger tips which gently closed the staring eyes. Then, with trembling hands, she drew from beneath her tunic a simple but curiously worked crucifix of silver, which had hung about her neck from a slender silver chain, and laid it upon the broad chest.

"That is a tribute to the brave man who would have become the King of Albania," she said so quietly in English that her words were audible only to Rankin. "It is the crucifix upon which Skanderbeg swore to maintain the freedom of his country—an oath which he died in attempting to keep. It was not the man who accompanied you from America who died here for me. I can't explain it, for I myself do not understand; but it was Skanderbeg himself who answered my unfortunate and accursed cry. That is my tribute to him as the reincarnation of all that was noblest and finest in the history of my country; this is the farewell of a broken-hearted girl to the chivalrous American gentleman whom she loved."

She bent over and kissed the cold, bloodstained forehead, and then rose to her feet, forestalling the command of the officer, who was becoming impatient at the delay.

In the blockhouse far above them, and just beyond rifle shot, there was evidence of activity, and the figures of mountaineers could be distinguished hurrying down the steep paths to reenforce the garrison. The Montenegrin officer was cursing at the evil fortune which had forced them to disclose themselves, for he attached but little importance to his capture, and the coming of this troublesome trio had forced his hand. Under cover of darkness he had carefully concealed his detachment, and all through that long day he and his men had lain hidden in the rocks, planning to intercept a raiding party from that very blockhouse, which had proved a thorn in the flesh to their army. Only through surprise and ambush could he hope to be successful in teaching the mountaineers their much-needed lesson, and now that they were aware of the presence of his comparatively small force it was the part of wisdom to withdraw it speedily. He was about to give the command to march when one of his men who had been watching Natalika closely said something to him in a low voice, and he

withdrew his hand from the neck of Rankin's horse, which he had appropriated as the spoils of war, and walked over to her.

"You are Natalika, the daughter of Bairaktar?" he demanded eagerly.

She threw back her head, and looked at him defiantly.

"Yes; I am Natalika, daughter of Bairaktar, the chief of the clan of Zatriejebac!" she replied. "If you are of the border you know our saying, 'As brave as the men of Zatriejebac,' and you know that a bloody toll will be exacted of those who harm one of its daughters. With me you may do what you wish, for you have already earned the penalty in killing the man I loved!"

"Pouf; *that* for your blood toll!" exclaimed the Montenegrin, with a contemptuous gesture. "We shall have a word to say to your highlanders after we have driven out your masters, the nazims. 'To-day to me, to-morrow to thee,' is one of our sayings, and this to-day makes the fortune of Captain Buto, your humble servant. Papa Nicholas will give you a warm welcome; you will be more valuable to him than a battery of siege guns—and as we have disturbed that hornets' nest on the mounside we shall take you to him before your friends come swarming about us."

An hour later the skirmishers of the Albanians advancing cautiously in the gathering dusk found only the body of the young American on the scene of the conflict which had puzzled them as they watched it from the blockhouse.

"Cursed luck; a dead man for all our trouble!" exclaimed the first of the hillmen who came across him.

"Aye, Kuc; and it's poor gleaning there will be in his pockets after those lowland thieves have had first searching," agreed his companion. "But there is always the chance, and perhaps we can find what manner of man the carrion was when it lived. Nazim he was not with such a build, nor is he of the race of these Montenegrin swine. A giaour, by all that's holy, Kuc, unless I'm mistaken."

Kuc had dropped on one knee beside the body as his companion struck a match to aid in the search, but he jumped to his feet and gave a cry of surprise as he held aloft the crucifix which Natalika had worn about her neck.

"A giaour! Then how comes a giaour by the sacred crucifix of Skanderbeg?" he exclaimed.

As startled as his companion, Lazzo bent over and scanned the face more closely.

"Aye, Kuc, how came he by it?" he answered. "How came he by the crucifix? How came be by that face—the face of Skanderbeg, which looks out from a dozen tapestries on the walls of the banquet hall of Bairaktar's castle?"

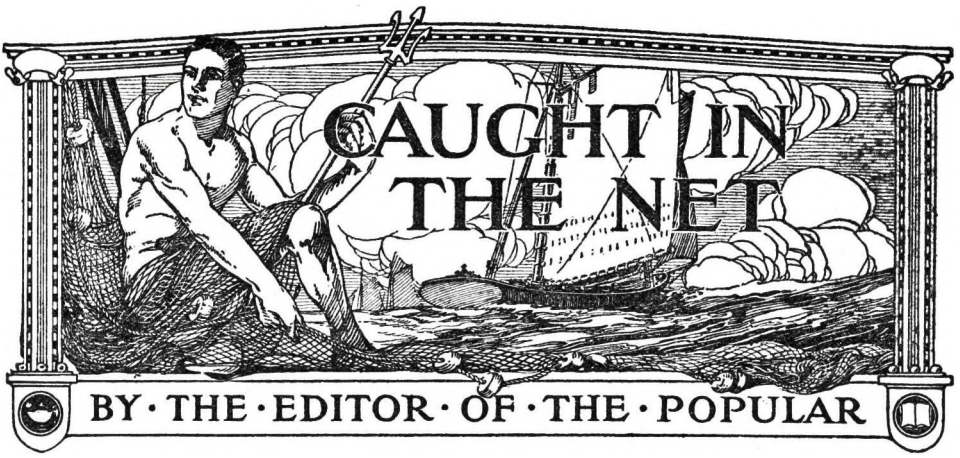
Without waiting for an answer, he threw back his head, and gave a peculiar call, the summons which would bring to his side every man of the clan of Zatriejebac within hearing. Out of the dusk they came, a dozen men of huge stature, among them the leader of the band. A dozen words explained to him the reason of the call, and with wondering eyes he gazed on the still face of the American.

"This is a matter for our chief!" he said curtly. "My brothers, it is not meet that a man who wore the crucifix of Skanderbeg on his breast and the likeness of Skanderbeg on his face should lie in this accursed lowland soil."

An hour later the garrison of the blockhouse listened wonderingly. There had been no sound of conflict from the plain below, and yet from the defile came the solemn chant of the dead—the chant of the men of Zatriejebac who carry the bodies of their clansmen who have fallen with honor on the field of battle.

TO BE CONTINUED.

The second part of this story will appear in the December Month-End POPULAR, on sale two weeks hence, November 23rd.



Steel

FOR every dollar the United States Steel Corporation has paid out in wages and salaries since its foundation, it has paid more than fifty cents in interest on its bonds and in dividends to holders of its preferred and common shares. This is the sworn statement of W. J. Filbert, comptroller of the Steel Trust. The interest and dividends have averaged two hundred and twenty-two thousand nine hundred and forty dollars a day, nine thousand two hundred and seventy dollars an hour, or one hundred and fifty-four dollars and fifty cents a minute since the corporation started business.

There has been greater stability to the steel industry since the giant corporation came into being. Prices of steel products have not fluctuated so violently as in former times, the trade has not been disturbed by rate wars, and order, system, and economy have taken the place of the irregularities that were common previously.

Financially the Steel Corporation has been a gigantic success. The holders of its securities have received more in ten years than the whole property is worth on a reasonable valuation. In all that it has accomplished, however, labor has had little profit. The workers in the steel mills toil twelve hours a day, as they did before the Steel Trust came into existence. A high-class steel maker gets less pay to-day than fifteen years ago, and the cost of living is higher now than then.

The twelve-hour work day is un-American. The one-to-two proportion of interest and dividends to wages and salaries in such an industry is unfair. Corporations are crying out against restraint and restriction by State and government. The Steel Corporation never can hope for peace until it learns more of justice.

Vision

IF every child who can write a good composition were taught the real value of seeing and observing, the new generation in this country would produce writers of wonderful power. And, almost by the same token, if a child who shows unusual ability for observing and commenting upon persons and things were taught the rudiments of real writing, practically the same results would follow.

Without the ability to observe closely and to learn with the accurate eye and the discerning mind, a man might have the most wonderful command of the English language possible, and still not be able to produce one big literary work. And the man who can see things and persons as they really are may turn out a book of lasting value, even if his

strictly literary power has distinct limitations.

From observation comes knowledge, and, without observation, real knowledge of the world is absolutely impossible. If a child were taught to count the number of steps between the first floor and the second of his home, to learn all the varying hues and colors of the foliage in spring and autumn, to know by their names the flowers in the park, to detect and to relate the mannerisms of his playmates and of his elders, to take a comprehensive, although immature, view of everything that touches his young mind, he would confront the world in his young manhood with a mind better trained than is the case of almost any writer in this country.

Art, whether it be in the drama, or with the brush, or by the pen, is an instrument for good, and a marvelous incentive to the imagination of the world, only so far as it reproduces accurately and distinctly the things of the world. This principle is at the foundation of all great art! It may be played upon, and decorated, and variegated in a thousand ways, but at the basis of all lasting art is truth. There are actors and actresses who have achieved fame by going down into the slums or up into high society, and learning by direct contact the mannerisms of voice, laughter, and gesture of that "type" which the actor or actress was seeking to reproduce on the stage. Walter Scott thought nothing of riding sixty miles to see exactly how the ivy grew on a ruined abbey. Guy de Maupassant spent hours roaming the streets of Paris for the slightest hints that might serve him as local color in his stories and novels. Thus, countless instances could be given of greatness that was due to the exercise of this physical and mental power.

The great tendency nowadays is to train the young man or woman in writing, and to let it go as a hit-or-miss proposition, whether the power of observation is exercised or even possessed. If it were taught to the child, boy or girl, there would spring up among us a class of writers with clearer vision and deeper thought, and, consequently, more moving power than is now the rule. Every parent who has a child with the indication of either a tendency toward writing or a gift for observation, can, by following the simple rules we have laid down, add untold riches to the literature of America.

❀❀❀❀

High Living

THE present is the most extravagant period in the history of the world. Louis XIV. left a great record as a spender. So did Lord Hastings. So did Charles James Fox. A thousand columns of type were given to that poor, weak creature, "Coal Oil" Johnny, yet to-day, in New York, there are scores of men who are little known to the public who spend more on one item of expense than did any of the famous spendthrifts, except the Grand Monarque, on all their fads and all their follies.

One man spends more than seven hundred and fifty dollars a day for transportation. He has forty automobiles, and when he gets tired of his autos he rides to his Wall Street office in the subway with the common herd. He has a yacht. When that is in commission the cost is approximately three hundred dollars a day additional. He has four homes: One in Madison Avenue, one—the most wonderful in Manhattan—far uptown, and two in the country. His family is small, and yet his living expenses are two thousand dollars a day. This is more than Washington had for the commissariat of his army from Trenton to Yorktown. Once a year he sells all his cars for about twenty per cent of what he paid for them, and gets new models.

There are hundreds of New Yorkers who have from six to sixteen automobiles. In addition, some of them, who have estates on Long Island, have flying machines. To them the automobile has become a necessity. They must have a touring car, an electric, a runabout, and a limousine for their country homes;

and they must, too, have a set of cars for town use. There is style in cars, as there is in clothes. To shop in a runabout is as bad form as to go to a ball in negligee.

Pierre Lorillard once was asked how much money a man should have to live like a gentleman. "A thousand dollars a day," he replied, "and expenses." That was long before the auto or the wonderful spread of luxury. Prince Pierre was a grand little spender himself. He knew.

Awake at the Turns

IT is a good thing to dream about buttercups and sweet clover—but not while you are swapping horses. Alertness is a big element of success in any of the relations of life. A man whose mind gets around to a proposition just in time to say "Hey?" at the finish, is not in strong demand for ten-thousand-dollar jobs. A fellow who has to unravel the whole skein before he can tell what it is made of and its value, will not burn up the world by his business success. One to whom the simplest situation has to be diagramed before he understands the relations of its parts, is not even good company.

Alertness is not jumpiness, nor necessarily speediness; but a concentration which brings to bear all the sources of the mind upon the matter in hand. This concentration is on the first part of the proposition, not the last. That is the distinguishing mark of the alert man. He brings his attention fully and at once to the proposition. In a very few minutes his mind has grasped what is coming in all its details, and he knows whether it is worth while. The inalert man does not pay attention until something big or striking arouses his interest. Then he has lost the clew, and is muddled. Not only does such a man lose many of his best opportunities by not grasping their significance until they are by, but he is a weariness to the flesh with his everlasting, "Now go over that again, won't you?"

Alertness is not solely a gift of Heaven to quick minds. It is a habit, the exercise of sense. Many quick minds are not alert, because they are off woolgathering while they are in a cotton field. Many slow minds are alert, because from sheer force of will they concentrate promptly on the proposition before them.

If a man is ever to get to where he wants to go, he must be awake at every turn of the road.

Portrait of a Scientific Sleuth

THE ignorant, prejudiced portion of the public sees the Handwriting Expert as a man who will contradict himself, who can be marshaled on either side of a law case, a man who jumps at conclusions. It is from men of exuberant fancy that the public has constructed this idea of the experts—from vague, dreamy natures swimming in seas of the unknowable.

Let us give a picture of one such flamboyant expert and his box of tricks. His name is Albert H. Hamilton, and he calls himself "That Man from Auburn." He claims spiritual kinship with Sherlock Holmes, and a facial resemblance. He says that he qualifies as an expert witness in twenty-three subjects, of which finger prints, gunshot wounds, bloodstains, and embalming fluids are only a few of the cheerier items. He claims to be a good man to have around during the last sad rites, for, says he, he is a "skilled observer at autopsies." Can't you see him, with that salient profile of his, peering at the silent central figure of the ceremony? Or he releases the fumes of hydrochloric acid upon a sheet of paper, and with a toothpick deduces the age of the handwriting. He tramps with certitude in twilight zones.

But not only is he a mystery monger—he is also a miracle worker. In odd moments when he is resting up from his plunge into the fog, he sells to aging persons "Hamilton's Cream Hair Balsam." "This restores the original beau-

tiful color." It "restores to gray hair a natural color in from fifteen to thirty-six days." And he sells pills which he calls "Cleopatra's Secret—Not a patent medicine, but the prescription of a Queen—A Ladies' Remedy—A Queen's Secret."

About his immobile front break the waves of angry suspicion. The family at dinner read some of the things to which he has testified, and a laugh and a sneer run around the table.

"There's your handwriting expert for you," says dad, with a snicker. "They're all alike, those fellows—their head in the clouds, dreaming. Just listen to this stuff!" And then father reads how Al Hamilton told about a piece of handwriting that a man wrote with "a pen, one nib of which was broken, on a corrugated book."

Some quiet household in Watertown lift the morning paper from the doorstep, and bring it in to the assembled breakfasters.

"Listen, brother," says Sister Grace. "This beats the stuff you're so keen about in Conan Doyle. Here this man Hamilton, of Auburn, can tell who the incendiary was who burned the Paddock house. And how do you think he guesses it? He examines the dirt under the finger nails of the suspected Italian, and finds traces of kerosene!"

Or round the quiet glow of the evening lamp in Penn Yan, Uncle Dudley lines out the "Townsend case," in which Hamilton testified about an agreement forty-seven years old. He said that the agreement and the three signatures attached to it had all been written by the same person, and that that person was a woman. Wonder-working man to thread his way backward through the murk of half a century, and, with the eye of vision, see the moving finger write.

Among his famous flash judgments where men of finer sensibilities acknowledge ignorance are these that follow. They sound like echoes of Poe. He identified a safe blower by eight microscopical ridges on a cake of soap which he claimed were imprints of lines on the suspect's thumb. In the Burbank case, he testified that a man had written certain letters with his left hand and other letters with his right, though the writer in nineteen of the alleged right-hand letters apologized for writing with his left, stating that his right was disabled by rheumatism. One of his rapid-fire decisions led to the arrest of an Italian boy on an accusation of murder. The lad languished in jail for several weeks. Al Hamilton had reported that the bullet which killed a night watchman had been fired through the particular revolver found in the boy's house. Then finally the boy was able to establish a complete alibi, and was discharged.

The Roller Test

THE real test of a man is not when he goes up, but when he comes down. A mere gas bag may sail pretty high for a while; but it takes real stuff for a man to be ground under the heel of the mob and the iron roller of commerce, and get up and go to fighting again.

There are plenty of men who, through fortunate circumstances, go pretty high, yet who could not stand an hour's test of real grueling by fate. They would wilt down into whimpering cowards and abject failures. The final test of character is the things one will not do under any circumstances. There are men we instinctively know would be ground into dust and scattered to the four winds before they would yield in a matter of honor. There are men we know who would face all the disasters and pain that might come without losing their vital grip on life. Their personality is indestructible.

It is this bed-rock quality, this power of ultimate resistance, that marks a man as a real man, whether he shovels coal or sails a million-dollar yacht.

On the Night Wire

By Frank L. Packard

Author of "On the Iron at Big Cloud," Etc.

They took a risk on McGrew's weakness and sent him out to a lonely telegraph station where he couldn't get drunk. What happened in the desolate little structure at Angel Forks is one of the things that will never be forgotten on the Hill Division

REGAN, Tommy Regan, the master mechanic, speaks of it yet; so does Carleton, "Royal" Carleton, the superintendent; and so, for the matter of that, does the Hill Division generally—there's a bit of a smile goes with it, but the smile comes through a sort of feeble thing from the grim set of their lips. They remember it—it is one of the things they have never forgotten—Dan McGrew and the Kid and the night the Circus Special pulled out of Big Cloud with Bull Coussirat and Fatty Hogan in the cab.

This is the story:

Neither the Kid nor McGrew were what you might call born to the Hill Division—neither of them had been brought up with it, so to speak. The Kid came from an Eastern system—and McGrew came from God knows where. To pin McGrew down to anything definite or specific in that regard was something just a little beyond the ability of the Hill Division, but it was fairly evident that where railroads were there McGrew had been—he was old enough, anyway—and he knew his business. When McGrew was sober he was a wizard on the key—but McGrew's shame was drink.

McGrew dropped off at Big Cloud one day, casually, from nowhere, and asked for a job dispatching. A man in those days out in the new West wasn't expected to carry around his birth certificate in his vest pocket—he made good or he didn't in the clothes he stood in, that was all there was to it. They gave him a job assisting the latest new man on the early-morning trick as a sort of test, found that he was better, a long way better, than the latest new man; gave him a regular dispatcher's trick of his own—and thought they had a treasure.

For a month they were warranted in their belief, for all that McGrew personally appeared to be a rather rough card—and then McGrew cut loose. He went into the Blazing Star Saloon one afternoon—and he left it only when deposited outside on the sidewalk as it closed up at four o'clock on the following morning. This was the hour McGrew was supposed to sit in for his trick at the key; but McGrew was quite oblivious to all such considerations. A freight crew, just in and coming up from the yards, carried him home to his boarding house. McGrew got his powers of locomotion back far enough by late afternoon to reach the Blazing Star again—and the performance was repeated—McGrew went the limit. He ended up with a week in the hands of little Doctor McTurk.

McTurk was scientific from the soles of his feet up, and earnestly professional all the rest of the way. When McGrew began to get a glimmering of intelligence again, McTurk went at him red-headed.

"Your heart's bad," he flung at McGrew, and there was no fooling in his voice. "So's your liver—cirrhosis. But mostly your heart. You'll try this just once too often—and you'll go out like a collapsed balloon, out like the snuffing of a candle wick."

McGrew blinked at him.

"I've heard that before," said he indifferently.

"Indeed!" snapped the irascible little doctor.

"Yes," said McGrew, "quite a few times. This ain't my maiden trip. You fellows make me tired. I'm a pretty good man yet, ain't I? And I'm likely to be when you're dead. I've got my job to worry about, now, and that's enough to worry about. Got any idea of what Carleton's said about it?"

"You keep this up," said McTurk sharply, refusing to side-step the point, as, bag in hand, he moved toward the door, "and it won't interest you much what Carleton or anybody else says—— Mark my words, my man."

It was Tommy Regan, fat-paunched, big-hearted, good-natured, who stepped into the breach. There was only one place on this wide earth in Carleton's eyes for a railroad man who drank, and that was a six-foot trench, three feet deep. In Carleton's mind, from the moment he heard of it, McGrew was out. But Regan saved McGrew; and the matter was settled, as many a matter had been settled before, over the nightly game of pedro between the superintendent and the master mechanic, upstairs in the super's office over the station. Incidentally, they played pedro because there wasn't anything else to do nights—Big Cloud in those days wasn't boasting a grand-opera house, and the "movies" were still things of the future.

"He's a pretty rough case, I guess; but give him a chance," said Regan.

"A chance!" exclaimed Carleton, with a hard smile. "Give a dispatcher who drinks a chance—to send a trainload or two of souls into eternity and about a hundred thousand dollars' worth of rolling stock to the junk heap while he's boozing over the key!"

"No," said Regan. "A chance—to make good."

Carleton laid down his hand and stared across the table at the master mechanic.

"Go on, Tommy," he prompted grimly. "What's the answer?"

"Well," said Regan, "he's a past master on the key, we know that—that counts for something. What's the matter with sending him somewhere up the line where he can't get a drink? It might make a man of him, and save the company a good operator at the same time. We're not long on operators."

"H'm!" observed Carleton, with a wry grin, picking up his cards again one by one. "I suppose you've some such place as Angel Forks, for instance, in mind, Tommy?"

"Yes," said Regan. "I was thinking of Angel Forks."

"I'd rather be fired," submitted Carleton dryly.

"Well," demanded Regan, "what do you say? Can he have it?"

"Oh, yes," agreed Carleton, smiling, "he can have *that*—after I've talked to him. We're pretty short of operators, as you say. Perhaps it will work out. It will as long as he sticks, I guess—if he'll take it at all."

"He'll take it," said Regan, "and be glad to get it. What do you bid?"

McGrew had been at Angel Forks—night man there—for perhaps the matter of a month, when the Kid came to Big Cloud fresh from a key on the Penn. They called him the Kid because he looked it. He wasn't past the stage of where he had to shave more than once a week. The Kid they dubbed him on the spot, but his name was Charlie Keene; a thin, wiry little chap, with black hair and a bright, snappy, quick look in his eyes and face. He was pretty good on the key, too; not a master like McGrew—he hadn't had the experience—but pretty good for all that. He could "send" with the best of them, and there wasn't much to complain about in his "taking," either.

The day man at Angel Forks didn't drink—at least his waybill didn't read that way—and they gave him promotion in the shape of a station farther along the line that sized up a little less tomblike, a little less like a buried-alive sepulcher than Angel Forks did. And the Kid, naturally, being young and new to the system, was slated for the worst of it—they sent him up to Angel Forks on

the morning way freight the day after he arrived in Big Cloud.

There was something about the Kid that got the train crew of the way freight right from the start. They liked a man a whole lot and pretty sudden in their rough-and-ready way, those railroaders of the Rockies in those days, or they didn't like him well enough to say a good word for him at his funeral; that's the way it went—and the caboose was swearing by the Kid by the time they were halfway to Angel Forks, where he shifted from the caboose to the cab for the rest of the run.

Against the rules, riding in the cab? Well, perhaps it is—if you're not a railroad man. It depends. Who was going to say anything about it? It was Fatty Hogan himself, poking a long-spouted oil can into the entrails of the Four-twenty-eight, while the crew were throwing out tinned biscuits and canned meats and contract pie for the lunch counter at Elk River, who invited him anyhow.

That's how the Kid came to get acquainted with Hogan and Hogan's mate, Bull Coussirat, who was handling the shovel end of it. Coussirat was an artist in his way, apart from the shovel, and he started in to guy the Kid. He drew a shuddering picture of the desolation and the general lack of what made life worth living at Angel Forks, which wasn't exaggerated because you couldn't exaggerate Angel Forks much in that particular respect; and he told the Kid about Dan McGrew and how headquarters—it wasn't any secret—had turned Angel Forks into what he called a booze fighters' sanitarium. But he didn't break through the Kid's optimism or ambition.

By the time the way freight whistled for Angel Forks, the Kid had Bull Coussirat's seat and Coussirat was doing the listening, while Hogan was leaning toward them to catch what he could of what was going on over the roar and rattle of the train. There was better pay, and, what counted most, better chances for a man who was willing to work for them out in the West than there was in the East, the Kid told them with a quiet, modest sincerity—and that was why he had come out there. He was looking for a train dispatcher's key some day after he had got through station operating, and, after that—well, something better still.

There wasn't any jolly business or blowhard about the Kid. He meant what he said—he was going *up*. And as far as McGrew was concerned he'd get along with McGrew. McGrew, or any other man, wouldn't hold him back from the goal he had his eyes set upon and his mind made up to work for. There was perhaps a little more of the youthful enthusiasm in it that looked more buoyantly on the future than hard-headed experience would; but it was sincere, and they liked him for it—who wouldn't? Bull Coussirat and Fatty Hogan in the days to come had reason to remember that talk in the cab.

Desolate, perhaps, isn't the word to describe Angel Forks—for Angel Forks was pretty enough, if rugged grandeur is counted pretty. Across the track and siding, facing the two-story wooden structure that was the station, the bare, gray rock of a cut through the mountain base reared upward to meet a pine-covered slope and blend with bare, gray rock once more where it made a glaciered peak at the sky line. Behind the station was a sort of plateau, a little valley, green and velvety, bisected by a tumbling, rushing little stream, with the mountains again closing in around it, towering to majestic heights, the sun playing in relief and shadow on the fantastic, irregular, snow-capped summits.

It was pretty enough—no one ever disputed that. But sign of habitation there was not, apart from the little station—not a section man's shanty—just the station. Angel Forks was important to the Transcontinental on one count, and one count only—its siding. Neither freight nor passenger receipts were swelled twelve months in or twelve months out by Angel Forks; but, geographically, the train dispatcher's office back in Big Cloud never lost sight of it—in the heart of the mountains, single-

tracked, mixed trains, locals, way freights, specials and the limiteds that knew no "rights" on earth but a clean-swept track with their crazy fast schedules, met and crossed each other as expediency demanded.

So, in a way, after all, perhaps it *was* desolate—except from the car windows. Horton, the day man that the Kid was relieving, evidently had found it so. He was waiting on the platform with his trunk when the way freight pulled in, and he turned the station over to the Kid without much formality.

"God be with you till we meet again," was about the gist of what Horton said—and he said it with a mixture of sympathy for another's misfortune and an uplift at his own escape from bondage struggling for the mastery, while he waved his hand from the tail of the caboose as the way freight pulled out.

There was mighty little formality about the transfer, and the Kid found himself in charge with almost breath-taking celerity. Angel Forks, Dan McGrew, way freight Number Forty-seven, and the man he had relieved were sort of hazy, nebulous things for a moment. There wasn't time for them to be anything else; for, about one minute after he had jumped to the platform, he was O.S.'ing "out" the train that had brought him in.

It wasn't quite what he had been used to back in the more sedate East, and he grinned a little to himself as his fingers tapped, "O. S., A. L. (Angel Forks) 47. Out. 4:18" on the key; and by the time he had got back his O. K. the tail of the caboose was swinging a curve and disappearing out of sight. The Kid then had a chance to look around him—and look for Dan McGrew, the man that was to be his sole companion for the days to come.

He found McGrew upstairs—after he had explored all there was to explore of the ground floor of the station, which was a sort of combination kitchen, living room, and dining room that led off from the office—just the two rooms below, with a ladderlike staircase between them leading up above. And above there was just the one room under the eaves with two bunks in it, one on either side. The night man was asleep in one of these, and the Kid did not disturb him. After a glance around the rather cheerless sleeping quarters, he returned downstairs and started in to pick up the threads of the office.

Dusk comes early in the fall in the mountains, and at five o'clock the switch and semaphore lamps were already lighted, and in the office under a green-shaded lamp the Kid sat listening to some stray time stuff coming over the wire, when he heard the night man moving overhead and presently start down the stairs. The Kid pushed back his chair, rose to his feet, and turned with outstretched hand to make friends with his new mate—and his outstretched hand drew back and reached uncertainly to the table edge beside him.

For a long minute neither man spoke, staring into each other's eyes. In the opening through the partition at the foot of the stairs Dan McGrew seemed to sway a little on his feet; and his face, what could be seen of it through the tawny beard that Angel Forks had offered him no incentive to shave, was ashen white.

It was McGrew who broke the silence.

"Hello, Charlie!" he said, in a sort of cheerful bravado that rang far from true.

"So *you* are Dan McGrew! The last time I heard of you your name was Brodie." The Kid's lips, as he spoke, hardly seemed to move.

"I've had a dozen since then," said McGrew, in a pleading whine, "more'n a dozen. I've been chased from place to place, Charlie. I've lived a dog's life, and——"

"And you expect me to keep my mouth shut about you here, is that it?" the Kid cut him short, in a low, passionate voice.

McGrew's fingers plucked nervously, hesitantly at his beard; his tongue circled dry lips, and his black eyes fell from the Kid to trace aimlessly, it seemed, the cracks in the floor.

The Kid dropped back into his chair, and, elbows on the table, chin in hands,

stared out across the tracks to where the side of the rock cut was now no more than a black shadow.

Again it was McGrew who broke the silence.

"What are you going to do?" he asked miserably. "What are you going to do? Use the key and put them wise? You wouldn't do that, would you, Charlie? You wouldn't throw me down, would you? I'm—I'm living decent here."

The Kid made no answer—made no movement.

"Charlie!" McGrew's voice rose in a high-pitched, nervous appeal: "Charlie, what are you going to do?"

"Nothing!" The Kid's eyes were still on the black rock shadow through the station window, and the words came monotonously. "Nothing! As far as I am concerned, you are—Dan McGrew."

McGrew lurched heavily forward, relief in his face and voice as he put his hands on the Kid's shoulders.

"You're all right, Charlie, all right; I knew you wouldn't——"

The Kid sprang to his feet, and flung the other's hands roughly from his shoulders.

"Keep your hands off me!" he said tensely. "I don't stand for that! And let's understand each other. You do your work here, and I do mine. I don't want to talk to you. I don't want you to talk to me. I don't want anything to do with you—that's as straight as I know how to put it. The first chance I get I'll move—they'll never move you, for I know why they sent you here. That's all, and that's where we stand—McGrew."

"D'ye mean that?" said McGrew, in a cowed, helpless way.

The Kid's answer was only a harsh, bitter laugh; but it was answer enough. McGrew, after a moment's hesitation, turned and went silently from the room.

A week passed, and another week came and went, and neither man spoke to the other. Each lived his life apart, cooked for himself and did his work; and it was good for neither one. McGrew grew morose and ugly; and the Kid somehow seemed to droop, and there was a pallor in his cheeks and a listless air about him that was far from the cheery optimism with which he had come to take the key at Angel Forks.

Two weeks passed, and then one night, after the Kid had gone to bed, two men pitched a rough, weather-beaten tent on the plateau below the station. Hard-looking specimens they were; unkempt, unshaven, each with a mount and a pack horse. Harvey and Lansing, they told McGrew their names were, when they dropped in for a social call that night, and they said that they were prospectors; but their geological hammers were bottles of raw spirit that the Indians loved; and the veins of ore they tapped were the furs that an Indian will sell for "redeye" when he will sell for no other thing on earth. It was against the law—enough against the law to keep a man's mouth who was engaged in that business pretty tightly shut; but, perhaps recognizing a kindred spirit in McGrew, and warmed by the bottle they had hospitably brought, before that first night was over no secret of that sort lay between them and McGrew.

And so drink came to Angel Forks; and in a supply that was not stinted. It was Harvey and Lansing's stock in trade; and they were well stocked. McGrew bought it from them with cash and with provisions, and played poker with them with a kitty for the "redeye."

There was nothing riotous about it at first, not bad enough to incapacitate McGrew; and it was a night or two before the Kid knew what was going on, for McGrew was cautious. Harvey and Lansing were away in the mountains during the daytime, and they came late to fraternize with McGrew—around midnight, long after the Kid was asleep. Then McGrew began to tipple steadily, and signs of drink came patently enough—too patently to be ignored one morning when the Kid relieved McGrew and went on for the day trick.

The Kid said nothing—to McGrew. No word had passed between them for two weeks. But that evening, when McGrew, in turn, went on for his trick,

the Kid went upstairs and found a bottle, nearly full, hidden under McGrew's mattress. He took it, went outside with it, smashed it against a rock, and kept on across the plateau to the prospectors' outfit. Harvey and Lansing, evidently just in from a day's lucrative trading, were unsaddling and busy over their pack animals.

"Hello, Keene!" they greeted in chorus; and Lansing added: "Hang round a bit an' join in; we're just goin' to cook grub."

The Kid ignored both the salutation and the proffered hospitality.

"I came down here to tell you two fellows something," he said slowly; and there was a grim, earnest set to his lips that was not to be misunderstood. "It's none of my business that you're camping around here, but up there is railroad property, and that *is* my business. If you show your faces inside the station again or pass out any more booze to McGrew, I'll wire headquarters and have you run in; and somehow, though I've only met you once or twice, I don't fancy you're anxious to touch head on with the authorities." He looked at the two steadily for an instant, while they stared back, half angrily, half sheepishly. "That's fair warning, isn't it?" he ended, as he turned and began to retrace his steps to the station. "You'd better take it; you won't get a second one."

They cursed him when they found their tongues, and did it heartily, interwoven with threats and savage jeers that followed him halfway to the embankment. But their profanity did not cloak the fact that, to a certain extent, the Kid's words were worthy of consideration.

The extent was two nights—that night and the next one. On the third night, or, rather, far on in the early-morning hours, the Kid, upstairs, awakened from sleep, sat suddenly up in his bunk. A wild outburst of drunken song, accompanied by fists banging time on the table, reached him; then an abashed hush, through which the click of the sounder came to him, and he read it mechanically: The dispatcher at Big Cloud was making a meeting point for two trains at the Bend, forty miles away, nothing to do with Angel Forks. Came then a rough oath—another—and a loud, brawling altercation.

The Kid's lips thinned. He sprang out of his bunk, pulled on shirt and trousers, and went softly down the stairs. They didn't hear him, they were too drunk for that; and they didn't see him—until he was fairly inside the room; and then for a moment they leered at him, suddenly silent, in a silly, owl-like way.

There was an anger upon the Kid, a seething passion, that showed in his bloodless face and quivering lips. He stood for an instant motionless, glancing around the office; the table from the other room had been dragged in; on either side of it sat Harvey and Lansing; at the end, within reach of the key, sat Dan McGrew, swaying tipsily back and forth, cards in hand; under the table was an empty bottle, another had rolled into a corner against the wall; on the table itself were two more bottles among greasy, scattered cards, one bottle almost full, the other still unopened.

"'Sall right, Charlie," hiccuped McGrew blandly. "'Sall right—jus' havin' little game—good boy, Charlie."

McGrew's words seemed to break the spell. With a jump the Kid reached him, flung him roughly from his seat, toppling him to the floor, and stretched out his hand for the key; but he never reached it. Harvey and Lansing, remembering the threat, and having more reason to fear the law than on the simple count of trespassing on railroad property, lunged for him simultaneously. Quick as a cat on his feet, the Kid turned, and his fist shot out, driving full into Lansing's face, sending the man staggering backward—but Harvey closed. Purling oaths, Lansing snatched the full bottle, and, as the Kid, locked in Harvey's arms, swung toward him, he brought the bottle down with a crash on the back of the Kid's head—and the Kid slid limply to the floor.

White-faced, motionless, unconscious he lay there, the blood beginning to

trickle from his head, and in a little way it sobered them—but not McGrew.

"See whash done," said McGrew, with a maudlin sob, picking himself up from where the Kid had thrown him. "See whash done! Killed him—thash whash done."

It frightened them, McGrew's words—Harvey and Lansing. They looked again at the Kid and saw no sign of life—and then they looked at each other. The bottle was still in Lansing's hand, and he set it back now on the table with a little shudder.

"We'd better beat it," he croaked hoarsely. "By daylight we want to be far away from here."

Harvey's answer was a practical one—he made for the door and disappeared, Lansing close on his heels.

McGrew alternateley cursed and pleaded with them long after they were out of earshot; and then, moved by drunken inspiration, started to clear up the room. He got as far as reaching for the empty bottles on the floor, and that act seemed to father a second inspiration—there were other bottles. He reeled to the table, picked up the one from which they had been drinking, stared at the Kid upon the floor, brushed the hair out of his eyes, and, throwing back his head, drank deeply.

"Jus'er steady myself—feel shaky," he mumbled.

He stared at the Kid again. The Kid was beginning to show signs of returning consciousness. McGrew, blinking, took another drink.

"Nosh dead, after all," said McGrew thickly. "Thank God, nosh dead, after all!"

Then drunken cunning came into his eyes; he slid the full bottle into his pocket, and, carrying the other in his hand, stumbled upstairs, drank again, and hid them craftily, not beneath the mattress this time, but under the eaves where the flooring met and there was a loose plank.

When he stumbled downstairs again, the Kid was sitting in a chair, holding his swimming head in his hands.

"'Sall right, Charlie," said McGrew inanely.

The Kid did not look at him; his eyes were fixed upon the table.

"Where are those bottles?" he demanded suspiciously.

"Gone," said McGrew plaintively. "Gone witsh fellows—fellows took 'em an' ran 'way. Whash goin' to do 'bout it, Charlie?"

"I'll tell you when you're sober," said the Kid curtly. "Get up to your bunk and sleep it off."

"'Smy trick," said McGrew heavily, waving his hand toward the key. "Can't let nusher fellow do my work."

"Your trick!" The words came in a withering, bitter rush from the Kid. "Your trick! You're in fine shape to hold down a key, aren't you!"

"Whash reason I ain't? Held it down all right, so far," said McGrew, a world of injury in his voice—and it was true; so far he had held it down all right that night for the very simple reason that Angel Forks had not been the elected meeting point of trains for a matter of some three hours, not since the time when Harvey and Lansing had dropped in and McGrew had been sober.

"Get up to your bunk!" said the Kid between his teeth—and that was all.

McGrew swayed hesitantly for a moment on uncertain legs, blinked soddenly a sort of helpless protest, and, turning, staggered up the stairs.

For a little while the Kid sat in his chair, trying to conquer his dizzy, swimming head; and then the warm blood trickling down his neck—he had not noticed it before—roused him to action. He took the lamp and went into the other room, bathed his head in the washbasin, sopping at the back of his neck to stop the flow, and finally bandaged it as best he could with a wet cloth as a compress and a towel drawn tightly over it, knotted on his forehead.

He finished McGrew's abortive attempt at housecleaning after that, and sat in to hold down the rest of the night trick while McGrew in sleep should recover his senses. But McGrew did not sleep. McGrew was fairly started—and McGrew had two bottles at command.

At five-thirty in the morning, Number Eighty-one, *the local freight, west,* making a meeting point, rattled her long string of flats and boxes onto the Angel Forks siding; and the Kid unknotted his bandage and dropped it into a drawer of his desk. Brannahan, Number Eighty-one's conductor, kicked the door open and came in for his orders.

"Hello, Kid!" exclaimed Brannahan. "What you sitting in for? Where's your mate?"

"Asleep," the Kid laughed at him. "Where do you suppose he is! We're swopping tricks for a while for the sake of variety."

Brannahan stooped and stuck the stub of his cigar in his mouth over the lamp chimney, and with the updraft nearly extinguished the flame; then he pulled up a chair, tilted back, and stuck his feet up on the desk.

"Guess 'most anything would be variety in this God-forsaken hole," he observed, between puffs. "What?"

"Oh, it's not so bad—when you get used to it," said the Kid.

He edged his own chair around to face Brannahan squarely—the wound in the back of his head was bleeding again; perhaps it had never stopped bleeding, he did not know.

Brannahan made small talk, waiting for the fast freight, east, to cross; and the Kid smiled while his fingers clutched desperately now and then at the arms of his chair to keep himself from pitching over, as those sickening, giddy waves, like hot and cold flashes, swept him.

Brannahan went at last, the fast freight roared by, Number Eighty-one pulled out, and the Kid went back to the washbasin and put his bandage on again.

The morning came and went, the afternoon, and the evening; and by evening the Kid was sick and dropping weak—that smash on his head must have been more serious than he had thought at first—again and again, and growing more frequent, had come those giddy flashes, and once, he wasn't sure, but it seemed as though he had fainted for a *moment or two.*

It was getting on to ten o'clock now, and he sat, or, rather, lay, forward with his head in his arms over the desk under the lighted lamp. The sounder was clicking busily; the Kid raised his head a little and listened. There was a Circus Special, west, that night; and Number Two, the eastbound limited, was an hour off schedule, and, trying to make it up, was running with clear rights while everything else on the train sheet dodged onto the sidings to get out of the way. The sounder stopped for an instant; then came the dispatcher's "complete"—the Circus Special was to cross the Limited at L'Aramie, the next station west of Angel Forks. It had nothing to do with the Kid, and it would be another two hours at least before the Circus Special was along.

The Kid's head dropped back on his arms again. What was he to do? He could stick out the night somehow—he *must* stick it out. If he asked for a relief it was the sack for the man upstairs—it was throwing McGrew cold. It wouldn't take them long to find out what was the matter with McGrew! And surely McGrew would be straight again by morning. He wasn't any better now, worse, if anything; but by morning surely the worst of the drink would be out of him. McGrew had been pretty bad all day, as bad as the Kid had ever seen a man. He wondered a little numbly about it. He had thought once that McGrew might have had some more drink hidden, and he had searched for it during the forenoon while McGrew watched him from the bunk; but he had found nothing. It was queer, too, the way McGrew was acting; queer that it took so long for the man to get it out of his system, it seemed to the Kid; but the Kid had not found those last two bottles, neither was the Kid up in therapeutics, nor was he the diagnostician that Doctor McTurk was.

"By morning," said the Kid, with a moan, "if he can't stand a trick I'll *have* to wire. I'm afraid to-night'll be my limit."

It was still and quiet—not even a breeze to whisper through the cut or stir the pine-clad slope into rustling murmurs. Almost heavily the silence lay over the little station buried deep in the heart of the mighty range. Only the sounder spoke and chattered—at intervals—spasmodically.

An hour passed, an hour and a half, and the Kid scarcely moved—then he roused himself. It was pretty near time for the Circus Special to be going through to make its meeting point with the Limited at L'Aramie, and he looked at his lights. He could see them, up and down, switch and semaphore, from the bay window of the station where he sat. It was just a glance to assure himself that all was right. He saw the lights through red and black flashes before his eyes, saw that the main line was open as it should be—and dropped his swooning, throbbing head back on his arms once more.

And then suddenly he sat erect. From overhead came the dull, ominous thud of a heavy fall. He rose from his chair—and caught at the table as the giddiness surged over him and his head swam around. For an instant he hung there, swaying, then made his way weakly for the stairs, and started up.

There was a light above—he had kept a lamp burning there—but for a moment after he reached the top nothing but those ghastly red and black flashes met his eyes—and then, with a strange, inarticulate cry, he moved toward the side of the room.

Sprawled in a huddled heap upon the floor beneath the eaves, collapsed, out like the snuffing of a candle wick, as Doctor McTurk had said some day he would collapse, dead, lay Dan McGrew—the loose plank up, two empty bottles beside him, as though the man had snatched first one and then the other from their hiding place in the wild hope that there might be something left of the supply drained to the last drop hours before.

The Kid stooped over McGrew, straightened up, stared at the lifeless form before him, and his hands went queerly to his temples and the sides of his head—the room spun dizzily around and around, the lamp, the dead man on the floor, the bunks, a red-and-black flashed whirl—the Kid's hands reached, grasping, into the nothingness for support, and he slipped inertly to the floor.

From below came the sharp tattoo of the sounder making the Angel Forks call, quick, imperative at first—then like a knell of doom, in frantic appeal, the dispatcher's life and death, the *seventeen*—and, "Hold Circus Special." Over and over again the sounder spoke and cried and babbled and sobbed like a human soul in agony; over and over again while the minutes passed and with heavy, resonant roar the long Circus Special rumbled by—but the man on the night wire at Angel Forks was dead; and the Kid was past the hearing—there were to come weeks while he raved in the furious delirium and lay in the heavy stupor of brain fever before a key meant anything to him again.

It's queer the way things happen! Call it luck, if you like—maybe it is—maybe it's something more than luck. It wouldn't be sacrilege, would it, to say that the hand of God had something to do with keeping the Circus Special and the Limited from crashing head on in the rock-walled, twisting cañon, four miles west of Angel Forks, whatever might be the direct means, ridiculous, before-unheard-of, funny, or absurd, that saved a holocaust that night? That wouldn't be sacrilege, would it? Well, call it luck, if you like—call it anything you like. Queer things happen in railroading—but this stands alone, queerest of all, in the annals of fifty roads in a history of fifty years.

The Limited, thanks to a clean-swept track, had been making up time, making up enough of it to throw the meeting point with the Circus Special at L'Aramie out—and the dispatcher had tried to hold the Circus Special at Angel Forks and let the Limited pass her there. There was time enough to do it, plenty of it—and under ordinary circumstances it would have been all in the night's work. But there was blame, too, and Saxton, the dispatcher at Big Cloud, went on the carpet for it—he

let the Limited tear through L'Aramie *before* he sent his order to Angel Forks, with the Circus Special in the open cutting along for her meeting point with nothing but Angel Forks between her and L'Aramie.

That was the dispatcher's end of it—the other end is a little different. Whether some disgruntled employee, seeking to revenge himself on the circus management, loosened the door of one of the cars while the Special lay on the siding waiting for a crossing at Mitre Peak, her last stop, or whether it was purely an accident, no one ever knew—though the betting was pretty heavy on the disgruntled-employee theory—there had been trouble the day before. However, be that as it may, one way or the other, one thing was certain, they found the door open after it was all over, and—but we're overrunning our holding orders—we'll get to that in a minute.

Bull Coussirat and Fatty Hogan, in the Four-twenty-eight, were pulling the Special that night, and as they shot by the Angel Forks station the fireman was leaning out of the gangway for a breath of air.

"Wonder how the Kid's making out?" he shouted in Hogan's ear, retreating into the cab as they bumped over the west-end siding switch with a shattering racket. "Good Kid, that—ain't seen him since the day he came up with us."

Hogan nodded, checking a bit for the curve ahead, mindful of his high-priced, heavily insured live freight.

"Did ever you hear such a forsaken row!" he ejaculated irrelevantly. "Listen to it, Bull. About three runs a year like this and I'd be clawing at iron bars and trying to mimic a menagerie. Listen to it!"

Coussirat listened. Every conceivable kind of an animal on earth seemed to be lifting its voice to high heaven in earnest protest for some cause or other—the animals, beyond any peradventure of doubt, were displeased with their accommodations, uncomfortable and indignantly uneasy. The rattle of the train was a paltry thing—over it hyenas laughed, lions roared, elephants trumpeted, and giraffes emitted whatever noises giraffes emit. It was a medley fit for Bedlam, from shrill, whistling, piercing shrieks that set the eardrums tingling, to hoarse, cavernous bellows like echoing thunder.

"Must be something wrong with the animals," said Coussirat, with an appreciative grin. "They weren't yowling like that when we started—guess they don't like their Pullmans."

"It's enough to give you the creeps," growled Fatty Hogan.

Coussirat reached for the chain, and, with an expert flip, flung wide the furnace door—and the bright glow lighted up the heavens and shot the black of the cab into leaping, fiery red. Coussirat swung around, reaching for his shovel—and grabbed Hogan's arm instead, as a chorus of unearthly, chattering shrieks rent the air.

"For the love of Mike, for God's sake, Fatty," he gasped, "look at that!"

Perched on the tender, on the top of the water tank, just beyond the edge of the coal, sat a well-developed and complacent ape—and, as Coussirat looked, from the roof of the property car, behind the tender, another swung to join the first.

"Jiminy Christmas!" yelled Hogan, screwed around in his seat. "The whole blasted tribe of monkeys is loose! That's what's wrong with the rest of the animals—the little devils have probably been teasing them through the barred air holes at the ends of the cars. Look at 'em! Look at 'em come!"

Coussirat was looking—he hadn't stopped. Along the roof of the property car they came, a chattering, jabbering, swaying string of them—and on the brake wheel two sat upright, lurching and clinging for dear life, the short hair blown straight back from their foreheads with the sweep of the wind, while they peered with earnest, strained faces into the cab. And the rest, two dozen strong now, massed on the roof of the property car, perilously near the edges for anything but monkeys, inspected the cab critically, picked at each other's hides, made gestures, some of which

were decidedly uncomplimentary, and chattered volubly to their leaders already on the tender. The tender seemed to appeal. Down came another via the brake rod, and swung by its tail with a sort of flying-trapeze effect to the tender—and what one did another did—the accommodation on the water tank was being crowded—the front rank moved onto the coal.

"Say!" bawled Coussirat to his mate. "Say, Fatty, get up and give 'em your seat—there's ladies present. And, say, what are we going to do about it? The little pets ought to be put back to bed."

"Do nothing!" snapped Hogan, one wary eye on the monkeys and the other on the right of way ahead. "If the circus people don't know enough to shut their darned beasts up properly it's their own lookout—it's not our funeral, whatever happens."

The advance guard of the monkeys had approached too close to the crest of the high-piled coal, and as a result, while they scrambled back for firmer footing, they sent a small avalanche of it rolling into the cab. This was touching Coussirat personally—and Coussirat glared.

Coussirat was no nature faker—he knew nothing about animals, their habits, peculiarities, or characteristics. He snatched up a piece of coal and heaved it at the nearest monkey.

"Get out, you little devil—*scat!*" he shouted—and missed—and the effect was disconcerting to Coussirat.

Monkeys are essentially imitative, earnestly so—and not overtimid when in force—they imitated Coussirat. Before he could get his breath, first one and then another began to pick up hunks of coal and heave them back—and into the cab poured a rain of missiles. For an instant, a bare instant, Coussirat stood his ground, then he dove for the shelter of his seat. Soft coal? Yes—but there are some fairish lumps even in soft coal.

Crash! went the plate-glass face of the steam gauge. It was a good game, a joyous game—and there was plenty of coal, hunks and hunks of it—and plenty of monkeys, "the largest and most intelligent collection on earth," the billboards said.

Crash! went the cab glass behind Fatty Hogan's head, and the monkeys shrieked delight. They hopped and jumped and performed gyrations over each other, those in the rear; while those on the firing line, with stern, screwed-up, wizened faces, blinking furiously, swung their hairy arms; and into the cab still poured the hail of coal.

With a yell of rage, clasping at his neck where the glass had cut him, Fatty Hogan bounced forward in his seat.

"You double-blanked, blankety-blanked, triple-plated ass!" he bellowed at Coussirat. "You—you idiot, you!" he screamed. "Didn't you know any better than that! Drive 'em off with the hose; turn the hose on them!"

"Turn it on yourself," said Coussirat sullenly; he was full length on his seat, and mindful that his own glass might go as Hogan's had. "D'ye think I'm looking for glory and a wreath of immortelles?"

Funny? Well, perhaps. Is this sacrilege—to say it wasn't luck?

Crash! There was a hiss of steam, a scalding stream of water, and in a moment the cab was in a white cloud. Mechanically Hogan slammed his throttle shut and snatched at the "air." It was the water glass—and the water glass sometimes is a nasty matter. Coussirat was on his feet now like a flash, and both men, clamped-jawed, groped for the cock; and neither got off scathless before they shut it—and by then the train had stopped, and not a monkey was in sight.

Jimmie Burke, the conductor, came running up from the rear end, as Coussirat and Hogan swung out of the gangway to the ground.

"What's wrong?" demanded Burke—he had his watch in his hand.

"Monkeys," said Hogan, and he clipped the word off without any undue cordiality.

"How?" inquired Burke.

"Monkeys," said Hogan, a little more brittle than before.

"Monkeys?" repeated Burke politely.

"Yes, monkeys!" roared Hogan,

dancing up and down with the pain of his scalded hands. "Monkeys—that's plain enough, ain't it? Monkeys, blast you—*monkeys!*"

To the group came one of the circus men.

"The door of the monkey car is open!" he announced breathlessly. "The monkeys have escaped."

"You don't say!" said Coussirat heavily.

"Yes," said the circus man. "And, look here, we'll have to find them; they couldn't have got away from the train until it stopped just now."

"Are they intelligent?" inquired Coussirat, in a velvet voice, "same as the billboards say?"

"Of course," said the circus man anxiously.

"Well, then, just write them a letter and let them know when to be on hand for the next performance," said Coussirat grimly. "There's lots of time—we can hang around here and stall the line for another hour or two, anyway!"

Burke and Hogan were in earnest conversation.

"We're close onto the Limited's time as it is," said Hogan. "And look at that cab."

"We'd better back up to the Forks, then, and let her cross us there; that's the safest thing to do," said Burke, and swung his lamp.

"Look here," said the circus man, "we've got to find those monkeys."

Burke looked at him unhappily—monkeys had thrown their meeting point out—and there was the trainmaster to talk to when they got back to Big Cloud.

"Unless you want to spend the night here, you'd better climb aboard," he snapped. "All right, Hogan—back away," and he swung his lamp again.

Ten minutes later, as the Circus Special bumped onto the Angel Forks siding and the front-end brakeman was throwing the switch clear again for the main line, a chime whistle came ringing long, imperiously, from the curve ahead. Fatty Hogan's face went white; he was standing up in the cab and close to Coussirat, and he clasped the fireman's arm.

"What's that?" he cried.

The answer came with a rush—a headlight cut streaming through the night, there was a tattoo of beating trucks, an eddying roar of wind, a storm of exhausts, a flash of window lights, like scintillating diamonds, and the Limited, pounding the fishplates at sixty miles an hour, was in, and out—and *gone.*

Hogan sank weakly onto his seat, and a bead of sweat spurted from his forehead.

"My God, Bull," he whispered, "do you know what that means? Something's wrong. *She's against our order!*"

They found the Kid and Dan McGrew, and they got the Kid into hospital at Big Cloud; but it was eight weeks and more, while the boy raved and lay in stupor, before they got the story. Then the Kid told it to Carleton in the super's office late one afternoon when he was convalescent—told him the bald, ugly facts in a sort of hopeless way.

Carleton listened gravely; it had come near to being a case of more lives gone out on the Circus Special and the Limited that night than he cared to think about. He listened gravely, and when the Kid had finished, Carleton, in that quiet way of his, put his finger instantly on the crux of the matter—not sharply, but gently, for the Kid had played a man's part, and "Royal" Carleton loved a man.

"Was it worth it, Keene?" he asked. "Why did you try to shield McGrew?"

The Kid did not answer for a moment; he was staring out through the window at the twinkling switch lights in the yards, already lit. And then he spoke, still staring at the lights below him.

"He was my father," he said.

How Pitchfork Held the Bridge

By George Pattullo

Author of "The Sheriff of Badger," Etc.

Jealousy held Pitchfork in its grip, and when that happens, a little thing like holding up the Mexican army is a mere nothing

PITCHFORK PAT was very dour at dinner, and ate with surly concentration, his nose very close to the plate. The talk displeased him. It was all of sordid money and success in trade, and he had just lost eight dollars to the cook by shaking dice for "double or quits" on the sale of a saddle blanket. So he listened glumly to Uncle Henry's varied recipes for acquiring riches.

"If a feller'll only save his money till he gits a thousand saved up," observed Uncle Henry earnestly, "and then invest it in somethin' that pays big, and keeps a-turnin' it over and turnin' it over, he'll grow rich if he lives long enough, and don't drink nothing to speak of, or don't gamble, and leaves women alone."

"Why don't he die and be done with it?" interrupted Pitchfork testily.

"That's the surest way of piling up money," Uncle Henry continued. "I declare I don't see how I managed to stay pore. When I look back twenty years it really does amaze me. All them fellers I started out with are rich—why, three of 'em are millionaires." Uncle Henry sighed, and wiped coffee from the ends of his mustache. "It looks like I couldn't keep from gitting rich by only staying alive, but somehow I'm pore. Always will work for wages, I reckon."

"Why," Pitchfork comforted, "you ain't an ol' man yet, Uncle Henery."

"No, I ain't," replied Uncle Henry, in all seriousness. "I ain't what you could really call old, Pitchfork. I'm only seventy-two. Maybe I'll git a start yet."

"The trouble is," Pat went on, deftly balancing a knife laden with frijoles halfway to his mouth, "the trouble with this country is foreign com'tition. Yes, sir—foreign com'tition is a-ruining this country."

A cowboy on the other sde of the table looked up from his food to grunt assent.

"That's ri-ight, Pitchvork," said he. "Ameriga for Amerigans, I say."

Which Big John la Ferriere capped with: "You're whistlin', Schwarzberger. They'd ought to pass a law. Why, if things keep on like they are in this country, there'll be so dog-goned many Yankees down here that white folks won't hardly be able to make a livin'."

Although he had precipitated it, Pitchfork took no part in the argument that ensued. And I guessed that the principle of general protection against the perfidious alien, for which they clamored, interested him less than individual application of it. For I had definite news—and it was that a large, hairy, blond person had crossed Talmage's path, as the fortune tellers say.

Having finished his meal, Pitchfork clanked outside and tilted a stool against the wall in the shade of the sod roof. There he considered the sky line, and the parched, brown stretches between. I joined him, and we smoked a while.

"Well?"

"It's a nice night," remarked Pitchfork.

"There's nothing," I quoted, as a feeler, "like the love of a true woman."

"You know about it, then?" he asked quickly, and I nodded.

"I wouldn't care so blamed much," Pat said next, "if he was a white man. But to give me the go-by for——"

"White?" I cut in. "Great Scott, he's as white as you or I."

"Shucks!" was his disgusted retort. "You make me tired. You know right well he's a foreigner. Did you ever hear of a feller named Hans Rattee onless he was one of them Eye-talians, or a Roossian maybe? Hans—huh, I reckon not. Well, that's what Ben Stiles says his name is, and he comes from Arizona."

His argument was unanswerable. My informant had not divulged the cognomen of his rival; he had merely mentioned in a postscript in the way of gossip that Mary Lou was planning to marry a big, yellow stranger, who had amassed a pot of money trading in cattle and mules. Therefore, I did not dispute with Pitchfork. Besides, what was the use? Jealousy had him in its grip; and what lover worth his salt but holds his rival in bitter scorn?

"But you'll admit now that friendship beats woman's love?"

"No, sirree, I won't. She's gone back on me. But so would a friend in a pinch."

"That's hardly fair," I remonstrated.

"Fair? It ain't?" he snorted. "I never seen a friendship yet that'd stand a two-dollar touch."

"You know mighty well I hadn't two dollars to my name that time," I replied hotly. "If you can't forget that and wait——"

"Don't let's argue," he broke in.

I desisted and whittled thoughtfully on a stick, revolving many things. Not a month before, with a whack on the back from his freckled paw that robbed me of breath, and sent me reeling, Pitchfork had unequivocally asserted that nothing in this world or the next surpassed the love of a good woman. Being forty years of age, and fifty inches around the waist, I had held out firmly for friendship as equally steadfast and slightly more enduring. And now——

"Ain't it the limit, Dan?" he was wailing. "Not only does that ornery rascal steal my girl off'n me, but I swan he beats me out of a hundred dollars, too. Yes, he does. That's what I lose in Ben Stiles' calf trade. And he done it. He foxed Ben."

"It was a straight-up business deal. He overreached Ben, that's all. Take your medicine."

"Straight-up nothing," he cried angrily. "I tell you he's a snake in the grass—nothing but a snake. And I aim to git even, too. You watch me. I'll git even if it take me ten years."

"Well, you had better go slow. From all I hear, this fellow can take care of himself tolerably well."

Pat fairly gnashed his teeth over this reminder.

"That's another thing," he stormed. "He's so consarned tricky. He done Ben out of a hundred perfectly good dollars on them calves, which is the same as cheating me. But the law won't touch him. It's one of those deals where you're right, but the other feller's got you by the short hairs, and won't let go."

"And those," I warned, by way of advice, "are mighty good transactions to forget. No, you've been beaten, Pitchfork. Don't be a squealer."

"A man's never beat," he flung back, "onless he thinks so hisself."

And with this moral reflection from Mr. Talmage, we parted. I heard about a month later that he had forsaken the Spade Range—probably the chaffing of his comrades proved too much for Pitchfork—and had gone to seek his fortune along the border.

Two seasons went by, and summer found me in a copper town fifty miles below the Arizona line. Prices of cattle had lately soared to a height where a man felt like taking a chance.

"All right," said the landlord of Las Dos Naciones, in a resigned, well-anyhow-I've-warned-you tone. "Go ahead if you want to. But you'll monkey around these parts, Dan, until you get

yours. And when you're croaked, don't blame me."

"Pshaw—all this fighting's in the newspapers."

"Most of it, yes. But just south of here they're raising merry Hades. You mind what I say—there ain't one chance in a hundred of bringing cattle up. Them rebels'd just gobble the whole herd. And if they missed you, the Federals wouldn't."

"So long," said I.

"Adios," said he, throwing out his palms in a comic gesture of resignation, "I'll send word to your kinfolks. And, say—if you run across that locoed Pitchfork feller, you tell him to send me four dollars he owes for his horse's keep."

Knowing how efficacious such reminder would be, I grinned back at him and then took the Cuitaca Road, heading south and west. It led through white-walled cañons and over mountains.

It was a cool, sunshiny day, and the world was fair. A brisk breeze whipped the post-oak leaves and went prying into every corner—nosing, whispering, scuttling out with shower of dry grass and spiral swirl of dust. My horse picked up his feet daintily; the thrill of life was in the air. What had the landlord said? Why, the country was peaceful as a Scotch Sabbath.

Torrential rains had fallen for two days, and the new grass was well started. Also, several gorges I crossed were running belly-deep with water. If old Fraustro could be induced to part with his stuff at the right figure, a herd might well be kept fat, easing along from Arizpe to the border; and fifteen dollars' profit a head on two thousand of them——

"Hi, there! Come alive!"

The hoarse challenge sent these agreeable calculations kiting, and I became aware of a tall person in the middle of the road, who stood with his legs wide apart, and one hand upraised. His manner was distinctly hostile. As he had a rifle nestling in the crook of his left arm, it seemed the part of wisdom to speak him softly.

"What do you want?"

Although a full hundred yards off, I caught the sheen of red hair. A horse was tethered to a clump of bushes away to the right, and back of the man was a bridge, spanning a deep gorge. A pile of post-oak logs that had apparently been thrown up as a barricade, commanded the head of this bridge.

"What do you want?" I cried again.

"Seven dollars," was the tranquil reply. "This is a toll bridge. Git down off that horse. Five for him and two for you."

The horse and I separated.

"And, say," came a second command. "Keep your hands where I can see 'em. That's all right. Now come ahead, bo."

"If you think," I said distinctly, wholly without fear, and advancing on this highwayman, "if you think you're going to get seven dollars out of me to cross this dinky bridge, you've got another guess coming. This is no toll bridge. You're a plain thief."

Not offended in the least, he repeated: "Seven dollars."

"Go to the devil!" I climbed back on to my horse and shook him into a trot. "Now, get out of the way, you big, Irish loafer."

"What's that?" His answer rang sharply. "Keep back there, or——"

Then he guffawed, and let the butt of his rifle sink to his hip.

"So it's you?" cried Pitchfork. "I might have knowed it. Only a fathead like you would try a joke like that. Don't you know you were like to git shot?"

His hat was promptly shoved to the back of his head in the old, familiar way, and all his gums were revealed in a smile.

"Git down and visit," he invited me. "I've got a li'l' hang-out over yonder behind them logs. It ain't very comfortable, but it's convenient. Let's sit—it's as cheap as standin'. Say, you got any tobacco?"

We repaired behind his barricade. There we sat down and exchanged the material for good-fellowship—he had papers and matches, I had tobacco. Mr.

Talmage also had a canteen of water at hand, some canned tomatoes, and bread, several boxes of thirty-thirty cartridges, and a slicker.

"Now," I questioned sternly, "tell me what all this means. What are you up to, stopping travelers on the highroad, and demanding seven bones? Don't you know that's against the law, even in Mexico? They've stood many a good man up against a wall for less."

"This," Pitchfork protested, in an aggrieved tone, which convinced me he was up to some rascality, "is all strictly legal. It's a straight-up business deal, as you call 'em. I done bought this bridge."

"Where did you buy this bridge? Talk sense."

"Anyhow," said he, "I own it. Here's the way it come about, Dan. Them rains we had yesterday and the day before, they washed out the old one. Yes, sir—carried it clean away. So I hired me a bunch of natives, and we fixed up what you see. It's sound, and it's straight, and it cost me fifty-eight dollars Mex."

He waited for comment; not a word from me. Soon Pat began to squirm.

"Anyhow"—much injured and rather resentful—"I'm entitled to git my money back, ain't I? Who'll pay me for this bridge? The gover'ment won't. That's a cinch. So I aim to collect from them that uses it."

"Well, now that you've told me all about it, let's have the truth," I suggested.

"By crackee, I will," he said promptly. "Of course you can see they'd pinch me long before I could collect expenses from people going along this way. The reason why I built it is—the reason is—well, there's a caravan a-coming up this evenin' from the south. It has got to come this road. This bridge is the only way of gitting across. So I figured it had ought to be worth five dollars a head for the mules and a couple of dollars for each man, don't you? They'd be stuck here only for me fixing it like I done."

"That's not all."

"No"—still more slowly—"it ain't. I've got another reason, and a right good reason, too."

And then he proceeded to unfold his plan in detail. Pitchfork had a way of conceiving the most outlandish things and making them sound quite matter of fact; also, he would put them through, just to prove they were simple.

"So," he ended, "here's where I git even with that ornery hound, Dan. I've waited over a year—one whole year. But no consarned Hans feller can smear it on me the way he done, and me take it. No, sir. I collect this evenin'."

I jumped hurriedly to my feet, for I would fain be many leagues from the spot when Mr. Talmage collected. Brigandage always gave me the chills, whether in Wall Street or Mexico.

"Now, don't look at me that way," he urged. "I ain't doing nothing wrong. This feller stuck me up. He done stole my girl by a trick, and then he held out a hundred what belonged to Ben and me. I'm entitled to even up, ain't I? The law won't touch the rascal, so I've got to do it my own way. No, sir, I couldn't find a better. This is strictly fair and aboveboard. And what's more," he added, with a pleased grin, "there's like to be a pippin of a good fight."

Pitchfork would have made me pay toll just for the sake of adhering to principles, as he called it; but we compromised on the tobacco. And he escorted me over the bridge.

At a point a quarter of a mile above, I dismounted behind a huge bowlder and tied my horse to a tree. Directly below wound the steep road along which the freighters must come. I snuggled down comfortably behind my rock and tried to enjoy Schopenhauer's "Counsels and Maxims." But of what worth were printed rules of life when death was lurking in the Cuitaca trail?

By and by came a distant, steady creaking of wheels, pierced by the crack of rawhide whips and the high-pitched cries of natives.

"Here they come," I chuckled, hunching closer. "I wonder what that fool Irishman'll do?"

The head of the caravan appeared

suddenly; it made me blink. A white man on a sorrel horse rode in the lead, and at least twenty native troopers were at his heels, their carbines slung under their left legs. Cautiously I stood up, being minded to semaphore warning to Pitchfork, but he could not see me; and it was, moreover, too late.

All unsuspecting, the big redhead stepped out calmly into the middle of his bridge, and held one hand aloft. Tightening rein, but scarcely checking pace, the leader called out: "What's the matter there? Anything wrong?"

"Nope. Only toll. This is a toll bridge," explained Pitchfork, in a stentorian voice. "It'll cost you-all five dollars a head for them horses to cross. And two dollars a man. Got the money? How many mules and men you got there?"

Somebody laughed. The column came on. Behind the riders stretched a line of wagons, drawn by four-mule teams. And beside each driver perched a man with a rifle.

"Toll bridge?" echoed the leader incredulously. "Say, what're you trying to run over us? This is a public road. Get back there before you're hurt."

Pat's answer to this was to throw a cartridge into place. Holding his rifle at the hip with the ease of efficiency, he shouted: "It ain't a public highway no more. Five dollars a head for them mules. You-all keep back there. Do you hear? This is my bridge. I built it. Now, you fork out that money, or you don't set a foot on these planks."

And, retreating, with his face toward them, he took up position behind the barricade. The vanguard halted, the natives keeping discreetly back of their chief. With screaming of brakes, with shrill objurgations and shrieked inquiries from the rear, the long caravan came to rest, there on the side of the mountain.

"What's this, anyhow?" bellowed the leader, angry now.

"Five dollars a head," repeated Pitchfork, in the singsong of a boy who has learned his lesson well.

They waited, puzzled, and inclined to suspect a trap. The leader gave a hitch to his belt, spoke sharply to his men, and on the instant jumped his mount for the bridge. He did not fire; perhaps he considered Talmage's attitude a bluff. If so he made a wretched mistake. Pitchfork allowed him to gain to within ten yards of the bridge head, and then threw down on his horse. It was a beautiful shot. The animal rocketed into the air and came tumbling on its side.

The rider was projected about twenty feet, skidding on hands and knees. Behind him the crowding natives piled up over his dead mount, hi-yi-ing in panic, and frantically endeavoring to untangle themselves from the coil. Pitchfork expedited these efforts by firing into the press.

Upon that they broke, scurrying like frightened rabbits, and found shelter behind the wagons and a providential bend in the trail. The foremost drivers, perceiving at once the impossibility of turning about, and reflecting that they were hired to drive mules, and not to fight, either flattened themselves on the bottom of their wagons, or hid behind the wheels.

Three or four of the escort had the hardihood to answer Pitchfork's fire. These shut their eyes and blazed away northeast, in the general direction of the bridge, and, having done their duty by their country, ducked for the nearest refuge.

The wild fighting blood was now racing in the redhead.

"Come on," he howled. "Come on, the whole shebang. Bring that Hans feller out."

They did not come on. And I lay behind the rock and gloated. For here was Patrick Thaddeus Talmage, of the Spade, holding at bay, and flouting, the entire——

Just then the white commander tottered to his feet. Pitchfork immediately got a bead on his middle, but perceiving that he was too shaken to be a menace, permitted him to take refuge behind a bowlder. Once there, he did some of the most sublime swearing it has ever been my lot to hear; and once he laughed.

"I wonder who the fool idiot is?" I heard him say.

Securely ensconced behind his barricade, Pitchfork surveyed the field. Thus far the damage done was insignificant. One dead horse, a leader whose feelings were hurt, and a trooper who held a strip of shirt to his arm and cried like a baby, anathematizing warfare in choice Mexican—that was the sum total of the carnage.

From my aerie a considerable stretch of trail was visible. Perhaps half a mile back and up—a bend hid what was back of that point—but the entire half mile was a solid line of wagons, and mules, and riders. On their right was a chasm, on the other side high cliffs impossible of scaling. They could not back up. The narrow road led toward the bridge, and on the bridge was a torch-headed person who did not seem aware of any odds.

"How about that five dollars a head now?" sang out Pitchfork.

"Let us by," fumed the white guide. "The rebels're behind. Let us by. If we don't make town by nightfall there'll be a fight, and we ain't in shape to fight. Stand back from that there bridge. Do you hear?"

"There'll be a fight, all right," answered Mr. Talmage comfortably. "What do I care about the rebels? Where's your owner? Hey? Where's Hans Rattee? That's the man I want to talk to. You go tell him that Mr. Patrick Thaddeus Talmage has a word to say. He's shore to understand. I'll bet the ornery coward's skulking in one of them wagons now."

"Owner? There ain't any owner here. What the Sam Hill are you talking about? You're crazy."

"All right," said Pitchfork, with a scornful laugh. "Maybe, and maybe not. But you pay me five dollars a mule before you come near this bridge. And two bones a man. If your boss is too scared to show hisself, you can bring it. Go tell him. And git a move on."

"What's the lowest you'll take to let us pass?" fenced the other. "The whole crowd."

"One hundred and ten dollars," Pitchfork announced, as though he had done some computing. "I don't know how many of you there are, but that's what your boss done me out of, *with* interest. Put it down on the bridge like a good man, and I'll let you cross."

Making a megaphone of his hands, the leader trumpeted to his skulking men: "Bring up the machine gun."

The order apparently struck Pitchfork as a merry jest.

"Go git your li'l' peashooter," he mocked. "Move now. But best watch out. I'm like to git peeved and twist the sights off'n it."

Doubtless they had a machine gun somewhere in the rear, for I detected confusion in that direction indicative of manful strivings to obey the command. But no gun could be brought along that narrow way past the mule teams, unless borne over the tops of the wagons.

"Say," said Pitchfork impatiently, when nothing came of all this pother, "the sun's gitting powerful hot. You-all want to hurry, or you'll never make town to-night. I'm figuring on gitting busy again soon."

"Then get busy and be blankety-blanked-blanked," raved the leader, himself letting fly with a six-shooter.

Pitchfork instantly obliged him; his first bullet ricocheted from the rock behind which he kneeled. No response coming, he pumped three shots up the trail, and the foremost mule team went to ruin. One of the animals fell in its tracks. Its mates shied away; two of them began to plunge and kick, which was foolish in their straits. Some squeals from the driver and escort, as they sprang back to safety, and down to the bottom of the gorge went the freighter, with rumble of earth and patter of shale and pebbles.

"Har-har," yelled Pitchfork gleefully. "Maybe that boss of your'n will hold out on me next time? Hey? How about that Hans Rattee feller now?"

Having reason to suspect that Mr. Talmage's inquiry was not understood, I was not surprised that he received no answer. Turmoil reigned; the break in

their march had raised Doubt, and when Doubt rears its head, Courage takes to its heels. Those in rear could not detect the cause of the delay, and pressed on; word ran down the line that they were attacked—a force of rebels had ambushed the head of the column.

"They're cut to pieces. Fly! Every man for himself," sped the panicky whisper, and men looked into one another's scared faces and remembered their families.

"Come on, you unwashed gang of bean eaters," besought the leader from his bowlder.

A number of troopers within reach of his patriotic appeal responded to it and rallied. They huddled together behind a jutting crag, and took cognizance of the situation.

Pitchfork appeared to be resting back of his barricade; at any rate, no sign of life came from him. The leader signaled with his arm, and four of the natives, letting out a whoop of self-encouragement, darted forth from their vantage point and swooped down on the bridge.

A spurt of flame came from the logs. One of the riders grabbed at his shirt, as though stung; then he clutched the mane of his horse. Slowly he slid forward over its shoulder, dragged for ten yards, and dropped to the trail.

Tugging wildly on the reins, the others managed to turn about. They galloped back to the bend at top speed. Whee-whee! sang the thirty-thirty bullets above them. Pitchfork was shooting high over their heads; I heard the shots pass above me, up the mountainside, whining like hard-driven golf balls.

The commander of the escort danced up and down in his rage, and shouted imprecations, but to no avail. While he was waving his arms and praying the troopers to return, for the love of Mike and the sake of decency and self-respect, and annihilate the fool, Pitchfork emerged from his shelter and calmly walked across the bridge.

"Look out!" I warned, but he could not hear.

Without haste, he picked up the injured man, heaved him on to his back, and returned. Let us assume that humane reasons prompted his display of bravado, although I knew better—the victim sported handsome silver spurs, and Pitchfork had long coveted a pair.

Nobody tried to stop him, or do him hurt, being otherwise occupied. All was confusion amid the enemy. Those behind cried forward; those in front yelled "Back!" And the sun was dipping behind the shoulder of our mountain.

I looked, and saw that the affray had gone far enough. Unless terminated at once, it might become serious. Therefore, I stood upright on a rock, and, "Hello, below," I bawled, at the man behind the bowlder. He dodged with the agility of a hell-diver, and I laughed. That brought his head out again—laughter is seldom associated with slaughter.

"Another of you?" he inquired.

"No. A friend. Don't shoot, and I'll come down. We can settle this without any bother."

"Is that so?" he replied. "No bother, hey?"

Despite my assurance, he watched my every movement as a hawk would a chick, and fingered a forty-five longingly as I descended the bluff. However, he suffered me to join him, and we talked. He was a heavy-set man of sandy complexion, and mentioned that he haled originally from Missouri.

"And I wish to thunder," said he, "I was there now. You say you can get 'em to move on and let us cross before dark?"

"I think so," was my cautious reply, "but if you put up fifty dollars, I feel sure of it."

Mention of money caused him to kick fretfully at a stone.

"How many of the scoundrels is there?"

"Well, there's a man called Talmage," I told him brazenly, "and a fellow who sometimes goes by the name of Thaddeus. Then there is Pitchfork Pat——"

"I'll bet that's him!" he exclaimed, with some excitement. "Five to one that's him. A big, red-headed guy? It

sounds like him—just what an Irisher would do. Yes, sir, I'll bet it was this Pitchfork Pat feller that done the shootin'."

"I shouldn't wonder."

"Well," he remarked reluctantly, "I've only got twenty dollars. And I know the general back behind ain't got even a 'dobe. And if he had, he wouldn't loosen up. But this freight has got to reach town by nightfall, or Salazar'll bag the whole outfit. Take it and see what you can do."

"Give me fifteen minutes," I assured him, "and then you can cross."

"One wagon and a mule team gone," he lamented. "Thirty-eight hundred dollars Mex—not counting that feller he shot. But he always was a-falling off his horse, anyhow. Take the twenty, and tell that red-headed guy what I think of him. Or say—wait—no, maybe you'd best not."

I left the gentleman from Missouri and started blithely down the steep trail.

"Hi, Pitchfork!"

The hail brought a shock of hair above the logs.

"Hello! You back?" he asked.

"Stay where you are and I'll come to you. Don't be scared. I'm a plenipotentiary."

"Advance, pleni—— Anyhow, come, Dan. But quit your foolin'."

His reception of me was very cordial, for he was much elated, so I plunged at once into explanations.

"So you've been holding up the Mexican army," I ended, "by mistake. Now, you'd best beat it. He's given you fifteen minutes—you've got eleven minutes left. Then they'll bring up cannon."

Pitchfork leaned against the log rampart, scared half to death. He looked as though he might faint, if given any encouragement. His mouth opened, and his lips moved, but for a minute no sound issued from them. Then he managed to say: "Mexican army? I've been fightin' a whole army?"

"A portion of it, yes. The others're behind."

"Go git my horse," he requested weakly. "Me for the border. Man, they'd peel the skin off'n my back and then roast me alive."

While we stood thus, with a wounded man lying at our feet, and regarding us with glances of fear, a buckboard came along the road from town, driven by a man and woman. So absorbed were we that neither of us heard or saw them until the man pulled up his horses and gave greeting.

"Hello!"

"Hello yourself," answered Pat, stooping swiftly for his rifle.

Then he turned a funny, greenish-yellow color, and his lips parted in a sickly smile. For there was Mary Lou, beaming on us from the buckboard. The individual beside her was tall and broad—a golden-haired giant.

"Why, it's dear ol' Pat," she exclaimed.

On hearing the name, instead of evincing joy at encountering a friend, her escort reached hastily under the seat for a weapon. She seized his wrist and called to Pitchfork: "Come over here. What on earth are you doing?"

"Don't tell 'em," he whispered hoarsely to me, as he obeyed.

Like an automaton, Pitchfork advanced on the buckboard, and shook Mary Lou limply by the hand. He could not utter a word for a while, but stared uneasily and with a measure of suspicion at the man beside her.

"Meet my husband, Mr. Hanratty, Pat," said Mary Lou warmly. "Shake hands with Mr. Talmage, Michael."

"Hanratty?" repeated Pitchfork, in a choking voice. "Mike Hanratty? Why, Ben said—I'll be dogged if I didn't think all the time you was a Swede."

"South Boston," said Mr. Hanratty briefly. "Given name Michael de Courcy. Say, Talmage, do you know anything about the road south of here? They tell me it's dangerous. I aimed to bring up some freight, but I've been delayed by first one thing, then another."

The query revived Pitchfork.

"Best go back," he advised, with much earnestness. "It ain't safe a bit.

Look across there. See that bunch hiding out? That's the Federal army. Me and them had a li'l' dispute. No, sirree, Mr. Mike, it ain't safe, especially with women along. These here natives'll rob any one. They don't care who. It's an awful country for stealin'. Say, you two——"

An impatient halloo broke in on him.

"Seven minutes," I warned. "Here's the twenty."

Talmage stuffed the money into his hip pocket. Mrs. Hanratty was whispering to her husband.

"And, say, Talmage," spoke up Hanratty again, not without embarrassment, "I reckon I'd best pay you a hundred that seems to be coming to you. Leastways, Mary Lou don't seem to figure you and Ben got a square deal. Here it is."

"Thanks," said Pitchfork, very shortly. Then he started for his horse. "You'll excuse me, but I've got important business back up the road. Adios."

"Five minutes," I chanted.

"It'll do," he answered. "Give me and ol' Baldy two minutes' start, and a thousand natives couldn't git near our dust. Well, good-by, Dan. You've shore stuck by me. And I'll be dashed if I know why you did. I don't deserve it."

"Oh, well"—brusquely—"it amused me. A sort of habit—I know you're no good, but I like you all the same."

Pitchfork gathered up the reins and leaned forward in the saddle.

"That," he replied, thoughtful for him, "that is what you'd call friendship, I reckon, ain't it? So long."

And he showered me with sand as he sped north, for the Border.

WHEN MULDOON WAS THROWN

WILLIAM MULDOON, the undefeated champion wrestler, whose sanitarium is of world-wide fame, is also a fair actor. His favorite part is that of *Charles the Wrestler,* in "As You Like It."

Some years ago this Shakespearean masterpiece was produced on the lawn of the Kenmawr Hotel, in Pittsburgh, with a notable cast, including the late Joseph Haworth as *Orlando,* Rose Coghlan as *Rosalind,* and Muldoon as the *Wrestler.*

Joseph Haworth was a slightly built man, and not very tall, so when, in the wrestling scene, he stood up before the mighty Muldoon, with his yard-wide shoulders and powerful limbs, it looked as if *Orlando* would find the throwing of his opponent—which the action of the play demands—about as easy as uprooting a mature oak tree.

However, they went at it—Haworth with dashing boldness and Muldoon grimly waiting for him. Then things happened. Before Haworth could get a "hold," Muldoon had the doughty *Orlando* balanced on two fingers of each hand, and calmly stood him on his head as if he had been a wooden doll. That was not all. In the next few minutes *Orlando* had been laid horizontally across *Charles'* left hand, tossed up, and caught in his right. Then on his head again, on his back, on his front, on his ear, up in the air, spinning around Muldoon's fingers as a cane is twirled by a juggler, up in the air again, held at arm's length by his waistband, once more on his head, and finally, dazed and breathless, on his feet on the greensward.

For five minutes this sort of thing went on, while the stage manager, behind a tree, begged Muldoon piteously to "Let him throw you! Fall down, won't you! Good Lord, Muldoon, you'll bust the show!"

Well, stage "business" must be obeyed. Haworth's fingers had hardly touched his opponent's chest when, with a shudder, Muldoon fell flat on his back, and was "dead." Haworth was so astonished that he forgot to go on with his part, while the "dead" *Charles* lay there grinning like a fiend.

"It was the dream of my life to meet Muldoon," remarked Haworth afterward. "Well, I've met him."

Black Gold

By Frederick R. Bechdolt

Author of "The Old Man of Eagle Pass," "Free Rein," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS

Seeing nothing ahead but legal rut and a bare pittance, Frank Hart, a young attorney, decides to go into a wildcat oil-well scheme that is projected by his friend Lawson, a man who has had wide experience in the oil fields of California. Several other men become interested also, notably Olds, a civil engineer, Porter, a train dispatcher, and Ryan, an expert driller. Pooling their funds they aggregate four thousand dollars, a "shoe-string" capital, but it enables them to buy a secondhand equipment, stake their claim, and begin work sinking the well. Hart acts as promoter of the scheme, and when a seemingly disastrous stage is reached, he succeeds in borrowing money from Jacoby, the banker of his home town, Kernfield. Still there is a hard task before them, for the octopus oil trust, the United, aims to control the crude oil of the State, and its chief opponent, Savage, president of the Petroleum Association, is weakening in his stand. If Savage capitulates, the future seems hopeless for Hart, Lawson and company. But the drilling of the "wildcat" continues unabatedly amid hopes and fears. Especially the latter for Hart, as not only is his every cent at stake, together with borrowed money, but his fiancée, Jean, has misunderstood his motives, and is angered at his apparent lack of confidence in her. But she forgives him, and desires to share his daily struggles. In the midst of their greatest anxiety an oil gusher is struck by Hart and his coworkers. Twenty thousand barrels of high-grade oil daily! They are elated, and Hart is enabled to raise funds to promote his huge undertaking. Seeing success so close, Hart marries Jean, but the happy event is shadowed by the latest move of the oil trust; the United has forced Savage into coöperation and means to corner the independent well owners. The price of crude oil is reduced to an absurdly low figure. Hart realizes that warfare has been declared and prepares to fight.

CHAPTER IV.

A PANICKY CONFERENCE.

THE Southern Hotel was crowded that evening. The owners had gathered from all the oil fields and from the cities. They were men of wealth; their fortunes ran from one hundred thousand to two million dollars. They were of the West; men who had gambled in the great game where the earth holds stakes. They had that democracy which manifests itself by use of the first name, ignoring wealth or standing. As if every one realized that the next day might find him seeking a wage earner's job once more. Their gestures were abrupt; their speech was strongly salted with profanity.

Hart came to the hotel an hour before the time set for the meeting. He came, owned by his plan; fearless in his faith in that plan. The utterance of the mighty pipe-line trust, "Oil, nineteen cents," had reached him as a declaration of war greets a born soldier; had satisfied a deep desire. He entered the lobby with its drone of bass voices, its staccato explosions of firecracker oaths, its sea of keen eyes. And the blood leaped through his body until it tingled in his finger tips. He had been waiting years for this. During months he had been growing for it. And for five days all his strength had been crystallizing. Now he walked serene.

He was passing a small crowd near the cigar counter, when a new note met his ear, a discord in the room's bass harmony. A shrill voice was saying:

"In the ground. I tell you, that's the only way. Shut down your pumps. Store your oil in the ground. We can't buck the United. We must wait. Organize? Bah! Shut down!"

This story began in the first November POPULAR. Back numbers may be ordered at the news stands.

That cry was familiar. Hart remembered how the United had used it in the days when it was striving to prevent formation of the Petroleum Association —the argument for shut-downs, which would bring idle men, business failures, hard times, then poverty and panic. In other States that idea had worked. Producers had gone into bankruptcy. The United had thus flourished, unopposed.

Hart halted; he looked for the speaker; he saw a portly, round-faced man, loose-lipped. He recognized him, the owner of five wells in the Baker River field. He noted the circle of auditors; several of these men were nodding as if they agreed; and fear was on their faces.

Hart smiled. The enemy was using time-worn tactics; but it was using them effectively. He felt admiration for that promptness in beginning the fight; but he had contempt for the lack of originality. He was starting on, and the fat man was beginning on a new tack.

"They've plenty of oil. They're ready for us. Shut down and——"

"What sort of talk is that?" Hart knew that voice. It was Olds. The engineer was pushing his way into the group; his eyes were blazing; his face was white; his fist was upraised. "Say that again!" he demanded loudly. "Say it again!"

Hart stepped forward quickly and touched Olds on the shoulder. "Come on," he said quietly, "I want to see you."

Olds followed him to one side, sputtering: "You heard it; that United talk? There are half a dozen peddling it. I'll punch——"

"Listen." Hart became stern. "If they're doing that, we've got to get to work. We can't waste time in fist fights. Where's Doherty?"

Olds shook his head. "He went away with eight or ten others. Men from Los Angeles and San Francisco. They're all up in the air. They're trying to arrange some scheme or other. I don't know what. This advice to store the oil in the ground has been going round all day. Bill Savage is behind it. He and George Long. It's taking hold, I tell you. Doherty is scared. He's going to be chairman. And he's afraid."

Hart frowned. He wanted to see Doherty, to tell that plan, to explain the thing which had come from within him; the thing which made him, like some John the Baptist, come from the wilderness; the idea which inspired him to mightiness.

But Olds had no knowledge of the place which Doherty and the other conferees had sought. And Hart had to wait here in the lobby.

Waiting, he heard that cry of fear. Now it came from the midst of some noisy crowd; now it was muttered in some group off to one side. Men were talking at random; villifying William Savage, abusing Long, the corporation attorney, shouting their hate for the United with oaths and foul epithets. There was wild talk of plans; hazy ideas were voiced, for the salvation of this industry.

Only one thing came with any semblance of system, with any trace of unity. That fear cry: "Shut down. The United is too mighty. Store your oil in the ground." Into the room's bass tumult it crept insidiously. The advice for hard times, for dissolution, for failure.

Once, while he was waiting for the hour of the meeting, Hart saw Jacoby near the street door. He was hurrying to reach the banker, when Jacoby suddenly grasped the hand of a man whom Hart had never seen before, a man advanced in years, wearing an old-fashioned chin beard. Jacoby caught sight of Hart; he merely waved his hand in greeting; then departed with this other.

Hart frowned, standing with Olds beside him. He had come with the idea of proposing this plan to some one, of getting help, of launching the idea through others. Now none was here to listen.

The hour for the meeting grew close. The crowd began to melt away. In groups the oil-well owners walked down the street to Kernfield's armory.

As he was leaving the hotel, with

Olds beside him, Hart saw George Long on the edge of the sidewalk. Long was standing alone. His face was calm, full of dignity. Hart shook hands with him. They looked into each other's faces, and Long gazed keenly at Hart, as if he found in the younger man something which was new to him, something which he was trying to comprehend.

"Going to the meeting?" Hart asked perfunctorily.

Long shook his head. There was a placidity in his smile. "I'm on my way home," he replied. It was the tone of a man who has done his work, and is confident that machinery will move.

Hart made some apology for haste and departed. He felt eager; his finger ends were tingling. That sureness of Long's made him anxious to see the fight begin in the open.

Kernfield's armory was a bare wooden building. Its interior was barn-like. About the walls were racks of muskets. There were rows of chairs held together by boards; there was a rough board stage in the front of the hall. These things were relics of the last county convention.

And now the chairs were filled. The owners of a thousand oil wells sat there, waiting—the owners of millions of barrels of oil. An industry was represented here by a crowd.

Standing in the rear of the great room, Hart gazed at that crowd. It was uneasy. It muttered hoarsely. Unwieldy, enormous in its strength, it was timorous. It could see no leader. Therefore, it desired above all things to evaporate in bickerings.

And, as he looked upon it, seeing its spirit of bewilderment, Hart felt the stirring of a strange exultation born of sureness. As if he were here and the crowd; two individuals; and as if there were a third presence, beside him, giving him a strength which this crowd had not. For he had his plan.

Doherty called the meeting to order. He stood on the rough-board platform, alone, behind a table, which he hammered with a length of gas pipe, left in the place by workmen. His face was calm; but his collar had begun to wilt already.

Now the crowd strove toward action. Like some sprawling monster, lacking powers of coördination, it floundered aimlessly.

Men rose from their chairs and spoke. Sometimes the crowd listened; again it buzzed uneasily; or uttered loud, impatient ejaculations. Some of these speakers shouted loudly, describing the United, telling how the trust had ruined the industry in other places, how it had driven well owners into bankruptcy, likening it to a vampire which fed on blood. The crowd growled hate. It was almost ripe for violence.

The corpulent man whom Hart had heard by the cigar stand in the hotel, arose. He talked in a shrill soprano, which reached the room's farthest corner. He told of the power of the United; increased because of the absorption of the Petroleum Association by the railroad. He dwelt on that strength. The United had oil, millions of barrels in storage. It owned the courts. Why try and oppose it? Useless! Shut down. Store your oil in the ground.

From different parts of the room came angry cries. "Traitor!" "Throw him out!" But many looked at each other in silence.

The fear for the dollars began to creep over the crowd.

One after the other Doherty recognized three speakers from among those with whom he had conferred. They were well-groomed men, with close-clipped mustaches, men of high standing in finance. Ruin now threatened them. Its imminence had brought anxiety to their faces. The anxiety flowed from them in that mysterious manner in which a feeling oozes from a speaker. They advocated a new stock company, along the lines of the old one which had just been sold out to the railroad—another pipe line.

Abruptly the crowd began snarling at these men. It greeted them with yells and refusal. Their plan was like prob-

ing a fresh wound. The crowd was smarting. A storm of voices drowned the words of the last speaker. Doherty was pounding the table with his length of gas pipe. His face was red; his collar was a ruin.

Again came the voice of fear. "Store your oil in the ground." The advocates of shut-downs came forth in the open. They spoke with conviction. They gazed about them bold-eyed. One of them, a second, a third, and a fourth.

The crowd became silent. Stampede was in the air. Doherty stood on the platform, pallid; his gas pipe lay before him.

"You've got no plan!" They hurled the cry at him from all parts of the room. "You've got no plan!" Men were stirring in their seats; some were rising as if to go.

"Adjourn! Adjourn!"

There was strength in this last utterance. It came from leather-lunged men in various parts of the hall. It had the threat of unison.

The crowd began to move in waves.

Then the plan which he had evolved, which he had cherished, until it had become mightier than himself, a power over him, told Hart to speak, and put words in his mouth; words that flowed from his lips with the sureness of hot inspiration; with the precision of a mind aflame to swift thinking.

He started that speech in the rear of the room. He uttered the first sentences walking down the broad aisle. His head was back; his shoulders squared; his voice was vibrant, musical with the song of eloquence. Men turned to look at him, then followed him with their eyes as he went on by. Those who had begun rising from their seats sank down again. And when he reached the front of the hall and stood facing it, the crowd was gazing at him with all its myriad eyes.

He was laden with that message, chafing to proclaim his plan.

But, with a clearness of perception born of his own strong purpose, he first led the way up to that plan.

He spoke of the United; of its merciless strength; the ruin it would bring to all of them. He spoke of its ally, the railroad. He reminded them of former fights against that monopoly.

Then he described the industry as it had gone on for two years now, with ever-increasing demand. He quoted the cry so recently raised—the cry of overproduction. He laughed at it. He pictured the empty tanks.

"We have the oil. They have none. We can name our own price." He paused and let those words sink in.

As he looked down on the crowd he felt coming from it to him, flowing, as it were, through the air, the strength of its enthralment.

"Now," he cried in a deep voice, "listen to my plan! We will pool our oil." He paused and gave them time to comprehend. He went on slowly, with solemnity, as if he were uttering a prophecy.

"Sign contracts with an agency, by which that agency gets the sole right to sell. Then no man can betray his fellows. Until that agency gets a figure for all of us, neither the United nor the railroad can buy a single drop.

"Choose the members of that agency by election, sending five men from every field in the State. These members will incorporate. The corporation will choose its president. Under the safeguard of these other members, who must ratify his actions, that president will bargain with the two monopolies."

He paused again; and then:

"In this way one man will get seventy-five cents for all our oil. He will get long-time contracts at that price. And he cannot betray us. For we have the other members as a safeguard."

It was the first word of purpose that had come, the first word of any plan which was not open to suspicion. When Hart finished speaking, silence fell upon the room.

Then a roar made the roof timbers tremble. Hart was leader of the oil men of California. Before midnight they elected twenty-five members of the new agency; and they made him president.

CHAPTER V.

HART'S ULTIMATUM.

Three weeks after the mass meeting, Hart entered the First National Bank of Kernfield. He carried a well-worn grip; there was in the manner of his handling of that leather bag something of solicitude; as if, perhaps, it contained valuables. He hurried to a window well down the wire screen, a window surmounted by a sign, which read:

SAFE DEPOSIT.

The clerk nodded and opened a gate of metal work. Hart followed the man to a massive vault door; he entered the room behind that armor-plate portal. He went to a little box. This box he unlocked; and then he opened his grip. He drew forth a bundle of papers, bound with heavy elastic. He held them before him, gazing upon them with a stern fondness; then placed them in the steel box, along with other bundles of similar appearance.

He stood before the box and bent his eyes to its contents. He drew a deep breath. There lay before him contracts from the owners of a thousand oil wells. These wells had formerly sent their black streams into the tanks of the Petroleum Association; and the Petroleum Association had carried that oil to seaboard, supplying the ever-growing demand of industry.

By these contracts, the Producers' Agency, now three weeks old, held this oil, to sell it at its pleasure. Those slips of paper, gathered into bundles, wrapped with elastic bands, represented a supply, without which William Savage would have no oil to fill his selling contracts.

This was Hart's belief. There were many other wells in the State, producing heavily, owned by large corporations. Those corporations were allied to the United—save one, which owned its own tank fleet, and sold its whole output direct. But the United needed all the oil that it could get, and could give none to Savage. Therefore, looking at the sheaves of paper within that safe-deposit box, Hart felt like some general who gazes on a strong citadel fallen into his hands. Those bundles were his fortress.

It was assuming grimness already, this war. During the first hot night of enthusiasm, that night when they had chosen him president of the Producers' Agency, while the well owners had clamored in their eagerness to sign the contracts, while Kernfield's armory and the Southern Hotel had resounded to stern shouts, Hart had mapped out his plan of campaign:

To center his attack upon the Petroleum Association, ignoring the United.

For the United could face a thousand lawsuits from consumers, while William Savage, ambitious, lusting for more power, would go to ruin if he had not the fuel which he had agreed to pour from his tank fleet into the maws of a thousand roaring furnaces. From that night, Hart had moved with one main idea—to gather into his safe-deposit box the means by which to threaten the oil master with ruin.

Now he had the last contract. The output of a thousand wells was in the hollow of his hand. It was in the hollow of his hand, because the others trusted him as their leader. It would remain there so long as they trusted him. And these others numbered twenty-four.

In this first grim enthusiasm, the other twenty-four members of the agency had given Hart their absolute trust; they had given him the task of doing all the bargaining. So long as they continued in their allegiance, the issue was safe; its outcome was a matter of time only.

For three weeks Hart had been traveling through the oil fields of the State, gathering the last of the contracts; attending to a thousand minor details. And during that time the enemy had been moving.

The Petroleum Association, its ally the railroad, and the United, ally of both corporations, had been fighting. They had chosen their point of attack. They had stuck to that point—the membership of the agency. For twenty days the allies had been striving to sow

fear and dissension among the other twenty-four members; and had been working quietly, skillfully to tear these men from their allegiance to Hart.

In the thick derrick forests, there were rows and rows of inert walking beams. Hard times were beginning; idle men, tightened credit, general uneasiness. The papers were full of it.

And into the papers, as it had begun to come from the tongues of many men, there had crept a steady stream of comment on Hart's store of oil; the output of the gusher. Only yesterday had it ceased its flow. It had yielded five hundred thousand barrels. During these three weeks the other wells under contract to the agency had brought only three times that amount. Two million barrels of oil. One-fourth of it belonged to Hart's company.

In black type that fact was emblazoned, day after day; the sudden increase of production due to that gusher. And with that fact, its inevitable insinuation, skillfully worded, put so that none who read could miss its import—the greater the production, the less the strength of demand.

Men said freely that Hart's oil hurt the chances of the others.

In this manner the enemy was fighting to bring dissension into the membership of the agency. And already the fighting was bringing its results. The shut-downs in the oil fields were forcing some of the poorer owners to bankruptcy. These casualties, inevitable to war, were coming thicker every day now. They were helping the enemy's main attack. In several quarters men were taking the insinuations from between the lines of the newspapers, were voicing them in direct language. They said that Hart was fighting with a selfish object—to sell half a million barrels of oil at a good price; that he was willing to ruin others in order to become rich.

Hart had made no answer to the statement.

He thought of all these things as he looked down into that steel box. He remained expressionless as he closed the box and locked it. He left the contracts under the protection of the armor plate, and he went out into the bank. He sought Jacoby's office.

Jacoby shook hands warmly with Hart. They had not seen each other since the evening of the mass meeting, when the banker had left the Southern Hotel with that old man, whom Hart did not know.

Hart settled himself in a chair. "Savage wired me yesterday to come and see him," he announced.

Jacoby nodded. "He wants to feel you out," he said musingly.

"I'm going to give him something to think about." Hart paused, then added: "You've been reading the papers lately?"

The banker smiled. "You mean the oil news?"

"That's it." Hart allowed himself a grim smile in return. "The news about supply—the comment on my half a million barrels."

"That stuff," Jacoby said quietly, "is being read a lot just now. It has an effect, you know. How about your directors?"

"I'm not worrying about them, for the present. But I have been waiting for Savage. I was glad to get this message. You see—I've figured out a policy in selling. The papers with this United talk gave me the idea. And I'm going to spring it on Savage."

"So?" Jacoby raised his eyes. "What is it?"

"Well, they're all figuring on that half million barrels of ours—increasing the amount of oil by one-third. They like that idea—increase of supply, decrease of demand. That's what they're saying." He paused again. After a moment:

"I'm going to cut down the supply. I'll only allow one-tenth of my oil to go on the market."

Jacoby allowed surprise to widen his eyes; then: "Frank, you realize the difference that makes to *you?*"

"Sure." Hart spoke carelessly, but his lips were tight. "It's the difference of being rich and being poor—for the present. But it makes seventy-five-cent oil just one-third more certain. Un-

less the law of supply and demand is wrong."

"Have you spoken to the others in the agency?" Jacoby asked.

Hart shook his head. "They're bound to agree to that, of course."

"I was just thinking—— It might make them a little firmer. This constant attack on you is bound to shake some of them," Jacoby said.

"I'm figuring on other things to hold them," Hart answered easily. "It's Savage I want to tell. Reduction of available supply by one-fourth. See? It ought to make him a little sick."

Jacoby laughed. "He won't believe it. He'll think you're up to some game."

"It will set him to thinking." Hart rose, glancing at the clock. "Just as my being late now will set him to thinking. These things are good for Savage."

Jacoby looked up at him with a gleam of admiration in his eyes. "Come to dinner with me to-night and tell me about it."

"I wired my wife," said Hart. "She's coming down this afternoon."

"Good! Then I'll call for you both at the hotel. How will that be?"

Jacoby nodded as Hart accepted the invitation, and turned to his desk again before the door closed.

The hands of the bank clock were pointing to eleven. Hart did not hurry to the offices of the Petroleum Association. That telegram from Savage had come like an order from a master; it had arranged the interview, as a matter of course; it had named ten-thirty for the hour.

During these weeks Hart had studied William Savage from afar, waiting for this same telegram.

When he entered the office at the end of the long suite, he found Savage dictating a letter to the wooden-faced private secretary. Ignoring his visitor, Savage continued dictating. Hart seated himself in one of the big leather chairs. At length the secretary departed, making no more noise than a cat.

Savage looked Hart fairly in the eyes until the door had closed. Then, scowling: "Well," he said, "you want to sell me oil."

Hart nodded. He made no reply.

It had begun now—their struggle. All the rest of that war was crystallized in these two men. For days Hart had been waiting for this, their first encounter, waiting oftentimes with a strong impatience. So now he sat patiently.

Savage leaned forward in his chair. His face relaxed somewhat. Hart's silence had deceived him a little; he thought there might be diffidence back of it.

"I'll tell you what it is." He spoke with an easy arrogance. "We're overloaded. Our tanks are practically full now." His lips drew back in his best endeavor at a smile. "The industry is in bad shape. That's where we stand."

He paused, and Hart settled himself more comfortably in the leather upholstery, remaining silent. His face was expressionless.

Savage glanced sharply at this visitor, whose dumbness was beginning to be disconcerting. He groped among some papers on his wide desk. He drew forth one, and nodded.

"Ten million barrels. That's our tanks. The United has fifteen millions. I get that on good authority. Together we've ten million barrels now in Kernfield—both of us." He looked over the top of the paper, frowning. "And you people are talking of seventy-five-cent oil! Man, we're not in shape to buy a drop for nearly a year."

Hart spoke: "Seventy-five cents. That's our figure."

Savage whirled suddenly in his chair. He glared at Hart. His face became darker. The multitudinous little veins under the skin of his cheeks were empurpled. Then he laughed.

"You fellows think I'm a fool!" he exploded. "You don't know the situation. I called you here to tell you that I'm willing to take on a hundred thousand barrels of your storage—at nineteen cents. I'll do it to stave off hard times among the producers. I can afford that much. But I won't be able

to make any contracts. You understand now?"

"Sure." Hart rose and started for the door. "And you understand—seventy-five cents. Not a drop goes out until then." He had his hand on the knob when Savage snarled:

"Wait!"

Hart paused and turned.

"I gave you our figures." Savage jerked the words out. "I'll tell you how you stand. Two million barrels on hand now, and——"

"Just a moment," Hart interrupted quietly. "I'll not talk about your own figures—that twenty-five million barrels." He allowed a trace of sarcasm to creep into his voice. "But I'll tell you this. You've overestimated the available supply by one-fourth. The agency has just a little more than a million and a half barrels for sale."

"Pah!" Savage laughed again. "I know. Two million."

"You're counting the oil from my gusher," Hart retorted swiftly. "That's not for sale. Only one-tenth of it. The rest don't go on the market during this fight. Not one drop more than fifty thousand barrels."

He turned the doorknob, and over his shoulder he said quietly: "And our price is seventy-five cents."

He was able to see the brief astonishment that swept over Savage's face, before he turned his head and left the room.

"That's one jolt for him, anyhow," he said to himself, as he gained the hallway. "He'll do some thinking over that."

CHAPTER VI.

THREE TWENTY-DOLLAR PIECES.

The General Pacific had built a new depot two years before in Kernfield; a structure upon whose framework wire screening had been stretched; and over that wire screening a rough mortar had been spread. This had been meant to give an impression of adobe, although the color was a glaring yellow. The architecture of the depot was after the mission style.

Under the cloistered arches of this building, whose intended suggestion of past romance was lost in the presence of a reeking lunch counter, a news stand, and the clanging of several yard engines, Hart awaited the coming of the noon train from the branch line which led to Sunset. He sat upon a wooden bench, immersed in thought.

First his mind lingered on personal disappointment. He did two small problems in long division. The answer to one problem was twenty thousand dollars. The answer to the other problem was two hundred thousand. These represented dividends. The former was the dividend which he now hoped to get when oil began to sell again. The latter was what he might have realized—had he not chosen to contradict William Savage's figure on supply within the hour—had he been willing to jeopardize the issue for his own sake. He had thought of these things before; he had dismissed them with absolutely a free heart. He had told himself that it was sound business judgment so far as his company was concerned; that in the long run it would make more certain a good price for the gusher's yield. But now, with Jean coming, his thoughts had gone to their situation, and to their hopes. And the contrast of what was to be as against what might have come, was inevitable.

He did wish that what he had so willingly repudiated had been possible. It would have been so good—when the time came—to show her their bank book with six figures in it.

But that idea passed quickly, and it left no regrets behind it.

Then Hart began to think of something which made his lips curve, and brought a light into his eyes. In a few minutes she would be here, and he had a surprise for her.

That was the main reason why he had sent for Jean. He had been planning for it during the three weeks while he had been traveling through the State. He had been working for it every day. By taking smoking cars instead of sleepers, by eating many meals in unpretentious restaurants, by avoiding the

temptation of the diners, and by a score of other small economies, he had prepared joy for this meeting.

The agency had allowed no salary to Hart, but it had given him an expense account in keeping with the importance of his task. Out of that daily account, by these various self-denials, he had managed to save the sum of sixty dollars—to do that without in any way betraying poverty where an appearance of prosperity would help the agency. These sixty dollars—three twenty-dollar gold pieces—were in his pocket now.

He and Jean were both of them accustomed to the grind of that near-poverty which is so common among people educated to appreciation of the world's finer, softer things. Her parents had only a small income, and their large home was but a relic of a former generation's careless spending. He had behind him the lean days of the law. But never had either of them endured the rigid self-denial that both had to practice now—with wealth an aggravating possibility just ahead of them, like the vision of a cool pool in the desert to the eyes of him who does not know whether that pool is real or only a mirage. He had seen her accepting her hard position with brave cheerfulness. He had noted more than once how she had cherished those plans for their home; how she had denied herself small things.

But now he had in his pocket these three large gold pieces. And the train was roaring in through the yard tracks. He rose from the bench and hurried down the wide platform. A traveling man emerging from the lunch counter touched the arm of a companion.

"There," said the traveling man, "goes Frank Hart, the new oil king. He's got a gusher; and he's trying to corner petroleum. Got all the producers hypnotized; they're sticking to him. He'll make ten million out of the deal, that fellow." And the companion stared, making some remark about buccaneers in finance.

Hart stood by the steps of the dusty day coach. Several men and women filed down to the platform. The brakeman reached up to seize a suit case. Jean came into sight; then Hart had her in his arms.

At first he noticed only small flashes of detail—the light in her eyes; her lips, soft and warm for him; the pressure of her hand; the faint perfume of her hair. Other things were invisible through a mist of deep emotions which her presence had brought.

They were walking across the station platform to the row of yelling hackmen on the other side of the cloistered arches, when he suddenly got a vision of her. And he exclaimed:

"Dear heart! How beautiful you are this morning!"

There was in her dress of soft, light, tan-colored material, and in the little hat of burnt, brown straw, a marvelous effect of harmony in both line and color—that unostentatious fitness which makes the garb of some women stand out; which suggests individual tailoring. And there was in both dress and hat something familiar; he could not place it.

She uttered a pleased little laugh. "This morning?" she asked. "Not always then, Frank?"

"But this morning more than ever," he spoke swiftly. "How pretty that dress is!"

"Hush!" She smiled, patting his arm. "Don't you know that dress? I made it over last week. And the hat, too."

They were suddenly immersed in a whirlpool of importunate hackmen. Out of these swirling, ear-splitting contenders, Hart selected one. A minute later, when the door had slammed and the vehicle was rolling over the oiled street, Jean leaned toward him and kissed his cheek softly.

"You look tired," she said.

"I never felt better," he told her. "And I've a surprise for you."

But when she asked what it was he persisted in keeping silence. He took a certain joy in waiting, until they had gotten to the Southern Hotel. When they were within their room, he drew

the money from his pocket and placed it in her hand.

She held it in her palm, gazing down at it. She laughed. "You know," she said, "I can't help thinking they're beautiful, those twenty-dollar pieces."

Then she asked him whence and how they had come; and, when he told her, he saw a flash of pain in her face. He went on describing the joy he had found in saving them, dollar by dollar. The light came back to her eyes.

"Some day," he said; "some day soon, dear, we'll have a bank book instead of these."

She had been looking at the thick, heavy, golden disks; she raised her eyes to his, they were swimming with a sudden flow of emotion. "We can't be any happier than we are now," she said softly, "with just the little we have. Don't you see? We've got each other. And that's the most."

She left his side and began arranging her hair preparatory to their going down to the dining room.

"I talked with Savage this morning," he said quietly.

She turned from the mirror, and came back to him. "Tell me about it."

He recounted the details of their meeting. He ended with the words which he had delivered, his ultimatum.

"That was splendid," she said breathlessly.

"You understand, dear, what it means to us?" He watched her, fearing the disappointment which might come from the sudden turn in their prospects.

But she simply nodded, saying: "You did a brave thing."

"And you, dear heart!" he cried. "You had counted with me on every barrel as we saw it coming."

"Frank," she said quietly, "if we can get our home out there, and have enough to get along on, that is all I want now. We can wait for the other. Why, dear! There aren't many men who would do what you did. It makes me proud. I knew you would make me proud of you."

They were at lunch before he remembered Jacoby's invitation. And when he told her that, he saw, to his surprise, that her face fell. He remained silent, puzzled, looking at her across the table.

"What is it, Jean? Is there any reason—— Why——"

Her face cleared suddenly, and he saw a sort of keenness come to her eyes. She said nothing; she was evidently thinking quickly. Then her head was raised, and she flushed. "Frank," she said, smiling, "I must go shopping. You don't mind going to a dry-goods store with me, do you? I can alter this dress a little—making it low in the neck. Then——"

"Lord!" He leaned back, relieved. "So that was it!"

She looked at him as if she wondered at him; and she smiled at his lack of comprehension. She remembered that gold, heavy in her purse. "I'll spend some of my money, Frank! The gold you gave me!"

Others at lunch in the dining room glanced often at this couple talking happily in low tones. And men who knew Hart's face nudged companions as the traveling man at the depot had nudged his friend, pointing him out——

"The man who is trying to corner oil."

"The man who stands to make millions!"

"Lucky dog! And look at his wife! A beauty! The world is good to some people!"

But neither Hart nor Jean heard the comments; nor did either note the looks. He was too happy in having brought that surprise to her. And she—in these moments of her happiness—was too busy planning toward economy in that afternoon's shopping.

He went with her into not one dry-goods store, but three. Jean looked at many things. She asked prices. There was a scarf; its quest took them out of one establishment to another, and then to a third; before Hart found that she had been captivated by a filmy thing in the first place which they had visited; and that she had retreated, appalled by the price, which was six dollars. When he made that discovery he became stern; he led her back, reluctant, yet astir with anticipation. They went

away with that length of shimmery, silken stuff wrapped in a small paper parcel. After that he became keener; he watched her eyes as she looked at things. Thus he found her in the thrall of a pair of little low shoes, which had French heels, and were open over the instep. They would necessitate silken stockings; she told him. He bullied her into that purchase, also. But after that she rebelled, and flatly refused what she termed further extravagance.

They spent the rest of that afternoon in their room. There she used scissors, thread, and needle, with a sort of dogged swiftness which kept her speechless and distraught for long intervals. And when the hour arrived for Jacoby to call, he left her in the room still busy.

Jacoby came in a carriage. The two horses stood outside the hotel, pawing impatiently, chafing under the driver's taut reins, while Jacoby waited in the lobby with Hart.

Finally Jean emerged from the elevator. The little traveling dress had become an evening gown; there was over its upper portion a sheet of glittering material, which Hart dimly remembered having seen wrapped up during the afternoon's shopping. The filmy shawl of silk lay over Jean's dark hair, half hiding it. The little low shoes with their French heels showed glimpses of silken stocking at their open insteps.

Jacoby was different from what Hart had seen him before. He had suddenly taken on an air of courtliness. He greeted Jean with that polished, but sincere, deference which a woman loves. Hart watched his wife with rising pride. She was more beautiful than she had ever been.

The driver released the tautened reins; the big, black horses stepped forward, their necks arched; their great limbs all trembling with their eagerness. The carriage rolled smoothly over Kernfield's oiled streets, until, far out, it rattled over a driveway of finely crushed bluestone; and stopped before a wide door, deep within a lawn all dotted with shrubbery and shaded by tall trees.

A manservant was on the steps; he hovered over them as they entered. Jacoby introduced his visitors to his wife. She had a full, dark beauty. She possessed the banker's fineness of manner.

As she took Jean away with her, Hart saw how this large room, where he was sitting, had been furnished expensively and in good taste. But what affected him most was the presence all about him of many small things, such things as gather in a home, accumulating through the years. These household gods gave Hart a lonely feeling; as if he had thus far been bereft of something.

The women came back in a few minutes. Shortly afterward a servant announced dinner.

At that table, with its heavy, white linen, and its silverware, its gleaming cut glass and flowers, Hart found his eyes going often to his wife. She was very beautiful, and she had dressed herself in a manner becoming to her rare, dark beauty. He saw these things with a throb of that high pride which goes with love. And, in that little improvised evening gown of hers, through whose V-shaped opening her full, soft throat gleamed; he got the memory of her hurried shopping, of her needlework all of that afternoon. That memory, in spite of all its pleasure, hurt him.

She looked so fit here! So perfectly in keeping with these surroundings! So absolutely intended for these finer, softer luxuries of life! And she did not have them.

That feeling passed swiftly; but during the evening it recurred more than once. He found one solace—a promise that some day she should have these things.

Jacoby had become like a man with a new personality. Here in his home, with his handsome, dark-eyed wife, he was a man of polish and of grace; a man who talked with brilliance; who found pleasure in making his guests happy; who watched every detail to bring them enjoyment; a gentleman in small things as well as large.

They had been talking with the ab-

sorption which comes to people when they find pleasure in one another's company, when the subject changed to music. The banker rose abruptly; he went to the piano. For more than an hour they listened to the songs of Schumann, the sonorousness of Bach, the primitive, stirring chords of Brahms.

After they had left the house, and the driver was speeding the two big, black horses toward the hotel, Jean leaned close to Hart. "I was thirsty for music," she said.

It brought him back to that half-painful feeling which had first come over him looking at the many household gods; which had recurred at the dinner table, seeing her amid these fitting surroundings.

And he said, almost savagely: "Some day, Jean, it won't be long, dear, I am going to give you those things that you were made for."

But she laid her hand on his arm. "Frank, we can wait for those things. We can wait. We have each other!"

At that same hour it so happened that William Savage was speeding homeward with *his* wife. They had been spending the evening at a dinner given by one of Kernfield's new millionaires; an elaborate affair, where men of wealth and their wives sat together.

William Savage was sitting in one end of the automobile's rear seat. He was leaning back into the corner. His wife was sitting at the other end of that leather-cushioned seat; and she, too, was leaning back into the corner. Thus they leaned away from each other, as if they were trying to keep as far apart as possible.

Savage had pride in his wife; the pride of a man who has created an institution. For she had beauty; and she wore a gown of beauty; and jewels glittered in her hair and on her throat. She wore these things well; as he intended she should wear them. She fulfilled the purpose for which he had chosen her. She was a good woman on whom to spend money—a good wearer of adornments.

But, fulfilling her purpose, she had become stricken with dumbness. In his presence that dumbness always overtook her. She was unable to speak of love when he was near, because she had no love for him. She was overmastered by another desire—a desire to move on as she had begun to move—to move on to other dinner tables with rarer jewels, and other sets of diners, more carefully chosen than they could choose guests in Kernfield.

That desire had come between these two. And now they leaned in opposite directions. Neither spoke to the other.

Being thus left to his own thoughts, Savage began to ponder over *his* one absorbing pleasure. He thought of the Petroleum Association. His mind went back to Hart that morning.

"What did that fellow mean by that talk of not selling his oil?" The question had bothered him at different times that day. Now he found an answer:

"He's looking to sell out himself."

Savage leaned forward in the excitement of that discovery.

"Humph!" he muttered. "Funny I hadn't the sense to see that before!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE BRIBE.

Being a complex mechanism of marvelous efficiency, the United was often likened to a monster, with senses, and motives, and appetite. But the United was only a machine, whose purpose was to get crude oil into one end of every pipe line at the lowest possible price, and to disgorge it from the other end at the highest possible price.

Thus the United always obeyed one rule: It always stood a barrier between the oil fields and the hungry industry. It interposed itself between supply and demand.

Working at this single purpose, the United often furnished power for other dividend machines. One of these was the General Pacific Railroad, whose acquisition of the Petroleum Association had been financed by the group of banks which handled United money.

Now, when the Petroleum Association was fighting the men who had formerly supplied it with oil, the United was buying very much as usual. Few of its old contracts had run out. Hart was centering his attack on Savage, certain in his own mind that the United had no oil for its ally. In this Hart was right.

But the United was helping its ally in other ways. For, if the Petroleum Association was bearing the brunt of war, the huge pipe-line trust, on the other hand, stood to get most of the loot in case of victory.

So it came that the press-agent campaign, which was filling oil journals and the commercial pages of many daily papers, was carried on with an insidious skill. It also came that George Long, the General Pacific's local attorney, sometimes acted under orders whose origin was not in the railroad, but in that office full of card indexes and tabulated reports, which was the nearest thing to a heart that the United owned.

Long, however, did not bother about the ultimate origin of orders. He was too good a soldier. So he never knew how a theory evolved by William Savage had traveled back and forth across the continent on the private wires of two corporations, before it reached his office in the form of brief instructions.

Obeying these instructions, Long sent a telegram to Frank Hart. The message found Hart in another field, where he had gone to hire men to guard the gates where laterals connected with the Petroleum Association's pipe line. For now there was fear of the association stealing the oil which it could not buy. Wild stories were afloat of midnight expeditions, and sumps half drained in the hours of darkness.

This new turn in affairs had come upon Hart in a few days after Jean's visit to Kernfield. He traveled through the State, making hurried trips to the points of danger. Also, he saw Olds and Porter, who were working for the agency, as scouts, spotting railroad cars, interviewing tank watchmen, beginning to gather facts concerning the actual amount of oil which the two trusts held in storage. Their reports were encouraging; but as yet they had no proof.

Hart was worrying over these phases of the fight that morning when the telegram came. He felt that the day was fast approaching when he must be able to show the other twenty-four members of the agency that the shortage existed. He must be able to prove that shortage by figures.

For these other twenty-four members were showing signs of fear. They were dreading to face ruin.

When he got Long's telegram, Hart put these thoughts aside. Here was something unexpected. What move was the enemy making now?

Two days later, when he entered Long's offices in Kernfield, he was still wondering.

Long greeted him with the old semi-paternal familiarity. In the lawyer's inner office Hart looked about him at the yellow-bound volumes. He had not been in a room lined by law books since he had left the profession. The air seemed stuffy with that book smell. He wondered how he had managed to stand it as long as he had before turning his back on these suffocating tomes with their endless spider webs of squibbling.

Long saw him look about. "Glad you're out of it?" The lawyer chuckled. "I never got tired of it, myself."

Hart turned to him. "I should think you'd have gone to San Francisco. They tell me you had a good chance after the purchase of the Petroleum Association."

Long smiled. "I did," he acknowledged; "and I'll tell you why I stayed, Frank. If I'd gone to the city, I'd have had to enter a new line entirely—telling other men how to carry on their business; telling them how to apply common sense to their dealings. I'd be an office lawyer. Here"—he waved his hand about the room—"I keep busy with lawsuits. I get to the appellate court and supreme court very often. I'm only a country lawyer; but I handle more law than a lot of big men in the office buildings—that is to say, I get into court ten times to their one." His face

became graver. "Of course, just now I get my share of the other thing. But that won't last long."

Hart grew expectant. The subject was drawing closer to that telegram. But his face remained unmoved by any sign of that expectancy. He was learning the art which makes some men wonderful poker players, the art of keeping his features immobile. And he said quietly:

"I don't think it will, either."

"Frank"—Long shook his finger and threw back his head, so that his heavy mane of iron-gray fell away from his brow—"the victory will not be with you." He said it impressively. He believed it.

Hart answered with an equal sureness: "I think it will." And, in the tone which he gave it, "think" meant "know."

"I'll tell you in a few words why I'm on the winning side," Long went on earnestly. "My people stick together. They know what they're fighting for. They have one purpose. While your people, Frank"—he became emphatic now—"they're a band of wolves, ready to turn on any one of themselves, on their own leader if they see him weaken. Ready to turn on him and rend him. To-day they're scared to death. Before the month is out, more than fifteen of those other twenty-four members of your agency will desert you—if you stay with them."

Hart remained silent, impassive. He was trying to see the point toward which Long aimed.

"I'm sincere in saying this. I know it." Long paused abruptly.

Hart nodded. "I believe that," he answered gravely.

Long looked keenly at him. "Why did you go into it?"

"Listen"—Hart became earnest now—"I went into this because I have five hundred thousand barrels of high-gravity oil. I intend to get a good price for that oil—seventy-five cents a barrel."

Long waved his hand. "You went into it for that?" He thought now for the first time that there might be a good, sound basis of fact back of those orders which he was following.

"I surely did." Hart nodded twice. "And——"

"Hold on, Frank. You want seventy-five cents for that oil. You are fighting for that figure. Supposing you could get—not seventy-five cents, but one dollar——"

Then revelation came to Hart. He saw the object of this summons—the bribe which Long was offering! He felt a sudden flush of shame that he should be considered vulnerable. With that shame there came a flash of anger at Long. But shame and anger passed. He knew that Long was only a good soldier. And now Hart felt a desire to know for a certainty that the enemy was trying these tactics. If this was bribery, the association must be desperate. So he said impassively:

"I'd fight harder for dollar oil than I would for seventy-five-cent oil."

Long frowned at the evasion. He spoke more sharply: "I can offer you a dollar a barrel for your company's oil—if you'll sell to-day."

"If I'll sell to whom?" Hart flushed again. "To the General Pacific?"

"You know whom I'm working for." Long's face had a drawn appearance, as he answered.

Hart leaned back in his chair. "I won't go on talking this way to you," he said. "I don't care who would buy it, anyhow. It all comes from the same quarter. But now I'll say what I started to say when you interrupted with that proposition. I went into this to get seventy-five cents for my oil. To get that it was necessary to secure a seventy-five-cent price for every one. I'm fighting for that price. Now, to make surer of winning, I took all of my own oil off the market—all but one-tenth of it. I'm going to keep the rest in storage, George, if I have to hold it for five years. The price is going to come for it, too. There'll be demand enough for it later on. That's my plan of action. Let's not bother over any more talk about oil prices. You don't want to buy, and I don't want to sell to-day."

Long remained silent for a minute. His face had lost that drawn look. But he repeated—as he believed from the bottom of his heart: "Frank, they'll quit you, those others. They're looking out for number one, the whole pack of them."

"I'll hold them together," Hart said quietly. He looked at his watch. "I've got to go now; it's past noon."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BATTLEFIELD OF INDUSTRY.

That afternoon Hart went to Jacoby. In the First National Bank he met a man whose face seemed vaguely familiar, an old man with a chin beard and no mustache. The two looked curiously at each other. Hart felt that this stranger recognized him. He was puzzling over the elusive familiarity of the other's face as he entered Jacoby's office.

When he saw the little banker sitting before his desk, Hart remembered. It was the old man with whom he had seen Jacoby on the night of the mass meeting.

"Lewis was just here," Jacoby said; "the president of the American Company. I wish you'd come sooner."

Hart became eager at once. American Oil was the only large producing company which had not taken sides in the fight. It owned a pipe line, and a fleet of tank ships. During these weeks Hart had watched that corporation sharply, wondering if by any turn of chance it would be induced to throw its oil to the enemy.

"I wish I had come before," he said. "I tried to find him twice in Los Angeles. You know where he stands?"

"The American," Jacoby said quietly, "is pumping oil and selling direct. They won't hurt your people, just now," he smiled peculiarly; "they're looking for new fields."

Hart drew a long breath. "I don't care what they're looking for, if they're not going to sell to Savage."

Jacoby seemed content at that dismissal. He listened while Hart told him of the visit with Long.

"That," said Jacoby, "was the result of your talk with Savage."

Hart nodded. "And now they'll swing back to the old attack. They'll move heaven and earth to pull the others away from me." He made the assertion with a matter-of-fact cheerfulness.

But Jacoby shook his head. "I still think you ought to have told those other fellows that your oil isn't for sale. This constant newspaper talk is going to do you harm."

"Sure." Hart smiled, undisturbed. "But I'm going to let them use up as much ammunition as I can. In a month from now the agency meets. No action can be taken until we do meet. Let the United and Savage shoot until then. I'll sit tight. But, Jacoby"—he pressed his lips closely, and his eyes flashed—"that night I'll give them everything I've got. It will be a show-down. If the Petroleum Association has the oil they claim to have, they'll win. If they're lying, they'll pay seventy-five cents a barrel. And it will be the other members that will say that, too!"

"A month from now." Jacoby tapped the desk with his lead pencil. "You can hold out?"

"*I* can hold out. Sure. All they can do is curse me. None can sell a drop of oil until the meeting. And, as for curses, my skin's getting thick."

Jacoby answered musingly: "It makes me think of when I was a little boy, and read about the Battle of Bunker Hill, and the general's order: 'Wait till you see the whites of their eyes.' I remember how I fidgeted imagining those ragged Continentals standing there and not shooting, waiting while the English swept up the hill."

"Yes, and they did business when they shot, too! Only trouble was, they ran out of powder." Hart chuckled. "I'm hoping to drive our friend, Savage, down the hill with two volleys——"

Jacoby looked up.

"First I'll tell my fellow members how I'm holding my oil. Then I'll show them that Savage and the United

haven't a hundred thousand barrels altogether."

"It's that last volley you want to make sure of," Jacoby said seriously.

"The ammunition for that I won't gather until the eleventh hour," Hart replied calmly. "I'll give them their figures up to the minute."

"Frank"—Jacob leaned forward in his chair—"I envy you sometimes. A banker has to sit down and watch these things. Often I wish I was in the fight instead of looking on."

Hart pulled out his watch. "I've got to get the train for the south," he said abruptly. "I'm going to hire some shotgun guards to watch the pipe-line gates."

"They're trying to steal already?" Jacoby asked.

"They have. It don't amount to anything. But it starts talk, and scares some of the producers. And a demonstration does them all good."

Hart's face tightened as he left the office; it became set, expressionless, as if he had made it a habit to prevent all men from reading his mind, finding it best to keep all men guessing.

Kernfield's wide main street was strangely quiet this afternoon. It was like the street of a beleaguered city. Industry's troops no longer roared and clanked down that broad thoroughfare. The sidewalk edge was lined for two blocks by men.

They sat there, their shoulders bent forward, their big hands folded listlessly between their knees. Some of them were talking quietly. But most of them were dumb, looking straight ahead of them.

They were the men from the oil fields; the drillers, the tool dressers, the teamsters, pipe-liners, and roustabouts. They had worked hard for high wages. During the heyday of boom times, they had spent their money freely. Now, they were drifting into the town; they were gathering on the edges of the sidewalks. They sat, waiting for the chance to work once more.

Occasionally they changed their attitudes. One, and then another, would remove his big, listless hands from between his knees; would thrust them deep into his pockets, as though from force of old, careless habit, expecting to find within those pockets the dollars which had jingled there before. But, finding nothing, the man would withdraw his hands, folding them again between his knees, leaning forward, frowning at the ground.

Passing the lines of idle men on his way to the depot, Hart heard a mutter grow among them. As he walked on, that muttering followed him; a wave of sullen sound, gathering force and height. Until, when he had reached the end of the line, it had increased into a torrent of angry ejaculations.

He caught, repeated in various portions of the long line, one phrase:

"Stands to make his millions, damn him!"

Those words followed him. They lingered in his memory. The reproach of men facing poverty. They believed that he was keeping them there on the edge of the sidewalk.

But Hart's face remained calm, and his mind remained easy. He knew whence had sprung the lie behind that growing wave of sullen hatred. And he knew that the hard case of these toilers was but one of many brutal incidents, but one result of this fighting—a casualty in the battle.

In the southern fields he hired shotgun guards for the gates where the laterals joined the association's pipe line.

He looked now on rows of inert walking beams. Only at rare intervals in the wide derrick forest did he catch sight of one of the huge beams heaving slowly upward, sweeping down again. Only at rare intervals did he hear the soft whine of the pumping. And then he knew the well was one which was selling to the United, or one belonging to Lewis' company, the American. On all sides he saw the full sumps, glinting somberly in the sun's rays; and the steel tanks, all splotched with dull, black stains, holding the fuel for which industry down at seaboard was clamoring from the mouths of a thousand roaring furnaces.

He talked with the owners of the wells; he heard their complaints of water gathering in the holes; he heard their fears of bankruptcy; and he heard the stories of sudden insistence on the part of banks and bondholders. He saw how the allied forces of the mighty dividend machines were bringing new strength to bear against his scattered army. The lenders of money had been driven by their masters into the battle.

From the southern field he traveled north, on his mission of hiring guards for the pipe-line gates. And in the other fields he found the same conditions: The inert walking beams; the lying idle; the rows of unemployed men on the edges of the sidewalks; the well owners, worried before the threat of bankruptcy, fearful lest the war last beyond their powers of endurance.

Now Hart began to hear on all sides the voice of sullen hatred. He heard it among the owners of the wells, whose contracts he held in that safe-deposit box—the men who could not sell a barrel of oil until the agency said the word.

These men were saying to each other the same thing which the drillers, the teamsters, the pipe-liners, and the tool dressers had said; that he was holding all their oil in order to sell his own enormous storage for a high price.

That statement came often from men who had been among the most enthusiastic at the mass meeting. It came, with the unreasoning influence of the fear which was now upon them—the fear for the wealth which they had acquired at great risk. That fear was over all the oil fields.

When these men talked to Hart, he saw that some of them no longer looked him in the eye; and many of them spoke evasively; or asked pointed questions about his own oil. He knew they stayed behind him now because of one thing—the contracts in his safe-deposit box.

The papers were devoting much space to oil news. They were constantly commenting on one thing. They said that there was on hand in the tanks of the United and the association twenty-five million barrels of crude oil. Enough to fill demand for nearly a year. They said the tanks in Kernfield now held ten million barrels.

This statement was the main artillery of the enemy. Every day that artillery roared on; as siege guns roar before some fortress which is deemed impregnable.

With that roaring came the sharp crackle of smaller arms: The insinuations by which distrust was spread; the constant comment on Hart's five hundred thousand barrels of crude oil; the constant reference to Hart as the man who stood the chance of gaining riches by this fight.

"The man who was trying to corner oil." "The man who would be California's oil king."

Now, as the days went by, and the weeks dragged on, companies began to go to the wall. There was a scattering of failures throughout the State. Men who had been wealthy found themselves without a dollar. The dead were littering this battlefield of industry. And, like streams of wounded going toward the rear, scores of crippled companies were shrieking for aid.

Hart's mail became large during the latter days of the month. There were many letters from strangers, abusing him; there were a few threatening him with personal violence. There were a goodly number from well owners begging him to call a meeting of the agency.

There were also other letters. These were written by members of the agency, by the twenty-four men whom he must hold in line. Some of the members were anxious for compromise; one or two even advised giving up the fight entirely; nearly all demanded to know what course of action he intended pursuing at the meeting.

Reading these letters, Hart saw that the final battle was near at hand.

Two days before the scheduled meeting, Hart got a message from William Savage, inviting another interview. That morning he went to Savage's office.

The oil master was sitting beside his wide-topped desk. It seemed to Hart that Savage's face had grown darker; that the little vein webs had become

deeper in hue. But Savage's eyes were bright, and his manner aggressive.

"Sit down," Savage said tersely. "I sent for you to make you an offer."

Hart nodded. "What is it?" he asked quietly.

"Twenty-five cents. We'll take on two-year contracts with your people for that figure. For the sake of the——"

Hart arose. "You got my figure last time I saw you. It's the same to-day." He went out from the office.

But Savage, sitting there alone, smiled, while the lines of craft squirmed about his eyes.

Hart was thoughtful leaving the building. He was trying to see the purpose of the interview.

That same afternoon, when he bought a copy of the Kernfield evening paper, he read an account of the offer on the first page, and a statement from Savage, expressing pity for the well owners. He realized the motive now. The enemy had fired its last salvo into the wavering band of twenty-four.

Hart sent two telegrams that evening; and the next morning Olds and Porter came to the Southern Hotel. They had been traveling during these weeks, between Kernfield and tidewater, along the routes of the Petroleum Association's pipe line and the pipe lines of the United. They had been gathering data on supply. And now they sat down with Hart, eager to explain their figures.

But Hart shook his head. "Give them to me," he said. "I sent for you to do some work. To-morrow night the agency holds its meeting. Before that meeting is over, I want you to bring me figures showing just how much oil is in the tanks of the association and the United in Kernfield."

"We've got that now——" Olds started impatiently.

Porter nodded; the ex-train dispatcher's face had grown leaner and more lined than ever during these days of spotting cars.

Hart shook his head again. "No," he said, "that won't do. It's only hearsay—gotten from tank watchmen and others. Here's what I want:

"The tanks in Kernfield—the tanks that the association and the United claim are now storing ten million barrels. I want firsthand information, showing *just how much oil those tanks have in them to-morrow night.*" He paused.

Olds and Porter looked at him in silence. The engineer's face was alight with a sort of fierce expectancy. Porter's lined features had taken on grimness.

"I want those tanks gauged to-morrow evening," Hart went on quietly.

"Good Lord!" Olds cried. "Do you know——"

"I know"—Hart spoke calmly—"there are ten-foot, barbed-wire fences. You want to have wire nippers. There are watchmen. You want to keep an eye on them. It will need about a dozen of you—and a gauge line to every man."

He paused and looked at the two of them earnestly. Then, slowly:

"It will be hurry-up work. It'll need nerve. Get good men, men you can depend upon. And men who are willing to do what they started out to do—no matter what tries to stop them—or how."

There was silence for some moments. Olds spoke first, and he was smiling:

"Better give us some money—for guns and gauge lines."

Hart nodded and handed him a hundred-dollar bill.

They talked over details for a while, and, when they were about to part, Hart gave his final instructions:

"Chances are you can do it quietly. But if you can't—do it anyhow. If those tanks are empty, the others at seaboard are surely drained. Get the figures to me in this room before to-morrow at midnight.

CHAPTER IX.

TWENTY-THREE MUTINEERS.

The next evening Hart came to the Southern Hotel during the dinner hour. He had stayed away all that day. He wanted to avoid meeting his fellow members of the agency. For he did not care to answer questions. During all

these weeks he had kept his plans secret. So long as no one else knew those plans, the enemy stood no chance of learning them. At this eleventh hour he was determined not to jeopardize that final coup by even the barest hint.

The entire situation now hung on the gauging of the tanks in which the United and the Petroleum Association claimed to be storing ten million barrels of oil. That measurement must take place. Hart trembled lest some false movement or some careless word on the part of those who had the execution of the raid should betray the project. He had no intention of increasing the risk by confiding in any of the twenty-four.

Therefore he had stayed away. He knew that his secretiveness regarding other details had already aroused distrust among some of these men. He knew his absence would increase that feeling. The enemy had maintained its attack on the twenty-four, until several, whose companies had obligations to meet, were close to ruin; until others were fearful of their own future; until nearly all of them felt that the struggle was becoming hopeless, and were eager for some compromise.

He was risking everything on the raid. When Olds and Porter brought the uncombatable evidence that the enemy was short of oil; when the twenty-four learned that all the fear talk had been but a monstrous fabric of lies; then they would come back to him, willing to dare ruin in one final charge. The battle would be won.

But he had to hold them in line until Olds and Porter came.

In the lobby of the Southern, Hart found Doherty. Doherty's face had grown thinner; there was a flabbiness in the formerly rounded cheeks, a drawn look about the eyes. Hart guessed the reason.

"How are you standing it?" he asked.

Doherty shook his head. "Sailin' close to the rocks. I may last another month. The banks have been hammering hell out of me." Suddenly he pulled himself together by a visible effort and smiled wanly. "My troubles are my own." There was pride in his voice. "How about seventy-five-cent oil?"

Hart laid his hand on Doherty's shoulder. "If I can hold these fellows together to-night, we'll get seventy-five-cent oil mighty soon. It all depends on that. It's them I've got to fight, just now, not Savage."

Doherty glanced keenly at him. There was hunger in the look; a huge eagerness to know. "Ye've got something on?" he asked.

Temptation assailed Hart. He knew Doherty was loyal. But he merely nodded. "Don't mention that much to any man," he said. "I have."

"I'll stick," Doherty spoke quietly. "I gave my pledge with the rest of them the night we organized. I'll keep it. But"—he pushed his broad-brimmed hat back from his damp forehead, and he sighed—"it may be us two for it. Back to back."

"What's on?" Hart demanded. "Where are the rest of them?"

Doherty's wan smile returned. "In caucus," he replied slowly. "An hour ago they went upstairs—twenty-three of them. When they asked me, I told them I'd do my caucusin' in the meetin'."

Hart whistled. He had not expected open opposition.

"Ye see," Doherty went on, "they're scared stiff, all of them. I can't blame them exactly. Nobody is as easy to scare as a rich man, when it's his dollars that's liable to go. I know. I'm rich myself—or was a month ago. God knows *what* I am now. And some of them are in a worse fix than me, I suppose. Anyhow, they came here in a blue funk, the whole of them. And durin' the afternoon Savage sent word for five of them. They went to see him; and when they came back, they called this caucus."

"Who were the five?" Hart felt his finger ends tingling, as they had tingled that night before he made his speech.

"Barker, Thompson, Davidson, Lord, and Jones." Doherty ticked the names off on his fingers.

Hart frowned. "All Baker River

field owners. And all of them living in San Francisco."

"And every one of them caught short when this started," Doherty said listlessly. "Millionaires if they can sell their oil; busted if they have to hold out much longer. Savage knows them. I tell ye, man, the United has done the butcherin' all this time, and Savage has stood by to end it by doin' the dirty work."

Hart shot a swift look at him.

Doherty shook his head. "Oh, I don't mean they're crooked. But they might as well be. They got the others together for some compromise. They mean to throw ye down. They're sore because ye've not talked more with them. They think you want to sell your oil at a high figure if it busts every owner in the State."

Hart laughed. "I'll have a surprise for them when it comes to that. I'll spring it on them when we start. But now"—he became grave—"this looks like a fight for time. I want to hold them till midnight. They must not take any action until I bring certain information before them. And I can't tell them what is on. We'll have to keep them there."

"I'm with ye," Doherty repeated. "If ye have anything up your sleeve, we'll fight it out—back to back."

Hart knew it was the utterance of a man facing ruin. He gripped Doherty's arm; and for a moment the two stood silent. Between them passed that which is stronger than words, that man-to-man loyalty which makes speech a poor thing.

Then—"Had dinner yet?" Hart asked.

Doherty shook his head. "I was waitin' for ye," he said simply.

They went together to the dining room, deserted now by all but themselves and two or three listless waiters.

"Meeting's set for eight," Hart said over the soup. "It lacks only five minutes now. If they're expecting to break away from me, they'll be in a hurry. We'll take our time."

Doherty's smile became more cheerful. He winked at Hart when he delivered his order—he had carefully chosen several dishes whose preparation would consume a good half hour.

"You see," Hart remarked, while they were at the entrées, "you're secretary; I'm president. They can't very well start without one of us."

Doherty made no remark, but jerked his head toward the door of the dining room. Glancing in that direction, Hart saw three of his fellow members looking in anxiously. He nodded to them and went on with his meal.

"Caucus is over," said Doherty. "They've decided——"

"On twenty-five-cent oil," Hart interrupted quietly. "I had a talk with Savage myself the other day, you remember."

They dallied through that meal. When it was done at last, they lingered over the finger bowls, smoking their cigars, while a waiter emanated dumb impatience behind them.

In the lobby Hart shook hands with the twenty-three, regarding them all with an open-eyed cheerfulness, which they did not reciprocate. Some of them looked him in the eyes with straightforword defiance; others looked upon the floor, while they uttered perfunctory greetings. Together all twenty-five of them went to the suite of rooms which Hart had retained for the meeting.

At one end of these rooms was a small center table; on that table were Doherty's minute book and a bundle of papers—the various reports that Olds and Porter had sent in regarding the shortage of oil in the tanks of the enemy, hearsay evidence gathered from many sources; the figure regarding the whole State which Hart hoped to prove this night by facts in Kernfield. On either side of the table was a chair. Hart took one and Doherty the other. Hart laid his open watch beside the papers. The timepiece showed five minutes past nine o'clock.

The body of the suite—for there were two rooms thrown together by opening folding doors—was sprinkled with chairs. In these the twenty-three other members of the agency gathered.

Thus they sat—the two opposing

forces. For all of the grim war had centered in this room. Its final battle was to be fought here—between two factions of one army. The old tactics of the United, practiced in many another field, had worked out to that end.

Would those tactics continue to work on—as they had in other cases? Hart asked himself that question—and he glanced at his watch. It depended on himself, on Doherty, and on time.

Hart called the meeting to order. He stood beside the table, thin-bodied, tense as a coiled steel spring; his lean face calm; his gray eyes very steady. He looked down upon the other twenty-three. They were well-dressed men. Most of them since becoming wealthy had lived in the cities. The close-clipped mustaches, and the iron-gray hair; the permanent cleft down the brow; these things were predominant among them. They sat there silent. From them came an atmosphere of sullen determination.

Doherty read the minutes. Doherty did this with a tremendous deliberation. He wore his glasses; at times he removed them to polish the lenses with his handkerchief. He pronounced every word slowly, sonorously. The twenty-three chafed visibly; as if, perhaps, they had something to do which they wanted to have over with.

At last the minutes were concluded. Abruptly a man arose, addressing the chair. A brown-eyed, florid man, with curling, gray hair, and full mustache.

"Just a moment, Mr. Barker," Hart said quietly. Now he knew their leader. He paused as Barker sat down. Then:

"Since this agency organized, the impression has been spreading that we had two million barrels of oil on the market. More than a month ago I saw William Savage. I told him then that we had a little more than a million and a half barrels. I took off the market my oil—all but one-tenth of it. I did that to cut down supply. I knew you would ratify my action. I want some one to make a motion to that effect now."

He made the announcement slowly, in an even voice. He watched their faces. He saw surprise come over them, then bewilderment. They had not dreamed of this. They had believed its opposite. They sat in silence; and every man of them was staring at him, as if they were trying to reconcile this revelation with something which they had just heard. He waited for the full effect to sink in.

Then Barker arose again. "You mean you told Savage that?" he demanded.

"I told Savage. I told George Long later, when he interviewed me for the Petroleum Association. I told Jacoby, of the First National. Either of the latter two will corroborate it. Savage knows it is so." Hart spoke quietly, with a pleasant sureness.

Barker stood frowning; perplexity was written on his face.

"Did Savage tell you otherwise this afternoon?" Hart shot the question at him, and smiled.

Barker flushed. His frown deepened. "I'll make the motion," he said abruptly; "withdrawing all your oil but fifty thousand barrels." He sat down and whispered to the man next to him, who rose at once to second it. When it was put to a vote, there was a scattering of ayes, and no opposition.

Hart saw how the twenty-three were bewildered, but he saw, also, that Barker was determined on sticking to his original course of action. He looked down at his watch.

It was nearly half past nine.

The twenty-three were muttering to one another. Heads were shaking. Hart waited; and saw the long hand of the watch drag by two minutes.

Barker rose; he thrust his hands deep into his pockets. He threw back his shoulders.

"We appreciate the stand you've taken," he bowed to Hart. "We have every faith in your honesty. But"—he threw back his head and half turned, so that he could look at the others—"we do *not* believe in your method. We're facing ruin. All of us. You're keeping us all in the dark. You're sincere. We feel that. But you can't make it. You can't make it! And we

can't afford to let you go on further—doing we don't know what—and"—he withdrew his right hand and raised it above his head—"bringing no results."

From all parts of the room came a sudden "A-a-a-h!"

"This afternoon some of us saw Savage. He offered us twenty-five cents and two-year contracts. We've got ourselves to look out for. We've got nearly two hundred other owners to protect. We've got a whole industry. And we cannot stand it any longer." He raised his face; his lips were drawn; his eyes blazed with earnestness. "Before God, we cannot stand it." He brought his clenched fist down in a tense sweep, uttering the last words with slow, deep solemnity. "We have conferred, and we've decided to take that offer."

Hart smiled his hard, tight smile.

Barker waited in the tense silence; then, suddenly, in a loud voice, as if it were bursting from him, beyond his control: "I make the motion. Sell for twenty-five cents. Accept that offer." Barker threw both arms out in a wide gesture, and bowed his head like one surrendering to the inevitable.

"I second it!" The cry came from several quarters.

TO BE CONCLUDED.

The final installment of "Black Gold" will appear in the December month-end POPULAR, on sale two weeks hence, November 23rd.

****

THE MINER WHO MADE GOOD

PARCEL post is working. Little by little, it will be made better, by being made cheaper, more far-reaching, simpler. For its installation and improvement, the nation owes thanks and a blessing to a modest citizen of Maryland, David J. Lewis. We are not forgetting the valiant service of such men as Hitchcock, Jonathan Bourne, Burleson, John Koons, and Senator Bristow in initiating and extending the system. But these men, who have done so much for us, are hearty in proclaiming the nation's debt to the clear-thinking, simple-hearted congressman from Maryland. The changes recently put through by the postmaster are in the line of tendency urged by Lewis. The post-office department, as it has worked out the grueling details in the installation of the new giant, has been in constant debt to him.

Few men in the country have made so close and long-continued a study of transportation as Lewis. For over twenty years he has aimed his life at the mastery of that one subject—the movement of persons and things from one point to another. Lewis has done it all—the slow rise to power and wisdom—lone-handed, unaided. He was a "poor boy," and then a worker in the mines. Whenever he could shake loose a quarter hour of time, he drove away at his books. It was his one desire to master his subject, to be thorough in a great matter.

He is theoretical, say those who would put the brakes on his speed—he is too theoretical, too scholarly. Think of it—the miner too scholarly! Surely this man has "arrived." The long climb has brought a summit. To think your way into the daily life of ninety million persons is fulfillment for a plain American. To make life a little better for his countrymen: the poor boy has come far.

Like most men, who have wrestled for patient years with truth, he talks in short words, through which his meaning is as clear as an October day. He is a thinker in the vernacular, clothing those ripe views of his in homespun English. And not only does he talk simply. He lives simply, and acts simply, stuffing wad after wad of tobacco into his old clay pipe. He meets men as equals.

In the clatter of great reputations, self-advertised, we must not omit to pay homage to the quiet, self-contained producers of result. Homage is due to David J. Lewis.

When Casey Laughed

By Neil Montrose

I STRAPS my belt around me,
  And steps out on the sill,
'Way up there on the 'leventh floor—
  A drop was sure to kill—
And then I swabs the winderpane,
All spotty, with the dust and rain.

Across the court was Casey,
  He didn't have no belt—
'Twas too much work to wear the thing—
  I knew just how he felt;
Us winder washers get to be
A little careless, don't you see?

The wind come up some stronger,
  And so I hollers: "Say,
You dum fool, Casey, get your belt—
  This here's a risky day."
I speaks in kindness, from my heart,
Not meanin' anythin' to start.

But Casey looks real ugly.
  He says: "Shut up, you dub,"
And then he turns away from me,
  To wash and wipe and rub;
He might have some ability,
But say, he lacked civility.

I keeps a-gettin' madder,
  As I was washin' there,
For talk like that from such as him
  Was more than I could bear;
And so I hollers: "I kin lick
A dozen guys just like you, Mick!"

He turns at me and cusses
  And yells: "I'll smash yer face!"
He shakes a ragin' fist at me
  From that there narrer place,
He got so careless of his grip,
I thought he sure was due to slip.

And me, I thinks it over,
  Like this: "He'll get so mad
That he will lose his holt and fall—"
  And that there'd be too bad.
You see, he had a wife and kid,
Dependin' on the work he did.

So I sings out, real scaredlike:
  "I take them words all back!"
And him, he turns and laughs so hard
  I thought his sides would crack;
I couldn't work up there, no more,
And went down to the second floor.

Say, I was boilin' over;
  I wished the day was done.
For I ain't one that starts a scrap
  And then will turn and run;
The afternoon went slowly by,
And me so mad, I thought I'd cry.

I heard the quittin' whistles
  And dropped my rag and pail;
I laid for Casey down below—
  We ended up in jail.
But, though he showed uncommon grit,
I beat him up and made him quit.

Some guys is most ungrateful;
  You do good turns, then what?
When you are lookin' for your thanks,
  Your labors is forgot;
You've got to pound a little sense
In them folks' heads, for they're that dense.

Dodo's Dream Horse

By Charles R. Barnes

Author of "From the Ranks," "The Hold-up Man," Etc.

The Boarder hears of a "really beautiful" incident in the eventful life of the race-track gambler's widow

I BEEN downtown," began Mrs Sweeney, in some excitement, "and I seen that there Dodo Walsh, all lit up like the front of a movie show. I slings out one of my silk-upholstered mitts at him, and I says:

"'O you Dodo!' I says.

"He looks at me almost like you see parties look at a nineteen-year-old chicken that they'd like to buy a dinner for. I guess I must stack up kinda good, these days, mister?"

The Boarder, who had been vainly endeavoring to produce good magazine material with the thermometer nearing ninety, turned from his typewriter to welcome the fluttering intrusion into his den. He deliberately took invoice of his visitor. She wore a well-fitting and modish gown of white serge, a white hat, white shoes and stockings, and white gloves. Her face was somewhat flushed, and there was a lively sparkle in her eyes.

"You look about twenty-five years old," said the Boarder evenly. "Also, you look cool, and very wholesome."

Mrs. Sweeney's color deepened.

"That ain't w'at Dodo said," she thoughtfully told her literary lodger.

"Dodo says, 'Belle Sweeney,' he says, 'the last time I lamped you was the aft'noon my dream horse, the Squab, run the race that put the sh-h in Walsh, so to speak,' he says. 'I mean,' he says, 'the race that made me do my thinkin' with my brains, instead of with my mouth. That,' he says, 'must be six or seven years ago, Belle Sweeney,' he says, 'and, take it from me,' he says, 'if you was a pleasant little view then,' he says, 'and all the gang at the tracks had you down on the slate like that, believe me,' he says, 'you are sure the Sunshine Kid now, with all the birdies a-chirpin',' he says, 'and the green grass growin' all round, round, round,' he says. 'The years,' he says, 'is treatin' you better as a make-up box,' he says."

Mrs. Sweeney paused to glimpse herself in a tiny mirror which she produced from the mysterious recesses of her vanity outfit.

"But Dodo," she presently commented, "was alwus heavin' words out of his system. His vocab'lary had a self-starter, and no back-up gear. He was what you might call a open-air thinker, mister. And I guess it was just as well in them days. You see, if he wouldn't of did his meditatin' like he was ballyhooin' at a Coney Island concession, us race-track folks never would of knowed that kinda creepy stuff about his ma and that there dream horse, the Squab."

"I don't remember that you ever mentioned him before, Mrs. Sweeney," the Boarder reminded her.

"Mebby I didn't," she said, "but I can do it now if you got time to listen. You see, w'en my poor dead husban', Dan Sweeney, was alive and doin' business as bookmaker at race tracks, him and me lived through so much that a party can't tell it all while you're gettin' your shoes shined. Are these seats all rented?" she asked whimsically, awaiting his invitation to make herself at home. He laughed and indicated a rocker, into which she sank.

"Dodo Walsh's ma didn't have noth-

in' but rockin'-chairs in the room, that aft'noon," she began. "I remember it plain as the last lobster salad I got ptomaine poisoned off of. Sometimes, mister, w'en big things is doin', it's some triflin' little bit of business on the side that a party alwus remembers when thinkin' about it. Right now, as I set here and line that queer stuff up, I can see little 'Lizbeth Breen, that had butted in there somehow, teeterin' back and forth in one of them rockers, and kinda gaspin' b'cause the soft-pedaled excitement was that grippin'. But lemme go back and charge at the barrier for a reg'lar start. This here thing of beginnin' at the three-quarter pole ain't w'at I'd call the class. First, you want to know about this here Dodo person I met up with downtown to-day. Ain't I right?"

"That's a pretty good place to begin," agreed the Boarder.

"It sure is," affirmed Mrs. Sweeney, "for Dodo was a character in them days; and all my friends in the show business falls so hard for the character stuff that I guess there must be a whole lot to bein' one. And Dodo cert'nly had a character part wished on him right. He was a mamma's boy, and letter perfect. He had worked at it so long, with his ma, Mrs. J. B. Walsh, schoolin' him and rehearsin' him, that he didn't make no mistakes. I guess he musta been twenty-six years old w'en his gameness come to be tested out. Gee, mister, it sure was some test, that was! It proved to the whole gang of us that you can lead some boys to the nursin' bottle regular, but you can't alwus make 'em drink. Most of us folks had been clean disgusted with Dodo for so long it had got to be a habit. But we'd ought to of stopped to remember that the kid was a son of the grittiest, fightin'est old sport that ever owned a string of race horses. If we'd of did that, we'd of knowed that the worst Ma Walsh could do was to sort of shake powder out of her puff on a complexion that was goin' to be all mussed up with a forty-five caliber beard one of these days. You can't keep a good beard down——" Her eyes twinkled. "Get that one?" she inquired.

"I—er——" stammered the Boarder.

"Down," said Mrs. Sweeney solemnly.

The Boarder's face was an interrogation. Mrs. Sweeney laughed.

"Fuzz!" she explained. "And now I guess we'll hop off of that bones-and-tambo stuff. It's so far above your head that I can see it, this very minute, sailin' over the left-field fence. You ain't got no more sense of humor than Mrs. Walsh had, and she couldn't see how ridiculous she'd made her Dodo by pamperin' and coddlin' him. And, mister, if you'd of saw him at that time, you'd realize what a fine recommend to the Ladies' Auxiliary of the Lodge of Simps I'm givin' her.

"She kept that boy in trainin' for the heavyweight boob class, even after her husban' died and left her without scarcely anything. Dodo must be a gent'm'n, she says, and he wasn't to get his hands dirty workin'. Not him, Mrs. Walsh wouldn't have that happen, even if she had to call on her dead husban's brother for help. And she wasn't goin' to do that. Not her. For them two Walsh brothers had managed to work up a fine young grudge against each other on account of a horse deal; and it was so much of the real thing that Dodo's uncle didn't come to the funeral that was held in the Widow Walsh's house. And it has to be some grudge to fetch out a man's petty-larceny disposition like that—don't it, mister?"

"Yes, indeed," answered the Boarder.

"Well," resumed Mrs. Sweeney, "it was just that kind of a full-portion grudge. All of us folks in racin' s'ciety knowed about it, and kept right on knowin' about it. For the minute we begun to talk of somethin' else, Mrs. Walsh was sure to hurl some new angle of the row at us, and we'd have to bite it, and chew it over and over and over, until it seemed to us as if that grudge was a part of our fam'ly lives. It was durin' one of the times when the gang was all charged up with a fresh shot of that Walsh dope, when Dodo floats around with the news that his ma has

took to her bed with some sort of a real bad sickness. Dodo, you know, is a young man, growed up, and not a child, like my talk about him makes him seem. He was real worried over his ma, and he tells us so. Babble, babble, babble goes his talk about her and the fam'ly affairs. Everything that comes into his head pops right out again through his mouth. More talk than you ever heard all in one place, mister. There was a time w'en I got to worryin'. I figgered he might learn to swear; and then he'd alwus have to go 'round with a napkin tucked in his neck so's the dirty words wouldn't drip on his clean white shirt bosums and ruin 'em. My gee, but them was nervous days!"

The Boarder smiled, but Mrs. Sweeney's face remained quite serious.

"I mean it," she insisted. "Mebby I'm stretchin' things a little; but it's a fact that you could figger out almost any kind of a worry combination, them days, and Dodo would fit into it, uspecially if it had him goin' to the pups in some pink-tea way. Drink gets good men, mister. But so does silk socks and puffume—and I don't know that there is much of a choice between the kinds of ruins they make. And Dodo was travelin' the soft route to Sissyville on the high gear with the throttle wide open, and the muffler cut out, when his ma was took down. For quite a while he bobs up in the different flats where the gang lived, wailin' round about the turrible misfortune that had come, and w'y didn't nobody do nothin'?

"Of course we sympathized with him. We all hoped that his ma would soon get better—and after he'd went, we told each other that while we didn't wish no bad luck on him, we hoped he'd bite hisself in the neck, some day, real hard, and tumble over in a faint, just as some ragin' taxicab was honkin' down on him. Gee, mister, we liked him the same as we would of liked a party in the next flat takin' rattle-bone lessons, and practicin' reg'lar. Then, all of a sudden, the figger of a new and more nobler Dodo steps into the film, as you might say. He drops in on me and my husban' one evenin' and begins to talk about the low stage of the money market over to his house. My husban', Danny, he says:

"'Why 'n't you get a job, pet?' he says.

"'That wouldn't do no good, Sweeney,' says Dodo.

"'W'y not?' says Danny, kinda sneerin'.

"'B'cause,' says the young feller, so serious that you just had to set up and take notice of w'at he was sayin', 'I want to help my mother. I want to help her get well, and I can't do it that way. You see, Sweeney, if she knowed I was doin' real work, it would kill her. You folks can kid me all you want to about the way I act, but I got to think of ma. She ain't well, and it's up to me not to fret her. More'n that, I got to think up a quick and sure route to a bank roll.'

"Me and Danny set there and just looked at him. For the first time in his life he'd quit whinin' and was makin' some real man talk. W'n he seen we was takin' him serious, he begun to talk the funniest line of stuff and in the funniest way! For a minnit, me and Danny both was sure that he'd been hauntin' them close-fittin' Tango floors, and that his mind was clear simp-copated. But it wasn't long b'fore we sensed somethin' deeper than anybody suspected that young feller capable of thinkin' up.

"'It ain't what you could call a real bank roll I'm after,' he says. 'Me and ma has got enough to get along with for a while. But——' He stops, and sort of squints at my Danny. 'Sweeney,' he says, 'did anybody tell you that I've went and bought that there horse, the Squab?'

"My husban' laughs.

"'Turn over on your other side, petty,' he says, 'and, after this, quit eatin' so much b'fore you hit the little white bed,' he says. 'The Squab,' he says, 'is a bargain at ten thousand dollars—ten thousand big round iron gents,' he says. 'And that much coin ain't been rattlin' round loose in your fam'ly since your father died,' he says.

"'All that was spoke true enough,' says Dodo. 'But I had to have that horse, so I bought him last night. I s'pose I got him by payin' a hundred down,' he says, 'and a dollar-forty a week, like you own your own home. I ain't very much up in business,' he says, 'but neither is my ma, which helps a lot. She's pretty sick. There's a nurse with her now. I ought to be there, too, only I had to come here to see about my new horse—and some other matters.'

"'W'at other matters?' says Danny.

"'I'll tell you all I can turn loose right now,' Dodo says. 'But there's part of it that I just ain't got the immodesty to confess in hard facts. You got to remember, though, that I bought the Squab, and that he's——'

"'It's a her,' Danny corrects.

"'Thanks,' says Dodo, 'I'll remember that. Well, she's mine. I think it was a wise move for me to buy her just at this time.'

"'That's right,' says Danny. 'She's a comer.'

"'That's w'at tickles ma,' says the kid, with a sort of sad grin. 'You see, ma has been worryin' her head off b'cause she don't want to—to go away—and leave me without nothin'. That's w'y I bought the horse. Don't you think it was a good buy, Sweeney?'

"Dodo's eyes was set hard on them of my husban's. I can almost see him now, mister, sittin' there, with his hands grippin' the arms of his chair, and kinda leanin' forward to hear the good or bad word from Danny.

"It was all of a minute b'fore my husban' has anything to remark, then he says:

"'Dodo, how's your ma?' he says.

"The young feller sort of choked.

"'She's—— Well, there was some talk about her lastin' the week out,' he says. 'She's been gettin' worse lately. And it all come on so sudden that I had to figger my horse buyin' pretty quick. I had to arrange my future some way, so's she could go—so's she wouldn't worry about me.' He seen he was gettin' a little bit gulpy behind his front collar button, so he stops.

"My husban' looks up at the ceilin'.

"'Dodo,' he says, 'you done just right. The Squab is a good horse. Le's see, how much did you pay for her?'

"'Ten thousand—took my last cent,' says Dodo, real readylike, and seeming to feel more cheerful.

"'She's entered in the Sweepstakes to-morrow, ain't she?' says Danny.

"'That's w'at I come over here to talk about,' says the kid.

"'Um-hum,' says Danny. 'And I guess if she wins that race, you can sell her for——'

"'Thirty thousand,' says Dodo. 'And it's a safe bet, Sweeney, even if she don't win, because she's sure to finish in the money, and she won't lose none of her value. This thing ain't like bettin', Sweeney. I've bought that horse, you know, and she's a real asset that is goin' to win stake money for me. I ain't goin' to put a big bet on her. She might lose—and we ain't got enough money in the family to take chances.'

"'That's the right idee, lad,' says my husban'.

"'It's only part of one,' the kid corrects . 'I'd like to have the gang know about me buyin' the Squab, Sweeney. Do you s'pose you could let 'em know, and invite 'em all around to our house to-morrow aft'noon to sort of set in while the race is bein' run? Mebby some of 'em would do a little bettin' on that horse of mine. That would make things more interestin' w'en the returns come in. I'll have a fr'en' on a telephone to let us know how things is goin',' he says. 'I wisht everybody could show up at our house,' he says, kinda pleadin' by this time. 'Ma's all excited over my new horse's chances; and if there was some of the old mob round durin' the race, it would do her good—kinda take her back to them good old days w'en dad was alive and plungin' like a divin' Venus. W'at?' he says.

"Danny catched up with the idee right away.

"'Leave everything to me, kid,' he says. 'And, by the way, I guess you had quite a time talkin' old man Ryan

into takin' your notes for his nice little horse?'

"'Notes?' says Dodo, sort of puzzled.

"'Sure,' says Danny. 'You bought the Squab with a cash payment, and your notes for the balance.'

"'Oh,' says Dodo, 'was it like that?'

"'Just e-zac'ly like that,' Danny tells him. 'Some men, not bein' honest, can't buy nothin' on their notes. But nobody ever knowed about your stealin' nothin', Dodo, so you're honest until you get catched. And, bein' honest, it's good business for to take your notes and a moggidge on the promisin' young goat. Was your mind wanderin', son, that you didn't pay no attention to w'at was goin' on w'en you bought the Squab?'

"'No,' says Dodo. 'I just ain't got no head for business, that's all.' He gets up to go. 'Thanks, Sweeney,' he says, 'for bein' my fr'en',' he says. 'I hope to see you to-morrow aft'noon,' he says.

"'You will, Dodo,' we both of us says as he goes out.

"And we kept our word to him, mister, even if I did have my doubts as to it bein' a good thing for to get poor Mis' Walsh all fussed up over a horse race, and her fadin' away so fast. W'en me and Danny got there and looked at her, we seen that she didn't have much longer to hang round. The doctor told us that she didn't respond to treatment, she couldn't live long. But, mister, wait till I get through b'fore you jump on me for not skippin' right out of that house, and lettin' the lady be quiet.

"A lot of the gang was there w'en we come. Mis' Walsh's bed had been set up in the livin' room, and she was smilin' and happy to see us, I tell you. It was goin' to be one big day for her Dodo. Every time a new arrival blowed in, she'd motion 'em to one of the rockin'-chairs, and say:

"'Don't you think my son showed a fine business head to buy that horse on practically nothin', the way he done?' she'd say.

"Everybody took that as a cue to brag up Dodo, and my gee, mister, if you could of saw the mother love wellin' up in Mis' Walsh's eyes, and the worshipin' way they follered that kid 'round the room, you'd realize that it was a fine thing for her that we was round showin' our appreciation of that there Dodo. You can't never make me b'lieve that we made a mistake by pullin' that party, mister.

"All of a sudden, w'ile we was settin' round in them rockers, the telephone rung. It was one of them stand telephones, and Dodo had set it on a table near his ma's bedside. He run to it, hollerin':

"'It's the race! Keep quiet, all of you folks. This receiver works so good you can hear it all over the room.' He took it down, h'isted it to his ear, and says:

"'Hello!'

"We couldn't make out the first words. Dodo answers:

"'Yes; all right, Skinny. Let her go!' He took the receiver from his ear, and right away we hears, real distinct:

"'They're off to a good start, Dodo. Major Gray's leadin' 'em, Charlie Boy second. Both them horses is out in front. Your goat seems to be goin' easy—just lookin' 'em over.'

"The voice stopped and Gold Dollar Cohen, he says:

"'Hooray!' he says. 'Jimmy Whaley's up on the Squab, and he's some jock, Dodo. He ain't a lad to let a horse run his head off at the start. You showed good judgment in choosin' that kind of a jock, Dodo. You got a good head.'

"All of us was watchin' Mis' Walsh. W'en she heard w'at the Gold Dollar has to say, she smiles, and her eyes goes to Dodo in that proud way. I guess every lady in the room wanted to start and bawl their eyes out, there and then. Gee, but I can remember it plain. The most clearest thing about it all was that little 'Lizbeth Breen, who was Heinie Althouser's cousin—from Minneapolis, which is away out West in the Rocky Mountains, a-sittin' there rockin' back and forth, and kinda gaspin'. And Mis' Walsh's look! I know I'll never for-

get that! We waited. Then the telephone receiver started up again:

"'They're at the quarter. Major Gray leads; Charlie Boy, second; the Squab, third!'

"'Whee-e-e-e!" hollers the Gold Dollar and the bunch. Somebody sings out:

"'O you Dodo!'

"There was a awful sick woman in that room, mister, but the racin' fever got the whole outfit as sure as if we'd been at the track. And you ought to of saw the change that come over that poor Mis' Walsh! She half set up in her bed.

"'Is our horse winnin'?' she says. And just then, as if answerin' her question, the telephone receiver squeaks out:

"'They're at the half. Charlie Boy leads; the Squab, second——'

"We didn't wait for the rest of it. I found myself standin' up and the others was on their feets, too—all except that little 'Lizbeth Breen. She just set there and rocked and kinda gasped But nobody paid any attention to her. Yellow Money Einstein come roarin' into the middle of things.

"'Dan Sweeney,' he says, 'I got a hunderd to twenty-five which says as the Squab is winner. A hunderd,' he says, 'to twenty-five. Are you on, Mister Sweeney?' he says.

"'I am not,' says my husban'. 'You want a sure thing, Einstein', he says. 'That there Squab horse has got a owner that knows enough to set a good jock up, like Jimmy Whaley,' he says. 'And gimme a good horse, and a good jock, and I ain't bettin' against the combination,' he says. 'And,' he says, 'I don't hear the owner of that Squab horse bettin' against hisself. W'at?' he says.

"'Huh,' says Yellow Money Einstein. 'You ain't game!'

"'Who ain't game?' says Danny, gettin' mad. Them two men started a argument that got so loud we couldn't hear if that telephone said any more. That kinda quieted things down, w'en some one mentioned it, and we all set still again. And, after a little while, the receiver come across with w'at we was all listenin' for.

"'They're in the stretch. The Squab——'

"Mister, you ought to of heard the bunch cheer.

"'O you Squab!'

"'O you Dodo!'

"Mis' Walsh had grew so worked up that she was almost cryin'.

"'My boy,' she kept sayin', 'my boy, my boy!' And the kid set there by the bed holdin' her hand and tellin' her that the Squab was a sure winner; that she mustn't worry about his future. And those hardened old racin' men was makin' all sorts of fool bets, and not lookin' toward the bed, for fear they'd bust out weepin' like all us women wanted to do. A kinda growlin' buzz of talk filled the room; and it was lit up now and then with giggly laughs. All at once the noise shut down, as if some one had pushed a button that worked it. Unconsciously everybody had timed the finish. And the hush had scarcely fell, w'en we heard Mis' Walsh say, in a voice that made me think of something strainin' and fightin' and prayin':

"'Oh, he must win—isn't he going to win?'

"We stared at her. Then every eye went straight to that telephone. A couple of seconds passed. The Gold Dollar muttered:

"'He's got to win!'

"'Sh-h-h-h-h——' come a w'isperin hiss from everybody. And right on the tail of it come that faint little voice out of the receiver:

"'The Squab wins——'

"Mister, be-lieve me, if anybody had dropped a pin just then, it would of sounded as loud as a tin washboiler fallin' off a roof. Nobody could talk. We stood up, and stared at the sick lady on the bed. She had sank back on her pillow and was sobbin' real soft—sobbin' in a happy way. It was quite a while b'fore she done anything else; and us standin' around all that time like street-corner loafers. I guess we all wished we was out of there, but no one seemed to know how to think up a good get-away.

"Dodo was on his knees beside of his ma, holdin' her hand and tellin' her

how he'd be all right now that the Squab had won. There would be the stake money, he said, and the horse would sell for thirty thousand, sure. H'd be fixed all nice and snug, he says, for life, he says.

"'You know, ma,' he says, 'I'm a growed-up man, now, only we didn't realize it. I ain't a child no more,' he says. 'I've showed you to-day that I can take care of myself,' he says, 'so you ain't to worry about me.'

"'My boy, my boy,' was all she says. But she seemed mighty well satisfied, and lay back against the pillow so snug and contented that even a mutt lady like Gold Dollar Cohen's wife could see that she was at peace. It was beautiful, mister—beautiful!"

Mrs. Sweeney seemed very near the weeping point. The Boarder discreetly looked away. But soon he was all attention again, for a sudden change had come into her voice.

"As I said," she resumed, "we was all standin' round like a fool mob watchin' a ambulance back up. Nobody could think of nothin' to say. And, just as us ladies was figgerin' out that it was time to scream, all in a bunch, owin' to bein' so nervous, Mis' Walsh opens her eyes wide, let 'em roam all over the room so they could get the situation, then turns 'em on Dodo.

"'Was the man that telephoned talkin' from the track?' she says, real calm and evenlike.

"'Yes, ma,' says Dodo.

"'There ain't no chance of him bein' mistook?' she says, in a tone that begins to show some snap.

"'No, ma,' says Dodo.

"'You're sure he was at the track?' she insists.

"'Of course,' says the kid. 'He's my fr'en', Skinny Taylor. He wouldn't do nothin' wrong to me.'

"Mis' Walsh, weak as she was, managed to drag herself into a settin' position. Once again she give us that look—a sort of take-it-all-in look.

"'Dodo,' she says, and there's a whole lot of light in her eyes now. It could easy of been mistook for fire. 'Dodo,' she says, 'you forget that the papers is full, just now, of how bitter them track owners is against the pool rooms,' she says. 'The hardest thing that's did, these days, is to get a telephone message out of a race-track grounds anywhere near race time. You forget, my son,' she says, 'that your pa was a racin' man, and your ma palled with him for near twenty years,' she says, 'and,' she says, 'your ma knows a thing or two.'

"She held that kid with her eyes as if she was studyin' some strange animal or somethin' that had broke loose out of a zoo. And Dodo didn't have a thing to say. He begun to get red behind the ears, and the color spread slow but sure into his face. After a bit, Mis' Walsh went on:

"'How many promissory notes did you give for that horse?' she says. 'Answer me that, Dodo,' she says. 'How many notes did you give?'

"The young feller didn't know w'at to say. He didn't know a promissory note from a crate of mushmelons. My Danny begun to clear his throat. He was goin' to help Dodo out. But the lady in the bed was too quick for him.

"'Not a word, Mr. Sweeney,' she says. 'Let my son answer. How many notes did you give, Dodo? And when does each one come due?'

"The kid tried to bluff it through.

"There's a whole bunch of them papers,' he says. 'I ain't counted 'em yet, ma,' he says. 'I was too much took up with bein' a horse owner,' he says, and begins to smile kinda soft at his ma, as if he thought she'd let up on him w'en she realized how proud he'd did her. But she wasn't in that kind of a mood. Her eyes kept sweepin' over the bunch of us; and now we could see somethin' in 'em that told us she was gettin' good and mad.

"'Dodo,' she says, in a voice that had a kinda turrible note in it, 'you go get me them papers, right now! And you needn't tell me they're locked up in safe deposit,' she says, 'for nobody knows better than me,' she says, 'that you wouldn't recognize a safety-deposit box if you seen one,' she says. 'You get them papers,' she says.

"Dodo didn't move.

"'Did you lend 'em to the janitor?' asks his ma, sarcastic. The kid didn't have a word to say. Mis' Walsh turns to us.

"'Folks,' she says, in a real cold voice, 'I want to thank you for your part in tryin' to make a fool out of a poor sick lady,' she says. 'You come here to help my son, which I was dead sure was a honest boy, make me believe that he had bought the Squab, and was makin' a barrel of money out of him. You have been in a conspiracy to lead me to think Dodo is enough of a business man to handle property. Shame on you! If I hadn't been wise about the telephone part of it, you'd have succeeded. Shame on you!' she says. 'Shame, shame, shame!'

"We was that took aback, mister, that for a minnit nobody could say a word. Then my Danny tried to.

"'We was actin' for your piece of mind, Mis' Walsh,' he says. But she wouldn't have nothin' to do with him.

"'That man Sweeney,' she says, real contemtuous, and not lookin' at him, 'is prob'ly one of the ringleaders. How much was his share goin' to be? Will some kind party please answer?'

"'Share?' says Gold Dollar Cohen. 'Share of w'at?'

"'My hunderd thousand in Jersey National Bank stock,' says Mis' Walsh. 'I ain't got no idee how Dodo knew I had it. But it seems he knowed about it, all right. Him with his baby ways! Pshaw!'

"By this time, mister, the whole gang was stupefied. Somehow I managed to blurt out:

"'W'at,' I says, 'in the name of sense ——' I didn't get no farther. The sick lady had went into action, and was there to stay till the quittin' whistle tooted.

"'I don't mind tellin' you folks,' she says, 'that I'd made up my mind to die. I ain't goin' to do it now. I think I'll stick around a while,' she says, 'and see w'at's comin' off. I meant to supprise my Dodo with that money, but I guess I'll use it myself, now. Was you all goin' to share in it?' she asks; and, mister, she said it in a way that made me wish I was my worst enemy, so I could hate myself more'n I did. Mis' Walsh kep' right on talkin'.

"'W'at a boob I been!' she hollers, or somethin' like that. 'Dodo,' she orders, 'just for tryin' to make a fool out of your poor dyin' ma,' she says, 'you can get out of here. And as for the rest of you parties,' she says, 'you can't go away too soon. There ain't goin' to be no dividend on me, boys and gels,' she cackles. 'I've made up my mind to live and see how my unnatch'ral son likes work. Good-by, everybody,' she says.

"And, mister, there bein' nothin' else to do, under the circumstances, we said good-by, too. Wouldn't you of did that same?"

The Boarder said that he probably would have made as graceful an exit as possible. Mrs. Sweeney complimented him on his appreciation of a delicate situation and proceeded:

"That lady, mister, is alive and most awful well to-day. And Dodo! My gee, w'en I seen him on the street to-day, and heard w'at he'd did, I growed real thankful, on his account, that we'd stuck round and stood for bein' insulted and never butted in hard enough to clear up things. For, you see, that there Dodo just stuck in town long enough to feel that his ma was well, and then he lit out for the West on his own hook. And he's a made man, now; more'n that, he made himself."

"Did he discover a mine?" inquired the Boarder.

"Mine!" sniffed Mrs. Sweeney contemptuously. "I should say not. He was after real money, Dodo was; no piker bets for him! He started a string of moving-pitcher shows, he did. That pick-and-shovel stuff, mister, is way up in the front of the hist'ry, and we're on page two hundred and sixty-three today. It was good about the time George Washington was slidin' down banisters."

Jane Hardy, Shipmaster

By Ralph D. Paine

Author of "The Guests of Captain O'Shea," "The Branded Man," Etc.

Another story of the gallant Captain O'Shea, whose life was colored with the bright hues of adventure. If you have not read any of Paine's entertaining yarns about O'Shea, begin now, and you will thank us for introducing you to this very human mariner who wooed the goddess of chance with the soul of a dreamer and the temper of a buccaneer.

(In Two Parts—Part One.)

CHAPTER I.

"A QUEER LIFE FOR A WOMAN."

THE ship chandler's shop on the waterside of Boston reeked of tarred cordage and oilskins, and was flavored quite as pungently with the talk of leisurely seafaring men. It was to the owner's interest to make them feel at home, these masters and mates who must lay in stores for the next voyage. There was always a bottle of prime old stuff in the cupboard, a box of cigars on the desk. Tilting back in a whittled chair was a robust, youthful man, gray-eyed and alert, who scanned the *Maritime Gazette*, and commented:

"Did ye read this, Kennedy? 'Tis a wonder the divil didn't get him years and years ago! The old rip! I sailed with him once as a boy, and he was wrinkled and sun-dried then. The last of the old-time Yankee deep-water skippers, says the *Gazette*. Good riddance to them! They made the sea a hell for sailors, and the worst of the lot was this same Owen Crozier."

"There's no killing a barnacle like him," replied the ship chandler. "So you know him, do you, Captain O'Shea? Yes, he's actually got a vessel, a New Bedford whaler that must be as old as he is. He wrote me that he would tow around here next week and refit."

"The Chilean Whaling Company has bought her, and he will take her out to Valparaiso. Will he stay in her, do ye think, or is it just for the voyage?"

"He has hopes, but his rough ways will be against him. Sailors are a soft breed, nowadays. They won't stand being kicked and cussed and mauled like when old man Crozier was in his prime."

"Oh, forget him, Kennedy!" quoth Captain Michael O'Shea, with an impatient gesture. "'Tis enough to give your whisky a bad taste to mention the hoary scoundrel. A hard job he will have to find a crew to go round the Horn with him if Boston still remembers the East Indiamen he used to be master of."

"There's sailors' boarding houses where they still drink damnation to Owen Crozier—a sort of tradition," said the ship chandler. "Aye, Captain O'Shea, I'll outfit his whaling bark, and charge him well for it, but he's no friend of mine. And what's the good word with you? For a man without a ship you take life easy and smiling. Anything in the wind?"

"I am taking my time," smiled the

other. "My kind of a ship and a voyage do not bob up every day, as ye well know. 'Tis safe to inform you, Kennedy, that there are interests in Boston, big people and most respectable, that would like to see a change of government in a certain corner of South America. They have put money in mines and railroads. They like my references, but we have not fetched beyond the preliminary negotiations."

"Your references!" chuckled the grizzled ship chandler. "They're good enough to hang you anywhere south of Mexico."

"Easy, man, easy!" cautioned Captain O'Shea, his virile features engagingly humorous. "Will ye ruin my reputation as a lawful shipmaster who never dodged a smoke at sea or put a cargo of arms on the beach instead of through the customhouse?"

Hearing some one enter the shop from the street, Kennedy quitted the little back room. Captain O'Shea glanced after him quite casually, but his demeanor changed. It indicated lively interest, and, a moment later, the most flagrant curiosity.

The visitor was a young woman. Wind and sun had tanned, not unpleasingly, a complexion naturally fair. Her eyes were as blue as the sea, brave eyes, but in them a shadow of sadness such as dwells in the vision of fishermen's wives who gaze oft at an empty sky line and wait for their own to come back to them. A double-breasted reefer of pilot cloth was flecked with salt crystals that had clung to its rough surface. She had removed a glove while waiting for the ship chandler, revealing a hand strong and shapely, but the knuckles were cruelly chapped. Her carriage suggested a noble physique, trained by experiences upon swaying decks to move with easy, reliant grace.

It was strange how well she harmonized with these surroundings, this place of business essentially masculine. And yet Captain Michael O'Shea, with the Celtic blood in him, intuitively trusting his impressions ahead of his judgments, surmised that she was profoundly feminine, and that her life had known little laughter.

The chip chandler was asking her:

"What kind of a run did you have, Miss Hardy? A rough March, this, and I was wondering only yesterday if your schooner was caught offshore in the easterly blow. What can I do for you?"

"I have made out my list of stores," said she, giving him a slip of paper. "Can you send them aboard to-morrow? Now I wish to look at chain cable, please. I lost ten fathoms and a stream anchor near Pudding Rock Shoals on Sunday night." A slow smile, grave and sweet, illumined her face as she continued: "Yesterday's gale? Oh, I hove to and rode it out, and never lost my deckload of lumber. The *Speedwell* is an able vessel."

"And Miss Jane Hardy is an able skipper," returned the other, with a clumsy bow.

They walked toward the chain lockers in an alcove, passing from the sight of Captain O'Shea, who promptly forsook the back room, and drifted within earshot. Pretending to examine a row of brass binnacles, he scrutinized this remarkable young woman, who commanded a schooner in the coastwise trade. It was not so much that she stirred his romantic fancy as that she conveyed an impression of thorough efficiency in her calling. That gale of yesterday was wickedly violent. He had been glad that he was not bucking it in a steamer.

He pictured Jane Hardy in streaming oilskins, giving orders to a crew and holding them steady, the laboring little vessel awash, the deckload menacing their lives. He knew why she had smiled at recalling it. She felt the shipmaster's honest pride of achievement, of winning against such odds as the landsman never finds in the day's work.

O'Shea heard her say to the ship chandler:

"I had to send my mate to the hospital this morning, Mr. Kennedy. You know him. He used to sail in the *Speedwell* with my father. He is getting on in years, and has been ailing for

some time. I need a man to fill his berth for the voyage home. Can you think of any one? I have never shipped men in Boston——"

"Of course you haven't, Miss Hardy," exclaimed Kennedy, his manner paternally solicitous. "You can't sign on Tom, Dick, and Harry. It wouldn't do at all. You have always carried nothing but Pine Harbor folks that you know all about. And you have to be mighty particular about a mate. Let me see. You must have him right away?"

"Yes. I need him to help discharge cargo. I do my own stevedoring, you know. And there is new rigging to be rove, and sails to bend. And I am in a hurry to get back to Pine Harbor."

"Um-m, a man that I can recommend to go with you as mate isn't easy to put my finger on. You don't want to fool with the shipping offices. Like as not they'll give you a sot that you will want to throw overboard. Let's ask Captain O'Shea. He has a sharp eye for good men."

Miss Hardy turned to look at the young shipmaster, who had been so obviously maneuvering for an introduction that he blushed as if caught in the act. As Kennedy presented him he said, in his pleasant, caressing voice:

"'Tis a rare honor to meet you, Miss Hardy, nor will ye mind if I tell you, as one sailor to another, that we who follow the sea should be proud of the captain of the *Speedwell*."

Her dignity stiffened, and she was a little confused. A New England training had not accustomed her to such florid compliments, and perhaps experience had taught her, poor girl, to beware of men who showed their admiration. Nor could O'Shea help it that he had a dashing air and a dancing eye. So constrained was her greeting that he guessed what lay behind it, and was sorry for her.

Kennedy hastened to assure her:

"You can take his advice as if it was my own. Captain O'Shea has made some wild voyages, and I wish you had time to sit in the back room and hear his yarns. But his friends all swear by him. Can you find Miss Hardy a mate at short notice, captain?"

"And where would I pick up a mate that I would let go with her?" warmly cried O'Shea. "I know only two. One of them is in the China Seas. It will sound comical to ye, but the other one is in jail in Honolulu."

"I should not have troubled you," said she.

The intonation was so colorless, her manner so indifferent, that O'Shea was nettled. As a rule, he impressed women favorably. In this instance he was genuinely anxious to be of service. With a winning courtesy that almost disarmed her, he suggested:

"Does it trouble you to have a few more words with me? Have ye known Mr. Kennedy long? Does it mean anything if he vouches for me?"

"My father traded with him for many years. They were dear friends." She spoke with feeling, and her lip trembled.

"Then will you let me go as mate with you for this voyage?" demanded O'Shea. "I have nothing better to do just now. I sailed in schooners before I went deep water, and I have not forgotten their tricks. A qualified navigator, sober and reliable, Miss Hardy, and ready to sign on at your wages."

Old Kennedy slapped his knee and shouted gleefully:

"Take him on before he changes his mind, Miss Hardy. You'll never have another chance to carry a mate that dresses as well as a State Street banker, and has bossed it on the bridge of a five-thousand-ton steamer."

Jane Hardy gazed at them in bewilderment, but she, too, had a sense of humor. Her mouth lost its sorrowful droop, and she caught the spirit of the situation.

"I am ready to take Mr. Kennedy's word for it," she said, with a ripple of mirth. "I'm sure I don't know where else in Boston to look for a trustworthy mate. Captain O'Shea, *Mister* O'Shea hereafter, if you please, you will get your dunnage and report on board my vessel at noon. She is at the Cambridgeport lumber wharves. If you

need an advance to go clear of your boarding master, I can let you have ten dollars, no more."

"That's rich! Give it to him. Teach him his place!" guffawed Kennedy. "Make him toe the scratch."

"Aye, aye, Captain Hardy," humbly quoth O'Shea. "Would ye like to see me discharges and certificates?"

"No, thank you. Mr. Kennedy will inspect them for me. What owners did you sail for last?"

It was the bold shipmaster's turn to look confused. With a wink at Kennedy, he asked appealingly:

"Would ye have me turn State's evidence against meself, Miss Hardy? 'Tis unlikely ye know the firms that have employed me. There was his majesty, the King of Trinadaro, for one. He is dead, poor man, or he would give me an excellent reference. I kidnaped him, but he was very glad of it."

The girl knitted her brows, and candidly surveyed O'Shea from head to foot, as if trying to appraise him. It was apparent that he puzzled her. Certainly he was a very different type of mate from the nautical relic who had been conveyed to the hospital. But his smile was so ingratiating that she could find no good reason to repent of the bargain. When she had gone from the shop he caught the ship chandler by the arm, and dragged him into the back room.

"Sit down, Kennedy, and tell me all about her. Why in the name of Heaven is a woman like that jammin' up and down the coast in a lumber schooner as a master mariner?"

The old man chewed a cigar, summoning distant memories, before he answered:

"It's 'most twenty years since I first set eyes on Jane Hardy, a long-legged, gawky, tow-headed little thing that used to sit on a beef barrel while her father passed the time of day with me. The mother died early. I never knew her. He took the girl to sea with him, and she was raised in the *Speedwell* except when he sent her to school winters, and boarded her in Pine Harbor. She lost him two years ago—washed overboard somewhere off Cape Ann. There was nothing left to her but his shares in the schooner. He didn't even own the whole of the vessel. Captain Hardy never laid anything by. A good seaman, but he had a muddling head for business, and was generally afoul of hard luck. Jane was plucky and competent to handle the *Speedwell,* and she was managing owner, though that isn't saying much in the way of profits. She hadn't learned how to make a living ashore. And there you are."

"'Tis a pity," gently observed O'Shea. "A queer life for a woman. Handsome she is, too, but her face is thinner than should be, and there is sorrow in her heart. And 'tis not all mourning for the father that is gone. I want to know what it is, Kennedy. Maybe this is why I am bent on sailing with her."

"I don't doubt your motives"—the ship chandler raised a warning finger—"but you go as mate, mind you, and you're not hired to coax Jane Hardy to tell you her troubles. I was a young man once. Sympathy is a spark that's apt to touch off a flare."

O'Shea rose and offered his hand.

"Thank you for recommending me," said he. "'Twas an impulse of mine to help the girl. The mail that comes for me ye will forward to this Pine Harbor. On the Maine coast, is it?"

"Yes. Up New Brunswick way. A week's voyage should fetch you there unless the wind hangs in the north'ard. Good luck. You are a whimsical man, Captain Mike O'Shea."

CHAPTER II.

THE SEAGOERS.

The new mate of the *Speedwell* lost no time in packing a sea kit and setting out for the wharf in Cambridgeport. His first sight of the schooner pleased him. She was a two-master, old and bluff-bowed, but the white paint on her sides was fresh, the brasswork as bright as gold, and the sails were stowed and covered with the smartness of a yacht.

A row of potted geraniums had been set in the lee of the after house to catch the thin sunshine of the early spring day. Their crimson bloom made a brave bit of color. A canary was singing in a cage hung inside a cabin window. The crew appeared to consist of two lumpish lads who were shoving pine boards across the bulwark, and a grandfatherly person whose white apron proclaimed him to be the cook. O'Shea stepped on board and went aft to report. Reluctant to invade the captain's quarters, he rapped on the companion hatch, and called Miss Hardy's name. She came to the stairway, and asked him into the cabin.

The little living room surprised him with its sense of homeliness and comfort. Rag rugs covered the sand-scrubbed floor, and muslin curtains were pushed back from the windows. Bookshelves were built into a bulkhead wall. There were magazines and a workbasket on the table, and beside the chronometer a bit of sewing had been laid down. Jane Hardy was bareheaded, and had discarded the reefer. The white shirt waist and short blue skirt were a costume trimly becoming. As O'Shea beheld her in this pleasant environment, all he could think of was the incongruity of her vocation.

"And where will I stow me things, Captain Hardy?" said he. "And what are the orders, if you please?"

"I shall finish checking up my accounts in a few minutes, Mr. O'Shea. Will you sit down?"

He remained respectfully standing, as befitted his position, while she returned to the papers upon the small desk lashed to the wall. His observant glance noted that a transverse partition wholly shut off her quarters from the forward part of the cabin space.

"You will not have to use this companionway to get to your room," she explained. "The entrance is from the waist, at the other end of the house. The cook berths with you. You will have your meals with me, of course."

"I will be glad to eat with the men, sir, I mean, ma'am," he laughed at the natural blunder, "if it will be more agreeable to you."

"I don't expect it of you, Mr. O'Shea," and her accents were severe, as if to assure him that she knew sea etiquette. "I want you to keep the lumber moving to-day. You had better hire two or three longshoremen to help. We shall return in ballast."

"I will jump the cargo out of her," he exclaimed. "Ye will find me a driver."

"Please do not be too zealous with those boys of mine," said she, noting his pugnacious jaw and clean-cut, powerful shoulders. "They have had no rough handling."

"'Tis said I am a masterful man at sea, but ye need not worry about the lads, Captain Hardy. I am here to do things as you want them done."

Thereupon he proceeded to break all records for unloading the *Speedwell.* After supper, instead of strolling ashore, he sat in his tiny room, and chatted with the cook, whom he found to be a gentle, low-spirited patriarch, viewing the schooner as a secure refuge from the tribulations common to mankind. It was his habit to croak this Delphic summary of his own vicissitudes:

"I married three wives, and never had 'a buy a cradle or a coffin."

Wary of intruding, O'Shea entered the cabin no more than necessary. At meals he sat opposite Miss Hardy at a table set with a certain simple daintiness, and was oddly conscious of the novel situation. Their talk ran to the business in hand, and skirted clear of the personal. It pleased him to find that she respected his abilities, and was grateful for his professional advice.

With his proficient aid the schooner was soon got ready for sea. On a bright morning, with a wholesail breeze, the *Speedwell* stood down Boston harbor and hauled on her northerly course. A visored cap pinned to the heavy, braided coil of her fair hair, hands in the pockets of the blue reefer, Captain Jane Hardy stood beside the man at the wheel. The industrious mate was at the heels of the other lad

and the cook, who were putting things to rights. It was play for him, and he was glad to be at sea again. The offshore wind was brisk and keen. It hummed in the rigging, and drove a sparkle of spray across the heeling schooner's deck. Presently O'Shea swung himself up to the poop, and asked, as gravely as if the *Speedwell* carried a crew of twenty:

"About setting the watches, ma'am? How do you divide the ship's company, if you please? And do you yourself turn out at night in fair weather?"

"The men stand four-hour tricks at the wheel," said she, trying to hide a smile at this polite reference to her crew of three. "The cook lends a hand when needed. I take the deck until midnight, and then rouse out the mate. Of course, if it comes on thick or blows hard I don't go below."

Her voice gave him a thrill of pleasure. It had a rich, contralto note that made itself heard without effort, even when she spoke an order to a man at the foremast. To O'Shea she was a woman first and then a shipmaster, and he wanted to tell her to betake herself to her books, her sewing, and her canary, and let him manage the trifling task of carrying the schooner to Pine Harbor. That he should snore in his bunk while she walked the deck through half the night was an arrangement so ungallant that he could not contemplate it without blushing for himself. But her serene independence checked his protest, and he was not ready to turn mutineer.

All day the wind came romping out of the west, and the *Speedwell* took it abeam, making brave progress with topmasts bending to the strain of arching canvas and a wake that foamed white against a heaving carpet of blue. Instead of dying with the sun, the breeze freshened, and O'Shea expected to be told to snug down to a reefed mainsail. But there was nothing womanish about Jane Hardy's seamanship; and O'Shea, whistling blithely, and eying her with frank admiration, concluded that he could not teach her how to crack on and drive a vessel home.

At eight o'clock she firmly suggested that he turn in and take his allotted sleep. Meekly obedient, he went to his room, with no intention of closing his eyes. Kicking off his shoes, he lighted a pipe, and sat on the edge of the bunk while he gazed with an expression of amused interest at the recumbent figure of Matthew Halkett, the cook. The old gentleman was swathed in a flannel nightgown, and a knitted wool cap was pulled over his ears. Propped against a pillow, he held in one hand a candle, in the other a volume of sermons which he blinked at through steel-rimmed spectacles, and read audibly, in a kind of droning mutter. His seamed, bony face with the fringe of white whisker under the chin appeared less melancholy than usual, and O'Shea was moved to inquire:

"'Tis cheerful literature ye have there, I take it, though the book looks weighty, and too much like ballast to divert a frivolous man like meself."

"This Doctor Increase Merriam was pastor of our Pine Harbor flock more'n a hundred year ago," cheerfully vouchsafed the cook. "A man orthodox from keel to truck, Mr. O'Shea, and brimmin' over with genuine hell fire and damnation. What satisfaction and enjoyment can you git out of religion nowadays, hey? It's slops. Nothin' to it a man can set his teeth into."

Fighting shy of debate, O'Shea returned:

"I have drifted in the Red Sea with a broken propeller shaft, and ye cannot arouse me enthusiasm for a blazing hereafter. Can ye quit licking your chops over that flint-hearted old sky pilot and be sociable with me?"

Matthew Halkett laid down the book and candle and pulled the blanket to his chin.

"Will you tell me another story, as good as the one about your bein' marooned in the Caribbean Sea?" he asked, with childish ardor.

"Bigger and harder to swallow than that," agreed O'Shea. "But first ye will inform me about another story that I have caught a glimpse of on board."

"You mean about my third wife run-

nin' off with the one-legged tin peddler from Machias that had money in the bank?"

"No doubt it is a jewel of a romance, but 'twas not precisely what I had in mind, Matthew."

The old man looked disappointed.

"It made considerable talk in our village. There was quite a piece in the papers about it. What be you drivin' at, then?"

"'Tis about Captain Jane Hardy and the *Speedwell* and Pine Harbor," ventured O'Shea.

The cook squirmed around in his bunk, dangled his thin shanks over the side, and tucked a blanket about them before he rasped out:

"I ain't got nothin' to say. How do I know but Enoch Brent had suthin' to do with hirin' you as mate of this vessel? He owns part of her. Mebbe you're a friend of his."

"Now, who in blazes is Enoch Brent?" impatiently demanded O'Shea. "His name is strange to me. You talk stern foremost."

"What makes you so terrible curious, I want to know?"

"'Tis a friendly interest, Matthew. I will find out for meself when we reach port. I am Irish enough to feel things in the air. Why is the girl running the schooner herself, instead of hiring a master? I cannot quite fathom that."

"Mebbe she can't afford it. She won't scrimp none in keepin' the vessel up. She buys a dreadful lot o' paint. Women has sentimental streaks, even the best of 'em, and the schooner has been Cap'n Jane's home so long that she's awful fond of it. She owns just enough shares to keep control. Mebbe there's somebody that 'u'd cheat her if she didn't keep an eye on the business every minute. Mebbe this same somebody wants to make her stay ashore by fair means or foul."

"And maybe he has a name that sounds like Enoch Brent," observed O'Shea.

"Well, now, how did you guess it? Ain't you real smart! And I didn't aim to say nothin' at all."

Matthew propped his chin in his hand and sucked a long breath between his withered lips. His faded, plaintive eyes searched O'Shea's face, and their quest seemed reassuring. There was not so much querulous suspicion in his voice as he said:

"I guess you ain't strictly orthodox, Mr. O'Shea, but suthin' tells me you're a real friend of Jane Hardy. Mebbe she needs you. The Lord works through queer instruments. I dunno but you was foreordained to come to Pine Harbor."

O'Shea let his pipe go out. He forgot his intention of watching the weather. Something larger than his own conjectures was hinted in the cook's words.

"There is a man ashore, then," said the mate, after a thoughtful silence. "And is she afraid of this Enoch Brent? I have seen that her mind wanders with thoughts that trouble her. Is it to meet him that she crowds on sail like a Gloucester fisherman? Tell me, Matthew."

"Great skeesicks, no! Cap'n Jane 'u'd carry the sticks out of this old packet to git rid of Enoch Brent for good and all. She's a-tearin' home to Pine Harbor to see the other one."

"*The other one!*" ruefully cried O'Shea. "And so there is no chance for me! But a girl that is sailing home to her sweetheart should be happy, with a smile on her lips and a song in her heart."

"You ain't been to Pine Harbor. You don't know Pine Harbor folks and doin's," the cook muttered. "You are a bold man, Mr. O'Shea. I wa'n't never a bold man, bein' spindlin' and peaked as a boy, and the older I be the timider I grow. Mebbe it's on account of bein' married so derned much. I dunno. But because you're bold, mebbe you can do suthin' for Jane when you land in Pine Harbor."

"Well, by the holy poker, I will have a try at it," and the warm blood colored O'Shea's brown cheek. "Your tale is cloudy, Matthew. It hints at things, and fetches ye nowhere at all."

CHAPTER III.

THROUGH THE STORM.

The schooner lurched and lay down so far to leeward that O'Shea heard the water rush along the deck and sob in the scuppers. He jumped for the door, and raced into the darkness. A flurry of rain hit his face. The stars had vanished, and the sea was impenetrably black. The wind smote the vessel in heavy, cadenced gusts. With a seaman's quick perception he felt the approach of the unseen squall, and knew it meant imminent danger. As he gained the poop, his shoulder brushed Jane Hardy, and knocked her aside. Flinging an arm about her waist to steady her, he shouted:

"Do you want to capsize the hooker? Throw her into the wind, and let everything go by the run. 'Tis about to blow the hair off a dog."

"That last gust knocked her down," and the girl's voice was as unshaken as his. "Cast off the head sheets, Mr. O'Shea, and I'll tend the helm."

He bolted forward, roared at a sleepy sailor who was emerging from the forecastle, and whipped out a clasp knife. The blade slashed at the quivering jib sheet, and it twanged and parted like a great harp string. A moment later the staysail also slatted furiously, and the schooner, relieved of the dragging canvas, slowly swung into the wind, and buoyantly crashed into the breaking seas. Thereafter O'Shea seemed to be everywhere at once. The schooner was magically stripped of canvas, and the bellying folds secured before the squall came screaming out of the night. Its breath was wintry cold, and the rain was turned to sleet.

The tumult of wind and sea made speech futile. It was really unnecessary, for O'Shea and Jane Hardy worked splendidly together. Each knew what must be done, and whose duty it was. The first fury of the squall presently abated. It had swooped out of ambush like a monstrous, evil thing that hoped to catch the vessel unready. The aftermath was a steady blow, strident and powerful, which had no terrors for a well-handled schooner. Under a bit of jib and a close-reefed mainsail, she gathered headway and went reeling off on a long tack to seaward. The thick clouds split apart, moving rapidly, and disclosed here and there a misty star. O'Shea took the wheel, and told Jane Hardy to go below. She refused, and stood, silent and vigilant, clinging to the rail that ran along the roof of the deck house.

An hour passed, and the mate dumbly suffered martyrdom. He had rushed on deck in his socks, bareheaded, without a heavy coat, but while the weather held boisterous and the wheel taxed his strength and skill he had no intention of quitting this indomitable young woman. At length the wind died with curious abruptness. It had blown itself out, and was likely to shift back to the westward before day. Jane Hardy called a seaman, and told him to steer. To O'Shea she said, as he danced upon his aching feet and flogged himself with his arms:

"Please come into the warm cabin before you take the deck. You have lost your sleep, but I will split the morning watch with you."

He smothered an impatient remark. Why in the name of all that was proper and sensible should she give his comfort a thought? What else was a man good for but to take work and worry off a woman's hands? Jane Hardy played her part with a scrupulous fidelity that made him long to scold her like a willful child. His sunny temper a trifle ruffled, he limped after her down the stair. The coal fire burned in the screened grate. The shaded swinging lamp diffused a genial light. The black cat yawned and purred a welcome. The contrast of this pleasing domesticity with the perilous turmoil so recently survived was singularly vivid.

Jane Hardy was trying to smooth her wind-blown hair when she turned to speak to the shivering mate, and observed his distressful plight. He had made for the grate, and was standing upon one foot, toasting the other against the wire screen. With a con-

trite gesture she ran to drag her father's armchair from a corner.

"Oh, Mr. O'Shea! You poor, silly man! Are you frozen stiff? Why didn't you tell me on deck? Let me poke the fire. Then I'll put the kettle on, and make a pot of coffee in a jiffy."

He sprang to help her with the chair, sank comfortably in it, and held his feet in his hands. The posture was like that of a seated Buddha.

"'Twas worth a few sufferin' toes to be rewarded with the likes of this," he said, with a grin. "I have sailed the tropic seas so much that a bit of bracing weather finds me soft. And would ye have had me stop and shave and dress for a party with the vessel so near turning turtle?"

She was tying the strings of a white apron, which feminine procedure he eyed most approvingly.

"A rude man I am to say it, Miss Hardy, but I like ye better in that than in sea boots and sou'wester. Not that you were a petticoat sailor in the big wind to-night."

"Thank you for the compliment," she cried, with a pleased little laugh, and her eyes were as merry as his. "You have discovered the right way to blarney your skipper, Mr. O'Shea. It's most unprofessional, and you must never repeat it, but I'd much rather be praised for my housekeeping than my seamanship."

"Which is what I observed to meself when first I saw you in Kennedy's shop," sagaciously replied the mate.

"How very clever of you! Why, sometimes you are really as wise as you think you are. I have another confession to make. I wonder what you will have to say to this? I carried sail too long to-night, Mr. O'Shea. You know I did. I disdain your pretty compliments about my sailoring. When the sky became so overcast and the wind veered I should have called all hands."

This admission, so unlike her usual self-confidence, surprised O'Shea. It went close to his heart. Their acquaintance had struck a new and personal note. With a frankness to match hers he returned:

"You let your pride get the better of your judgment. You would show me that ye were no fair-weather skipper. You were afraid I would laugh in my sleeve at you. I admired ye for it. It showed you were human, like the rest of us."

"So you take it for granted I was thinking of you," she retorted, with a toss of her head. "You have an excellent opinion of yourself, Mr. O'Shea."

"'Tis too true, Miss Hardy," was the amiable confession. "I have lived on very good terms with meself so far."

"You had a right to be proud of yourself to-night," said she. "With my old mate I might have lost the schooner."

"You would not have cared what the old graybeard thought of you, and ye would have shortened sail sooner," he mischievously persisted. "Tell me, Miss Hardy, do you like seafarin' as a trade? If the fairies gave ye a wish would you rather be somewhere else?"

She looked at him in a startled way, pausing at the cupboard with the cups and saucers in her hands.

"Why do you ask me that?" she queried sharply. "Do I seem unhappy and discontented?"

"Not precisely that, Miss Hardy. You are too brave a girl for that. But 'tis natural to suppose that you would sooner live ashore, where the life is not so rough and lonely for a woman."

"Yes, Mr. O'Shea. I wish with all my heart that I could live ashore," murmured Jane Hardy, a shadow of wistfulness crossing her sensitive face, and betraying more emotion than she was aware. He leaned against the bulkhead, a strong, ready man, who enjoyed hazards, and played the game of life zestfully. With his uncommon vitality was a sympathy quick and responsive. Such a personality invited confidences and drew friendship like a magnet. Until this night Jane Hardy had kept intact a barrier between them, determined that he should know her only as a shipmaster.

He did not mistake this changed,

more intimate demeanor for an awakening of sentimental interest. What Matthew Halkett had hinted in his vague, doddering way the girl herself had unwittingly revealed in this last remark of hers. Her love had already found its abiding place. O'Shea needed no more confirmation. Perhaps in other days by other seas a girl had tried to hold him ashore, her face as wistful, her voice as eloquent as Jane Hardy's.

"You wish to live ashore," he echoed softly. "And 'tis not because ye dislike the sea. The sea has been your home so long that to live in a house on the dry land would seem strange, no doubt."

Patting the arm of the shabby old chair by the grate, she said:

"I learned to walk by holding onto this and making a difficult voyage to the leg of the table. I am fonder of the old *Speedwell* than I can tell you."

"I feel that we know each other better since the squall to-night, Miss Hardy. 'Tis the way of danger and toil to brush nonsense aside. Maybe ye have felt awkward because I am a young man—thirty years I plead guilty to—and am sitting at your dinner table and living under the same roof, as ye might say. I would forget it. I have most tremendously resolved not to fall in love with you, and a sad struggle it cost me. If I do, ye will never find it out."

She laughed aloud. There was no taking offense at this honest declaration. The coffee was ready, and she bade him sit down.

"I will take a look on deck first," said he, "and see that our lights are burning bright. There is only a capful of wind, and 'tis safe to leave the lad at the wheel."

When he returned, Jane Hardy was in the armchair, gazing at the coals. The contour of her body was relaxed and weary, her thoughts somewhere else. She did not hear O'Shea enter until he said:

"If you are dreaming of living ashore, 'tis a shame to disturb ye. I will take my coffee and say good night."

"Excuse me," she stammered. "I'm afraid I was drowsy."

"No wonder. And ye saw things in the fire that made you look happier than since the voyage began."

With a lovely tide of color, she replied:

"Now I am sure you have the gift of second-sight. Yes. I'll admit that I was happy, and that I was thinking of Pine Harbor. I suppose you will go back to Boston at the end of this voyage. Such a quiet little town as ours will seem very stupid to the great Captain O'Shea that ran away with the King of Trinadaro, whoever he is."

"'Tis a finer berth to sail with you, Miss Hardy. But you will not be needing me as mate again, I presume. I have a notion that there may be diversion for a two-fisted man in Pine Harbor. And what are the schooner's plans?"

"She must be hauled out. The seams forward have worked open, and leak in a head sea. After that I expect to load with lumber for Boston."

With a wicked twinkle O'Shea commented:

"If you are always in such a tearin' hurry to get home, no wonder ye have to haul her out for repairs."

The girl was discomfited, and, regretting the jest, he added, with a mien very manly and serious:

"Tell me this, as one shipmate to another: Have ye need of a friend that will go through hell and hot water for you and count it a favor? Do you mind if I stay in Pine Harbor and take soundings, as ye might say, till you are ready to sail again? Let me boss the work on the vessel. I have a reason for asking."

To his utter amazement, her proud reserve was broken as one snaps a piece of twine. A woman tested by the stern and unexpected crises of the sea, her aspect disclosed a tragic helplessness so poignant that O'Shea was conscious of a sense of indelicacy, of stumbling into matters which she desired to keep inviolate. Her agitation was pitiful as she exclaimed:

"What do you mean? What have

you heard? I don't know what to say. What can you do for me? What can any one do for me?"

It might have been a brother speaking as O'Shea replied: "Good night, Miss Hardy. You are tired, and you must not come on deck before morning."

"I will stand my watch, of course," she declared, with a flash of her wonted spirit.

"Then I will fasten the hatch and keep you below. 'Tis not the first vessel I have been obliged to navigate without the skipper's consent."

He went to find his shoes and warmer garments. The cook slumbered noisily, his lineaments suggesting a weather-battered gargoyle. Pausing to glance at him, O'Shea murmured:

"You silly old pot-wrestler! I have a mind to prod ye awake and extract some information. Who is this fearsome Enoch Brent that you talked about? And who is the other man she was dreaming of by the fire? And what is the cloud that hangs so heavy over Pine Harbor? But maybe I have stirred up trouble enough for to-night."

CHAPTER IV.

NEARING THE MYSTERY.

The sea had subsided, and the west wind was returning to blow the *Speedwell* home. The rain squall had washed air and sky wonderfully clear. O'Shea, too, was eager to make port and fathom why Jane Hardy should feel both gladness and sorrow. He shook out the reefs and hoisted all sail. It seemed to him that he had plainly heard the call when first he beheld her in the ship chandler's shop, the wistful sadness in her eyes that were as blue as the sea. And so a bold man was needed to banish this trouble and make her in love with life, as God meant a fine girl to be.

"I will splice the ends of this puzzle," was his emphatic conclusion. "And the business of mine in Boston must wait."

When Miss Hardy came on deck after sunrise she greeted the mate with authoritative crispness, very much the master of the vessel.

"A fine morning, Mr. O'Shea. You are getting a good eight knots out of her. What lights have you seen?"

"Only one—white, with a twelve-second red flash. It bore dead abeam of us at four o'clock. I had no trouble in finding it on the chart."

"The course is still west-nor'west, then," said she, glancing over his shoulder at the heaving bowsprit. "You had better turn in after breakfast and sleep until noon, Mr. O'Shea."

"Very well, Captain Hardy," dutifully replied the mate, wondering if this could be the same young woman who had come so near to weeping in the cabin. He inferred that she repented of her weakness, and wished him to forget it. There must be no more of his persuasive sympathy. They were to be strictly master and mate during the remainder of the voyage. The courageous quality of her pride both touched and amused him.

That chronic timidity to which the cook had confessed afflicted him more grievously than ever. He evaded O'Shea's questions or pretended to be hard of hearing. Possibly he had been summoned to the cabin and scolded for gossiping with the beguiling mate. On the last day at sea, O'Shea discovered him sprawled against the heel of the bowsprit while he eased his rusty joints and hummed snatches of hymns sternly orthodox. The gift of a cigar mellowed him somewhat, and he was maundering gently along about the weather and the need of a new galley stove and the merits of baking powder versus saleratus when O'Shea glowered at him and growled:

"What do you mean by refusing to answer civil questions? Did ye think I would overlook it? I have fried sea cooks in their own grease before now."

The ancient one, his hearing restored, raised his hands as if to ward off a blow.

"Don't look so fierce at me," he faltered. "I scare awful easy, and git trembly fits. And when I have one o' them trembly fits I drops dishes and

breaks 'em. Cap'n Jane Hardy always speaks easy to me. It saves her buyin' new dishes. Will you lose your temper and git vi'lent if I don't tell you suthin'?"

"Yes, Matthew. And the last time I lost it there was three men buried at sea next day," gravely replied O'Shea. "All stitched up in their hammocks and shoved over the side in a row."

"I want to know! Wa'n't that dreadful?" Matthew pensively observed, now more curious than alarmed. "Mebbe you'll tell me a story about it when we turn in."

"A blazing whopper of a yarn. 'Twill make your eyes pop out like onions. Listen to me! I would not pry into Miss Hardy's affairs. 'Tis not becoming of me. But I am determined to stand by, Matthew. And is there not something more ye can impart to me about this Enoch Brent? The kind of a man he is?"

The old man nervously plucked at his chin whisker. His face was greatly troubled. Grasping O'Shea's arm, he confided:

"I'm scared of Enoch Brent worse than anythin' in the world. Says I to myself, feelin' all timid and goose-pimply: 'What if that man ever gits wind of it that I talked against him?' But all of a sudden I'm real brave, so I be. My hand ain't trembly a mite—is is, Mr. O'Shea?"

"Steady as a rock, Matthew."

"I'm a thousand times obliged to you. It chirks me up wonderful. But 'most the hull village of Pine Harbor is scared o' Enoch Brent. Not that he's rampagin' bad and desprit. He jest gits the best of everybody. I'm prayin' he won't git the best of you, but I dunno."

"So he is the big trouble that ye think I am foreordained to bump? One man? Pshaw! I thought it might be an army or an epidemic. And will it make Captain Jane Hardy happy if I wipe him off the map?"

The cook raised a hand aloft in a gesture like that of some Hebrew prophet calling down the fires of heaven.

"Jane Hardy 'u'd bless you. Pine Harbor folks 'u'd bless you. I ain't a blasphemin' man, and I never used no wicked swear words like most seafarin' men, but I wish the Almighty would strike Enoch Brent dead in his tracks."

It was such a tremendous outburst for Matthew Halkett that O'Shea felt something like awe. Presently recovering himself, he said, with his careless laugh:

"Enough! I could get no stronger impression of the man if we discussed him for a week. Thank you, Matthew. Now, remember, no more trembly fits. Ye must take my word for it that you are a brave man."

Soon after daybreak of a morning gray and almost windless the *Speedwell* moved in past the headland that sheltered Pine Harbor from the sea. So faintly breathed the air that the tall sails hung limp, and the wake was no more than a tinkling ripple. The tide which swirled by the weedy ledges and sobbed against the channel buoys swept the quiescent schooner toward her anchorage. White and spectral she was against the water and sky that blended in a silvered, misty monotone. Sunshine would have made the landward prospect more friendly, less hard and cold. The bay was set in a rugged coast whose granite ramparts shelved steeply to the surf. From the inner shore the ascent was by no means so abrupt, and here the village sprawled beside its ancient wharves. Beyond it were brown, windy hills framed in stone walls, patches of woodland now leafless, and an occasional farmhouse.

O'Shea perceived that Pine Harbor had once been busier and more prosperous. Only one wharf showed signs of recent repairs. Beside it was moored a small steamer. Down to this wharf ran the main street between stores and dwellings which looked old and shabby for lack of paint. The by-streets were irregularly laid out, some of them no more than rambling lanes, whose low-roofed cottages were set behind small yards and picket fences. A place of several hundred souls, with a weather-beaten, picturesque flavor, it possessed the humble yet substantial dignity of a century of existence. To a stranger

there is something melancholy in the aspect of a seaport town whose commerce has ebbed.

Because this was home to Jane Hardy, she saw it with different eyes. Nor was this a bleak, inhospitable coast to her who had known no other. Awake and on deck long before dawn, she descried the familiar landfall with an enthusiasm bright and girlish. From the outer bay into the harbor she stood at the wheel, and coaxed the drifting schooner through the deep-water passage. It was so gracefully done that the gallant O'Shea could not forbear to say:

"You may disrate me for impudence, Miss Hardy, but 'tis a handsome picture ye make, and a proper sailor's daughter you are."

The young woman who had been such a martinet for discipline at sea smiled at the compliment. It was no longer necessary to keep the mate in his place. Twinges of jealousy disturbed the region of his heart that another man was waiting to welcome her home to Pine Harbor. Going forward to free the anchor, he said to himself:

"'Tis not her sweetheart, whoever he is, that I should be troubling about, though I have an unholy wish to punch the head of him. My business is with the man that has made sorrow for her—the bogy that has put the shadow of fear in the town—the one they call Enoch Brent."

Pine Harbor was not yet astir when the *Speedwell* swung to her cable. The galley stovepipe was smoking early, and presently the cook ambled aft with a tray of breakfast dishes. Jane Hardy and the mate went into the homelike cabin and sat down at the table. The black cat rubbed against O'Shea's leg and yowled as though its emotions were deeply moved.

"The intelligent beast knows it is my last meal with you," said he. "Cats are sound judges of human nature, they say, Miss Hardy. This one approves of me, and would have me sign on for another voyage."

"But you don't want to, I'm sure. It has been a joke to you to take orders from me."

"I have tried to do me duty, and I trust ye will give me a decent recommendation," was the demure reply. "What is there for me to do to-day? I have no wages coming to me till the schooner is hauled out."

"As soon as there is breeze enough we shall tie up to the wharf, and discharge ballast. After that the vessel will go in tow to the marine railway on the other side of the bay."

"I will manage the ballast business," he assured her. "Do you go ashore right away, and enjoy yourself."

"Thank you, Mr. O'Shea! I have an aunt, my mother's only sister, who is crippled, poor soul. She will be waiting for me as soon as she sees the *Speedwell* in port."

Being a person of candor and unused to guile, Jane Hardy dared not meet the whimsical eye of the mate as he made comment:

"Such devotion does you credit. Seldom have I seen the like of it, for a girl that is master of a schooner to crowd on sail and risk blowing good canvas away to get home to a crippled aunt."

"I shall be pleased to have you call and meet her," was the extremely dignified reply. "She may think your jokes funnier and in better taste than I do."

With this the penitent O'Shea was left alone to stare at his plate. Soon the boat was shoved overside, and the two seamen scrambled in to row Miss Hardy ashore. The mate helped her embark with such solicitous care that she forgave him and called up:

"Don't be too anxious to get the ballast out, Mr. O'Shea. I'll come aboard before noon, and let you knock off for a good rest."

Bereft of Jane Hardy, the schooner was so lonely and forlorn that he heaved a most sorrowful sigh. Before the morning was much older he was delighted to see a breeze come rippling across the bay. Hoisting anchor, he let the vessel gather way, made two or three short tacks, and then cleverly shot her into the wind and laid her alongside

the wharf. The seamen removed the main hatch, and he climbed into the hold with a lantern.

He was still below when some one jumped heavily from the wharf to the deck, and halted near the open hatch to say in a jovial, resonant voice:

"*Speedwell,* ahoy! Hello, there, Matthew Halkett, you sanctimonious old rooster! What kind of a run did you have? Where is Captain Jane? Gone ashore so early?"

O'Shea stared up through the hatchway, his view eclipsed by the coaming, and saw only a pair of legs and brown clothes. A voice like that would belong to a man stalwart and big-hearted. Oh, ho, perhaps this was the lucky man who had won the love of Jane Hardy, thought O'Shea. It was a plausible surmise. He heard the cook reply:

"Fine a voyage as ever I see this time o' year. Cap'n Jane went off at six bells."

"She did, did she? I missed seeing her ashore. What orders did she leave?"

"You'll have to ask the mate."

"Where is the old codger?"

"He was took sick, and Cap'n Jane had him lugged to a hospital in Boston."

"A new mate, eh? I'd like to have a look at him."

"'Twill cost you nothing." exclaimed O'Shea, emerging from the hatchway and springing to his feet. He confronted a tall, heavily built man, a trifle too fleshy to be in the best of trim, whose years were edging on toward forty. The broad, smooth-shaven face, very ruddy, had a suspicion of a double chin. It suggested boisterous good nature. O'Shea's quick scrutiny was not conscious of details, but he was disappointed. At sight of him the other man stepped back, taken by surprise, and his black eyes hardened with suspicion which he tried to conceal as he said in his large, breezy way:

"Glad to meet you. I don't know your name. Your first voyage to Pine Harbor? Younger man than I expected to find. Quiet, old-fashioned town. I don't believe you'll like it."

"My name is O'Shea, Captain Michael O'Shea," was the crisp reply. He had begun to bristle with dislike. "I expect to stay in your town for some time, and if I find it quiet 'twill be me own fault."

"*Mister* O'Shea, while you're mate of the schooner," and the sonorous voice was perceptibly testy. "What did Captain Hardy tell you to do this morning?"

"'Tis her business and mine, and we can handle it, thank ye kindly."

"Look here! I am part owner of this vessel. My name is Enoch Brent."

"The divil you say!" murmured O'Shea, grinning with pure enjoyment. "I mistook ye at first for a more deserving man. I have heard of Mr. Enoch Brent. And 'tis my hope and expectation to know ye much better."

CHAPTER V.

WITH AN EYE TO THE MAIN CHANCE.

On the schooner's deck Captain Michael O'Shea and Enoch Brent gazed hard at each other during a small silence. It was easy to read that the Pine Harbor man perceived this virile mariner, so clean-cut and carelessly sure of himself, to be most unlike any one who had hitherto sailed with Jane Hardy. Where had she found him? How had he impressed her? What did he mean by saying he intended to stay a while in Pine Harbor? Was there a covert threat in his easy assertion that if the town was too quiet for his taste it would be his own fault?

For his part, O'Shea had decided to play a waiting game, to flatter this consequential person, and get to know him better. Each was trying to take the other's measure. It therefore befell that a mutual curiosity, a sort of watchful neutrality, made the conversation less aggressive than at first.

"When will you be ready to take a tow from my steamer yonder?" asked Brent. "Miss Hardy sent word that the schooner must be hauled out. I own the marine railway, you understand."

"Ah, yes; I see that you are an important man," was the suave reply. "I will see that ye are notified as soon as the ballast is out of her. Will you come into me room for a cigar and a nip to take the edge off the morning air? I would ask ye into the cabin, but when a woman is master of a vessel a man feels that the quarters belong to her."

A nice feeling prompted the remark. The cabin was Jane Hardy's home. It would be something like profanation to let this man enter it. As owner of forty shares in a hundred of the *Speedwell,* Enoch Brent may have thought the mate's scruples far-fetched, but he affably returned:

"Why, certainly. Very courteous of you."

O'Shea and the cook had lived in the tiny stateroom without uncomfortably crowding each other. When this visitor sat upon one of the bunks he seemed to fill the cramped space, to convey much more strongly than when out of doors an impression of bulk and grossness. His flamboyant jocularity was laid aside. His mind was busy with speculation, his uneasy surmises near the surface. He poured a large drink of whisky into a tumbler, and O'Shea took a much smaller one.

"Risky stuff to get too fond of," said Brent, having tossed down the fiery ration unblinkingly. "But I never let it get the better of me. It's like other things. I manage to keep the upper hand."

Frowning at the empty tumbler, he paused and looked up quickly from be neath heavy, black brows. His temperance dictum may have suggested it to him to say:

"You were very particular to have me call you *Captain* O'Shea. You are a shipmaster, then? Looking for a ship, were you, when you happened to find the schooner shy a mate? A run of hard luck? I know seafaring men. Spend all their money ashore. Lots of temptations."

To Michael O'Shea, clear-eyed and athletic, shunning dissipation because he would keep mind and body at the fighting edge like a good sword ready for instant service, the inference was amusing. It suited his purpose, however, and he replied:

"A man will take any job that offers when he is stranded."

"But of course you don't intend to stay in this little schooner. I should say you're a deep-water man by the cut of your jib."

"I have sailed to foreign parts, 'tis true." O'Shea hesitated, and added, with a slight air of reluctance: "Well, maybe you know how it is—a master gets in trouble with a ship—perhaps 'tis no fault of his—and the lies and gossip about him spread from port to port."

"Sounds as if you might have got in wrong with your owners. I like your honest way of putting it." Brent beamed with sympathy. "I see you're an open man like myself. I'm afraid you will find nothing to do here. Miss Hardy will want a Pine Harbor man as mate. The lumber and granite trade out of here is pretty dull just now. Not many schooners in it."

"The *Speedwell* is a pleasant vessel, with a fine, capable skipper," pensively sighed O'Shea.

"I suppose you got pretty well acquainted with her during the voyage," smiled Brent. "High-spirited girl. She ought to quit this foolishness of going to sea and live ashore."

"Indeed? But I suppose she knows her own business."

The slightest touch of frostiness was in O'Shea's voice. He felt an acute disinclination to bandy words about Jane Hardy. Steering the talk away from her, he said:

"I will quit the schooner, I suppose, as soon as she is hauled out. Is there a hotel in the town?"

"Yes. A nice, clean little tavern. It's my property, but I hire a man to run it."

"From talk I heard dropped on the wharf I concluded that ye owned most of the town, Mr. Brent."

Brent removed his hat and passed his fingers through his rumpled black hair before thoughtfully observing:

"It wasn't talk that you heard on

the schooner? That crack-brained old cook wasn't spilling nonsense into your ear? I had some business dealings with him several years ago. He defaulted interest on a mortgage, and I had to foreclose—nothing more than a house and barn and a little grassland. Perfectly straight, simple transaction, but he nurses a grudge about it. He has no business sense."

"Matthew Halkett holds ye in the greatest respect, as far as my knowledge goes," O'Shea gravely assured him. "I am a man with an eye to business meself."

"You look it. An eye to the main chance, eh? Let no sentimental drivel stand in your way, eh? A man of just your kind doesn't often drift into this port. By the way, do you know the Canadian waters to the north'ard of here?"

An eyelid fluttered on O'Shea's cheek as he laid a hand upon Brent's knee, and confidentially answered:

"My dear man! Will I guess what's in your mind? You and I will get on better than looked at first. Ye wondered why I wanted to hang around Pine Harbor. A bold man who knows his way about need not be idle anywhere. You are not far from the Canadian coast. 'Tis a shame that so much good money should go into the pockets of the customs people. A fast schooner and an enterprisin' master now——"

Brent looked alarmed, and hastily interrupted:

"Not so fast. You jump at conclusions. I was thinking of lumber from Nova Scotia to New York."

"Of course you were. But ye will not take it amiss when I say that when I first clapped eyes on you I sized ye up as a man of my own breed."

"What do you say to having supper with me at the hotel?" was the cordial invitation. "We can have a sociable chat with nothing to rush us."

"A pleasure that I cannot refuse, Mr. Brent."

O'Shea opened the door as he spoke. The overlord of Pine Harbor rose from the side of the bunk with a kind of lumbering deliberation, and made his way to the wharf. O'Shea's smile was inscrutable as he gazed after him and said to himself:

"The fresh air tastes good. I feel as if I ought to be fumigated."

Matthew Halkett was toddling in the direction of the galley with suspicious haste. O'Shea summoned him, and sternly asked:

"Were you eavesdroppin' outside my room, you old sinner?"

"I jest stopped a minute to take a hitch in my galluses," confessed the cook, and never had he appeared so lugubrious. "Mebbe some words come floatin' out. You was a-talkin' with him as sociable as two pups in a basket, Mr. O'Shea. You actually said you was goin' to eat a meal of vittles with him at the tavern. He's got the best of you already. It's a dreadful setback to me. Be you goin' to tell him what I said about him?"

"Nonsense, Matthew!" laughed O'Shea, but those reproachful old eyes disturbed him. "Would ye have me knock the man down the minute he set foot on deck?"

"I cal'lated you would," was the mournful response. "But I ain't got nothin' more to say."

"I will deal the cards and play them me own way," said O'Shea. "Do you live aboard the vessel in port?"

"No, sir; but Cap'n Jane expects me to cook for you till you quit to-morrer. She visits with her aunt, Miss Ellen Titherbee, that broke her hip three years ago come this January. Folks do say that Cap'n Jane provides for her, and pays the hire of a girl to look after her. I put up with my Brother William, that's a ship carpenter by trade. We git on real well together for folks that's so near o' kin."

The two seamen had led the hoisting rig to a winch on the wharf, and all hands bent to the toilsome task of emptying the hold of ballast. It was perhaps an hour later when O'Shea straightened his aching back and idly gazed in the direction of the town. His eye chanced to follow a road that

dipped from sight just beyond the more thickly settled part of Pine Harbor, then reappeared and climbed along the close-cropped russet hillsides. At the top of a long slope was a small cottage, as white as paint could make it, against a background of pointed firs.

A woman came out of the front door and turned into the roadside, walking briskly toward the town. Distant though she was, O'Shea's farsighted vision recognized the pliant figure and graceful carriage of Jane Hardy. Presently she halted and stood as if waiting for some one. A man was hastening to meet her around a turn of the highway.

An unblushing spy, O'Shea dodged into his room, and came out with a pair of binoculars which had cost him fifty pounds in London. On certain unlawful occasions he had found them worth much more than this. They enabled him to behold the meeting of the twain with a sharpness of outline that made him more envious and unhappy than he would have supposed. In truth, something more than the binoculars was brought into focus—namely, a realization that his heroic determination to be nothing more than a friend in need to Jane Hardy was in danger of shipwreck.

That audacious young man on the hilltop had fairly run to cover the last few yards of road betwixt him and Jane Hardy, his hands outstretched to grasp both of hers. Thus they stood for a moment, then turned, and more sedately walked back toward the grove of solemn fir trees.

The favored suitor was not at all the description of man that O'Shea had expected to see. He was slender, and only a trifle taller than the girl herself. Against the sky line his boyish figure moved with an animation volatile and restless. It was possible to know when he was speaking, for his gestures had a dramatic quality. Of a certainty the young man was temperamental.

Before they passed from view behind the trees, O'Shea saw them pause again. The young man's attitude betrayed discouragement. His head was bowed, his shoulders sagged, his hands were jammed in his pockets.

It was like watching a scene in a pantomime. Jane Hardy laid a hand on his arm. She was bidding him take heart. Her pose was almost maternal. It made her appear the older of the two. Presto, he was himself again, head in air, shaking his fist at misfortune, striding on ahead as if defying the world. Then the firs hid them, a dark-green curtain thrust across this outdoor stage.

Captain Michael O'Shea slowly replaced the binoculars in the leather case, and said to himself:

"I might as well have been listening. 'Twas indecent of me. He is a lad of spirit, but I had a notion that Miss Jane Hardy would fancy a man more like—well, there is no harm in mentioning it—a man a bit more like meself, strong and upstanding, with a punch to him. And she picks a slim-jim youngster that I could spank over me knee. But Cupid carries a lee helm, and steers a queer course. 'Tis the nature of women, God bless them all, to go contrary-wise. Well, well, I have seen a moving-picture show that was most unusual. And I will sleep no better for it."

It was long after noon when Jane Hardy returned to the schooner. The delay had made O'Shea anxious and distraught. She nodded absently, and was about to hurry into the cabin when he asked, a little wistfully:

"Did you find things all right ashore? I hope so. There is nothing here that ye need bother your head about."

"Thank you, Mr. O'Shea. I shall be here to look after things until sunset. Would you like to take a little time off?"

She looked so careworn that he found it hard to hide his solicitude. With a smile and a sigh, he said:

"I should like to buy a package of pipe tobacco and some socks, if ye can spare me as well as not."

He shifted into his well-fitting shore clothes, brushed a stiff hat, and picked up a pair of dogskin gloves. It was an uncommonly smart and prosperous-

looking mate of a Pine Harbor schooner that strolled along the wharf with just a touch of swagger. On the beach near by a row of fishing dories had been pulled above high-water mark. Seated in them were several elderly, amphibious idlers, among them Matthew Halkett, who appeared to relish the gossip of this club of superannuated salts.

O'Shea walked over to them, and good-naturedly inquired:

"Where is the leading emporium? I have shopping to do."

"He means a store. He wants to buy suthin'," piped up a withered worthy in hip boots and overalls.

Matthew was glum and querulous.

"Bein' as you're so friendly with Enoch Brent, I guess you'd better go to the old store, Mr. O'Shea. They were jest tellin' me that folks say *he's* bought it out. It's town talk, anyhow, though he says it ain't so. The other store is a heap sight nicer to trade with, Hamilton Elbridge's, but don't let Brent know if you go there. He wouldn't like you so much, and mebbe he wouldn't ask you to eat with him at the tavern."

"There ain't a brighter, more up-and-comin' young man in the county than 'Ham' Elbridge," volunteered another. "And I ain't scared to trade with him."

"Most folks is," said Matthew, and subsided, his information as fragmentary as usual.

CHAPTER VI.

THE INGENUOUS GROCER.

O'Shea turned on his heel, and left the company to discuss him with the interest befitting a stranger in his town. Presently, rounding a corner of the main street, he discerned a grocery store, so bright and spick and cheery and modern that it projected itself against the general dinginess like a startling surprise. No critic is so quick to detect slovenliness or disorder as your efficient shipmaster.

Halting admiringly in front of one of the show windows, O'Shea paid the store the highest possible tribute:

"It could be no more shipshape if I was in command meself."

He sauntered inside, glancing at the varnished counters, the gleaming cash register, the attractively burdened shelves, the tall towers wondrously built of gayly labeled cartons, the pyramids of oranges, the speckless glass cases of candy and cigars.

Out of a storeroom in the rear came a slender young man who moved with a quick, light step that suggested unflagging activity. Lithe, vivacious, just a dash of olive in his cheek, there was doubtless in his blood some strain inherited from sunnier climes than this. Without being foppish, his dress had a fastidious, careful air, even in working hours, as though a man should be as well appointed as his business. There was something immensely, joyously youthful about him.

O'Shea was older by no more than five or six years, but this Hamilton Elbridge gave him a sort of ripened, fatherly feeling, as if a generation lay between them. The impetuous grocer was charming, no doubt of it, and O'Shea ungrudgingly acknowledged it. In a village store of the Maine coast he seemed a brilliant exotic. With a captivating smile that showed very white teeth he eagerly exclaimed:

"My dear Captain O'Shea, is it not? Miss Hardy has told me about you—what a bully sailor and friend you've been to her. By George, she didn't say much about your looks. I'm afraid I'm going to be jealous. I had made her promise to let me pick out the next mate of the *Speedwell*."

"You are not slow at the blarney yourself," laughed O'Shea. "But I like the frank way of ye."

"I say what I think. She says I say it before I think it. What can I do for you?"

"A four-ounce packet of Harpoon Cut Plug, please. You have a jewel of a store."

Hamilton Elbridge flew behind the counter, and whisked out the desired merchandise with such incredible speed that it was like a feat of prestidigitation. The fascinated O'Shea demanded

an encore and bought three more packets, one at a time. Then he was plied with suggestions, with enticements irresistible, until his arms and his pockets were laden with bundles.

"Hold on, my son," he cried. "As a salesman you are the divil and all. Do ye think I have chartered a schooner to fill her with your truck? You could sell spectacles to a blind man and make him praise God for the bargain."

Elbridge was instantly apologetic. It was most ungentlemanly of him to impose on the good nature of a friend. With one of his ardent, dramatic gestures, he declared:

"I forget myself. Business is a romance to me. I suppose this sounds crazy to you. But you like your own game, don't you?"

"I can imagine meself doing nothing else," was the earnest answer. "I perceive that you have fetched imagination into the grocery trade."

"Captain O'Shea, I once dreamed of being a poet," was the solemn assurance, "and now I am sublimely contented to be a grocer. That sounds like a riddle, doesn't it? Not at all."

"I will not try to guess the answer, my lad, but any man as lucky as you should be sublimely contented."

"I know that very well," said Elbridge, and his mobile features glowed with such fine rapture that O'Shea turned away to look at something else. He bethought himself of his real errand in the store, and launched one swift question after another.

The ingenuous grocer needed only a spark to set him ablaze. He was not one to suffer and be silent. He talked with headlong gusto. The tame, prosaic story of a struggle after business success was colored with the bright hues of adventure. The picturesque O'Shea, who had wooed the goddess of chance with the soul of a dreamer and the temper of a buccaneer, listened attentively. His first feeling had been one of dismayed surprise that Jane Hardy should have given her heart to a village grocer. It was an anticlimax, in a way. But this was no ordinary country grocer. The fellow had a way with him.

He had drudged through boyhood as errand boy and clerk in an inland city, indefatigable, aspiring. At night he scribbled and read every manner of book he could lay his hands on. He had first come to Pine Harbor as a cheap place in which to spend a week's annual vacation. It was wholly fortuitous, but of course he viewed it as the hand of destiny. Managing to upset himself in a dory, Jane Hardy's schooner had fished him out of the bay. This was the inglorious circumstance of their acquaintance. Shortly after this a distant relative had left him two thousand dollars. The windfall, together with his savings, enabled him to embark on the great adventure. Of the two grocery stores in the town, he had bought the stock and good will of the larger and more flourishing.

Success seemed as certain as daylight. Why not? He was young, extraordinarily industrious, and he knew his business. No moldy, old-fashioned methods for him. Pine Harbor looked down at the heel, but there was money in this town, a surprising amount of it. And there was still a good deal doing in fish, lumber, granite, with a considerable back-country farming region which had no other convenient trading center. The beginning was auspicious. He held the old customers and attracted new ones. The other store could not beat him by fair competition.

As he explained, with a kind of flashing vehemence, he was wide awake, and on the job fourteen hours a day.

"Every morning, when I came down, the world seemed bright and brand-new, Captain O'Shea. There was such a pleasant excitement about it. To meet the different kinds of people and win their regard, to wonder about them, to feel that this was your town, too, and that you would become more and more a part of it. And to make your store attractive, to put yourself into it, to see something more than barrels and bins and jugs! Why, it is like a bit of 'The Arabian Nights,' if you stop to think of it, that a store like this gathers

its goods from all the strange, distant seas and lands, China, and Brazil, and Ceylon. You long to visit them. You build lovely air castles."

"Yes, I know," said O'Shea. "A man had better be dead than find no joy in his work. And is it as much fun to ye as it was a while ago? I misdoubt it."

Hamilton Elbridge lost all his sparkle. His emotions were apt to veer to extremes. He smiled no more. No, there was no more fun in it. Tragedy held sway. Several months before this, the tide had turned strongly against him. Trade diminished. His credit became impaired. The air was full of unfavorable rumors about him. On the surface he could find no reason for it. But, by Heaven, he wasn't going to knuckle under without making a fight of it. This was his great chance, the supremest altitude of his ambition. Never again would he have enough capital to set up in business for himself. He aspired to cut no great figure in the world.

"I was stupid not to suspect," he cried. "But I am the kind of fool who has a confounded lot of faith in human nature. I wear my heart on my sleeve."

"The trouble began after a miracle of good fortune came to ye? You know who I mean?" quietly suggested O'Shea.

"Yes. It was after—it was after I got to know Miss Hardy well," simply answered Elbridge. "Oh, I saw the motive at last. It was to smash me and chase me out of Pine Harbor. But I never dreamed that Enoch Brent was infatuated with her. He is so much older——"

"So people quit trading with you? What kind of a strangle hold did he have on them?"

"All kinds. They were afraid of their jobs, afraid of their debts, afraid of their shadows. I can't explain it to you, but in a little old New England town like this almost everybody is afraid of something or other. They wouldn't feel comfortable without it. The good men go away. Those who stay behind are shy of gimp and backbone."

"And Brent was wise enough to see that he could be the big toad in this puddle, and make all the little toads hop when he said so."

"That's it precisely, Captain O'Shea. He works in the dark. There's nothing you can put your finger on. Stories about him? Yes, plenty; but you can't piece them together. The ugliest is about a girl that left the town a long while ago. She died a year or so later. He gets hold of more and more property. There is no bank here, and he lends money on notes. And he carries the county politics in his vest pocket."

"I would call him an unhealthy influence," was O'Shea's brief verdict.

"But how can I get at him? Suppose I tackle him with a club and give him a licking. He'd hammer the life out of me, and then clap me in jail. I wasn't going bankrupt fast enough to suit him, so he buys out the rival store, or stands behind it with capital. Why, everything has been marked down below wholesale cost, going for a song. Of course, he is back of it. I can't last a month longer against such dirty tactics as these."

"Is that all of it? Get the woe out of your system," advised O'Shea. "'Twill make you feel better."

Elbridge groaned and put his hands to his curly head. He was carried along to make a clean breast of it by sheer momentum. He would have continued talking to a lamp-post. Surcharged emotions had burst their bonds. Nor could he have found a confidant more responsive and sympathetic, a stranger and yet a friend who had no fear of Pine Harbor opinion.

"Oh, Lord, I wish it was all of it," faltered the hapless young grocer. "*She* says I can trust you. I didn't think I could trust anybody but her. Well, when I needed more working capital, when things began to go against me, she insisted on coming into the business as a silent partner. I tried to argue her out of it. But she generally has her own way. You may have noticed it. Her faith in me was some-

thing beautiful. Everything would work out swimmingly. Meanwhile, she must keep on going to sea in the schooner until I got on my feet and we could afford a home ashore. So she raised some money, borrowed it on her shares in the schooner from an old friend of her father, Squire Markle. That money is gone, Captain O'Shea. I can't pay it back. My business is a wreck, with no salvage. And she has her disabled aunt, Miss Titherbee, to care for."

"A total loss?" murmured O'Shea, with a whimsical smile. "Dear me, but ye have upset the whole kettle of fish. And the large, genial Enoch Brent is responsible!"

"I'm sure of it. But he makes a mistake if he thinks he has got rid of me."

"'Tis his kind of strategy, me lad. He has had his own way too long. He knows only one game to play. Maybe we can convince this Mr. Brent that he has a whole lot to learn."

A tall, heavy man in brown clothes had crossed the street and entered the store with a tread surprisingly light for his weight. For once caught napping, O'Shea had failed to perceive him. Enoch Brent examined the cigar case for a moment, and then his jocund laugh prefaced the greeting:

"Well, how's business, Ham? You and the other store seem to be cutting each other's throats. Glad I steered clear of the grocery trade."

"You big, sneaking——" passionately cried Elbridge, but O'Shea cut him short and replied in his stead:

"'Tis an interesting business, this, Mr. Brent. And how do ye find yourself this afternoon?"

"How are you, Captain O'Shea?" exclaimed Brent, his hearty cordiality of manner not a whit abated. "Don't forget your engagement for supper with me, will you? Six o'clock. Since my cozy little visit with you this morning I have thought over your suggestion. About finding a berth for you in one of my vessels, remember?"

"I recall it, Mr. Brent," was the very curt reply. "I shall be pleased to discuss it at supper, thank you."

"Fine! Good afternoon, Ham."

With this Brent swung out of the store. O'Shea's glance followed him with a certain admiration. The man was no fool. He had seen the opportunity to stir up trouble, and seized it instantly. O'Shea knew what to expect as he turned to face Hamilton Elbridge, who leaned against a counter—pale, troubled, perplexed. His silent scrutiny was so disquieting that O'Shea spoke hastily, as though annoyed:

"And have ye seen your great-grandmother's ghost, or what is it? Had you not wit enough to catch the man's intention? 'Twas stupid of me not to sight him coming into the store. He heard enough to want to set you against me. A smooth article is Enoch Brent."

Elbridge was still harassed by grievous doubts. It cost him an effort to say:

"You are a friend of his? You have asked him for a job? Why didn't you tell me so? If Miss Hardy were not so sure of your loyalty——"

It was an awkward situation, just as Brent had meant it to be. O'Shea perceived that his campaign in Pine Harbor would require the most careful maneuvering. From the bottom of his heart he pitied Elbridge, but all he had to say was:

"Well, 'tis my advice to take Miss Hardy's word for it. I must choose me own way to fight the divil with fire."

With his boyish smile, the grocer impulsively returned:

"Why, of course. I suppose I am just naturally turning suspicious of almost everybody in Pine Harbor. Brent was trying to make mischief. It wasn't true that you have been friendly with him. But I wish he hadn't said those things. I—I——"

Giving it as an excuse that he must return to the schooner, O'Shea left the young man still leaning against the counter in an attitude of bemused introspection.

Jane Hardy was on the schooner's deck, and the two seamen were swinging out buckets of ballast. She brightened at sight of the mate, and asked:

"Did you meet Hamilton Elbridge?

He was hoping you might drop into the store."

With a humorous twist of the mouth, O'Shea confessed:

"We met with delight, and we parted in sorrow. A very fine lad he is, and 'tis a generous man I am to say as much."

"Why, what happened? I found him really very nice about it, Mr. O'Shea. He didn't show a bit of—well, I really can't say it."

"Jealousy, ye mean, Miss Hardy. It was not that, though I would like dearly to give him cause for it. He mistrusts me in another quarter. He has a notion that I will tie up with Enoch Brent."

"How perfectly ridiculous, Mr. O'Shea! But you will overlook it, won't you? Mr. Elbridge has had a great deal to worry him. Poor boy, he is not like himself. Nobody knows what it is to have the feeling that a sinister, powerful enmity is working night and day to ruin you. He told you what it is?"

"Yes. You don't doubt my friendship, do you, Miss Hardy?"

"Oh, can you ask such a question!" she said, so unwaveringly that he flushed with pleasure and tried to hide from her the adoring tenderness that suffused those steadfast, gray eyes of his. It was safer for him to talk of something else. He urged her to go ashore forthwith, and he would remain on duty until the seamen knocked off and went to their homes. She consented, and he observed at parting:

"If you happen to stop at a grocery store on a bit of an errand for your aunt, please give him me regards."

TO BE CONCLUDED IN NEXT ISSUE.

THE UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE

FRANCE gave to the world the automobile. It would not be strange if the automobile should make France an English-speaking country. Twenty years ago there were few places in France, outside of the hotels, where a traveler could find a native with any knowledge of the English language. To-day there hardly is a village in the republic where a Frenchman or a French child with a smattering of English will not be encountered.

The French as a people have made more progress in the last ten years toward speaking English than in the previous ten centuries. Persons who went abroad last year for the first time in four or five years, were amazed at the tremendous spread of the knowledge of English throughout France. The automobile has done it. In some parts of France English is being taught in the public schools. Trade and travel break down the prejudice of ages. Sentiment sinks before the power of money.

France is invaded each year by an army of Americans and Britishers in motor cars. Nowhere do they find better roads or more places of historic interest or charm. No pleasure seekers are more lavish in their expenditures. The lace makers of the hamlets, the shopkeepers of the quaint old towns, and the keepers of crumbling châteaux find it profits to be able to speak the tongue of the rich visitor. France gains a pretty penny through this annual invasion, and each year the gain is larger.

What is true regarding France is true to a minor degree in respect to Germany, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, and Austria. Wherever the automobile goes it drops the seeds of gold that flower into English. It is idle to talk of Volapük or Esperanto as the universal language. Whatever chance they ever had was ruined by the automobile. If there is to be a universal language, it will be English. And the men who have unwittingly done the most toward this end are Daimler, Beau de Rochas, and Panhard, one a German, the other two French.

Prisons Versus Ingenuity

By H. Hesketh Prichard

Author of "The Chronicles of Don Q.," "The Fortunes of Geoff," Etc.

III.—THE BOTTLE-SHAPED DUNGEONS OF COUNT OTTO, THE HUNTER

In a note about this story Mr. Hesketh Prichard says: "The extent to which the passion to possess the heads of red deer attained at the date of this story is almost inconceivable. Game laws were of incredible severity, and as much as a sum corresponding to $25,000 in the money of to-day was offered for a single fine head and failed to buy it. Frederick the Great, gave a full battalion of grenadiers for a single noble set of antlers. The Elector of Saxony killed 47,239 heads of red deer—the European form of the wapiti—in forty-five years during which the Thirty Years War was raging!"

(*A Complete Story*)

IN a land of tumbled mountains, near the heart of Europe, stands a castle once accounted impregnable. It crests a rock that rises abruptly from the floor of a long, wild valley; at its back a precipice, in front its armor of rampart, tower, and buttress.

Within, its vast, dark walls are graced by countless pairs of antlers of red deer, yet among them there hangs one pair before which the expert, and even the most careless visitor, always pauses.

These antlers occupy the place of honor, and must have belonged to some gigantic stag, for they are thicker and heavier far than those around them—the topmost tines on either side cup forming twin hollows that can each hold a bowlful of water. Underneath these wonderful horns is inscribed the legend: "Shot by a poacher upon the Schwartzberg."

As has been said, the visitor always pauses beneath this splendid trophy, and looks long upon its beauty and symmetry, but not so the foresters or the wood rangers, whom chance may cause to pass across the pine flooring of the great hall. They may dart an involuntary glance of admiration at the great horns, but they hurry by, crossing themselves, for they know the history of the Schwartzberg stag, and they know, also, the name of the poacher who slew it, and the tragic events which followed.

That is the story I will tell here.

It was the close of a long day of hunting. The Count Otto had done full justice to an ample meal, and now he sat brooding in solitude, while he rolled the good wine upon his tongue. Yet neither good food nor wine could lighten his gloomy humor, for he was a man of rancorous heart.

The door opened cautiously, as if under a timid hand, and the count's Greek major-domo appeared, shrinking and pallid, in the opening.

"What is your excuse for disturbing me in this fashion? You begin to take too much upon yourself, Dimitri."

"Forgive me, most high and nobly

The first two stories in this series appeared in the issues dated September 1, and October 15.

descended, but I bring news, bad news. A terrible thing has occurred."

"Are my crops burning?"

"I would that the misfortune were so slight!"

"What? My castle of Rudenstein, then?"

"Alas! Even that were better."

"Your babbling and stuttering maddens me! Speak! What is it?"

"Highness, the Schwartzberg stag—is—is——"

"What?" roared Count Otto.

"Is dead!"

"Dead? The Schwartzberg stag! You say dead—you dog! You say dead?"

"It is, indeed so, excellency."

"How? How? *How?*"

"Shot, highborn."

"Shot? Impossible! No man would dare to shoot him! You know that the shooting of that stag is reserved for the emperor! My own overlord himself!"

"Most nobly born, do I not know all these things? Yet it cannot be denied that the stag has been killed. Fritz and Hans are waiting——"

"Waiting? What are they waiting for? What are they doing here? Why are they not hunting down the scoundrel to his death?" Count Otto thrashed about the stone-paved floor.

"But they have caught him, excellency."

"Then where is he?"

"They have him safe in the hall—ex——"

"Fool! Imbecile!" the count bellowed. "Bid them bring him here at once. Who is he?"

Dimitri fled, well pleased to have delivered the dreadful message.

A moment or two later, two burly forest guards entered, one of them bleeding from a wound in the face. Between them, securely bound, they led a man nearing middle age, not a man of any great stature, but powerfully built. Though clad in the rough clothing of the peasants, no one looking at his sensitive, high-bred, though withal reckless face, surmounted by wild, dark hair, would have believed him a son of the downtrodden people.

As the three men appeared, Count Otto cried out:

"Who is the fellow?"

"It is Helmuth Erlau, highborn."

Count Otto sprang up and, leaping across the room, struck the prisoner heavily across the face.

"You villain! You brute!" he shouted. "You have killed the Schwartzberg stag!"

Helmuth Erlau answered nothing, but his eyes blazed under his dark brows.

"How did you dare to hunt him? How did you dare to kill him? You knew, as all people within my barony, and even far beyond it, know, that the stag was sacred, sacred, I say, from the common touch as the bones of a saint! He was mine to keep alive! He was the emperor's to slay when I chose the allotted hour! Had I a child, it would be less to me than the great stag which you have slaughtered!"

"I have shot no stag."

The indifferent tone of the voice struck Count Otto. He turned savagely upon the foresters.

"Then why have you brought him here?"

Fritz, the elder, stepped forward.

"Have I permission to speak, highborn?"

Count Otto grunted.

"I was up in the forest on the Schwartzberg Alp, when I heard a far-off shot. I ran in the direction of the sound, for you have forbidden all forest wardens to shoot even vermin in that forest, excellency, on account of the great stag. After I had run a good way, I caught sight of a man coming down very swiftly through the trees. He had a gun in his hand. I recognized him, though he was at some distance. It was Helmuth Erlau. He did not see me, for I lay in the bracken, and when he was gone I rose and climbed the alp, following the track he had made as he ran down. Near the broken hut, under the pines below it, where the rock hangs over, I at length found the great stag. Its body had been hidden under branches and brushwood. I dragged

them away. The stag had been killed by one ball fired through the neck."

Count Otto burst out into an incoherent volley of rage.

"Go on!"

"When I saw this, I did not pause, but went quickly to the hut of Hans and told him. He sent his two sons to guard the body of the stag, and he and I hastened to the farm of Helmuth Erlau. He had but just returned, and still had the gun in his hand. We seized him. He fought——"

"Had you not come upon me unawares——" began Helmuth, smiling.

"Silence, dog!" thundered Count Otto.

"Having bound him, we brought him to the major-domo, and he commanded us to lead him to the presence of the highborn," ended Fritz.

"You have done well. Now, you dog, Erlau, you may speak! What have you to say?"

"I shot no stag, not the great stag, nor any other."

"Bah! You were on the alp with a gun."

"It is true, but——"

"If you did not kill the stag, who killed it? Answer me that!"

"I don't know. And if I shot the stag, how comes it that, when the men came upon me, my gun was clean?"

"In that he speaks truth, excellency. His gun was clean, but we think he cleaned it on the alp even as the stag died, for he knows——"

"That is enough!" cried Count Otto. "Take Helmuth Erlau to that window. Let him look forth and tell me what he sees."

Helmuth Erlau spoke, wondering what was next to come:

"I see the treetops stirring in the wind, and the stars are in the night sky."

"You have seen them for the last time. There is no dungeon in the castle too deep for the slayer of the Schwartzberg stag. Call Elias and Dimitri, bid them fetch ropes and lanterns. You, Fritz, bring the prisoner down."

The little party were led by the major-domo, carrying a lantern, down a long and winding passage, with little flights of steps at intervals, that finally debouched into a low room of irregular shape, with rough walls that might have been cut from the living rock, for all that the prisoner could see.

"This is the core of my castle, Helmuth Erlau," said Count Otto. "You see those two apertures at your feet? Each is the mouth of a bottle-shaped dungeon. Into this one my grandfather flung a creature who had angered him. Who the man was, I do not know, but he lived below there for fifteen years, and you can use his bones for a pillow. Each morning, you shall have food and water, thus you will be given time to meditate upon your crime. Lower him down."

Vain as such a struggle must be, Helmuth Erlau made one last effort to avoid his fate. But the end was a foregone conclusion; a rope was knotted about his body, and he was thrust into the hole that served for entrance into his prison. He was lowered hastily, first through a narrow neck, where sharp, protruding stones tore his clothing and bruised him, then he dangled a while in wide blackness.

"The rope is all paid out. It is not long enough, highborn," said a voice above him.

"I saw its length. Let go! The fall will not be great, not enough to kill Helmuth Erlau. He will live to wish it had finished him!"

When Helmuth came to himself, it was long before he realized where he was. He was aware of a dull aching through his whole body, and when remembrance filtered back into his brain, he moved first one limb and then another, until he satisfied himself that, although much bruised and scratched, neither arms nor legs were broken by the fall he had suffered.

The aperture overhead had not been closed, and through it a faint light still shone. After a while, as he recovered himself, he set about examining his prison. He knew that the neck was a funnel several feet long, and barely wide enough to admit the body of a

man. But there was much more space in the "bottle" itself than he was prepared to find. He followed, by touch, the circle of the slimy wall, slipping now and again on the greasy ooze that covered the ground, and once stumbling over some loose stones or gravel that lay in his path.

"Hi, there! You are awake again! My highborn master, in his clemency, sends you a bed," called out a voice, and a bundle of straw obscured the light, as it was pushed down the dungeon neck. "And here is another act of mercy. The noble count permits you a light for a few minutes in your cell, so that you may see what there—is to be seen." The sentence ended in a laugh, the light in the neck of the dungeon became brighter, as a lantern swinging on the end of a rope was dropped through.

Helmuth looked carefully about him. He was in a gigantic bottle, as it were, some thirty feet in depth, roughly built in stone and masonry. The walls sloped with a hollow curve toward the neck, and the prisoner saw that no creature but a fly or a beetle could hope to climb out from such a dungeon.

For the rest, there was nothing to be seen but stones dripping with damp, and here and there the faint light shone on streaks of slime that gleamed like silver. Helmuth placed his straw in the small heap of gravel, which was a little raised above the actual mud upon the floor. His position was desperate.

"There! You have seen enough of your lodging!" cried Fritz. "Now I will send down your food. Ready?"

A string with a lump of meat and some black bread bumped its way through the funnel and, swinging wide, reached Helmuth's hand. This was followed by a bucket of water, the larger part of which was spilled on the way down. Immediately the light was withdrawn, and in the blackness, it must be confessed, Helmuth felt the weight of uttermost despair.

II.

Possibly, it is during the first hundred hours of imprisonment that a prisoner touches his extreme of feeling. Certainly it was so with Helmuth Erlau. He was innocent of the action charged against him, and he lay in helpless rage, condemned for life never to see again sun or stars, to smell the fragrance of the pines, or to meet the wind that blows through the mountain forests. He who always had lived outside stone walls as much as civilized man may, was now thrown into a foul dungeon, deprived of light and air where he must linger during years of darkness, or starve himself to death as others, perchance, had done. Those were his only alternatives, and, of the two, death seemed the more desirable to the man of the mountains.

For a whole week, Helmuth had debated this point with himself—whether to kill himself or to live on. The fact that he still lived was due only to the dour character of the man, whose mind had become absorbed in a single passion of hatred, illuminated by a hopeless and somber thirst for revenge. Hour after hour, Helmuth lay wrapped in a dream of vengeance, of vengeance that could—as was only too evident—never pass beyond a dream. What, he wondered, had been the fate of the other prisoners that, during the last hundred years, these dungeons had known? Had freedom come to a single one of them? Or had all died down there in the gloom? The count had spoken of one who had found death after fifteen years—and here Helmuth was arrested by a sudden thought, a thought inexpressibly sweet, since with it came the first faint gleam of hope. That prisoner whom Count Otto described as dying in this very dungeon! If he had so died, where were his bones?

A thousand times Helmuth had crept on his hands and knees round and across the floor, quartering it as best he could in the dimness, and feeling every inch of it. Most surely he had touched no bones. They had not been removed, since Count Otto had bade him pillow his head upon them. But the hope vanished. Doubtless there was some mistake. Helmuth returned once more to the deeps of his despair.

Next day he refused the food that

was lowered to him; on the second day he did likewise. On the third day he was startled from an uneasy sleep by voices above.

"Helmuth Erlau!"

He made no reply.

"Helmuth Erlau. You dog, answer!" It was Count Otto who called.

Still he made no reply.

"Listen, Helmuth, you sullen devil! Your brother, Heinrich, has threatened to lay your case before the emperor."

"My brother is a true man."

A laugh came from above.

"He will never reach the emperor. Heinrich is here. It would be cruel to divide two brothers who love each other so well!"

The suggestion that he was to have some one, most of all his brother, to share his solitude, caused a spasm of selfish joy in the heart of Helmuth, but it passed as the count went on:

"We are about to lower him down into the next dungeon. He will be a companion, for you will be separated by but ten feet of stone and mortar. Now, down with him!"

Helmuth stood upright. "Spare him! Spare him!" he cried. "I will confess anything!—that I slew the stag—anything! Only do not condemn Heinrich to this living death!"

But the count had moved away, and Helmuth heard the sounds of a struggle, a wild, screaming cry, then, quite close to him, a curse called down upon Count Otto.

Helmuth turned, trembling. What could it mean? He had been standing looking up at the neck of his dungeon, at the faint light that percolated through it far above. Yet Heinrich's voice was so clear, so audible. There again! What *could* it mean? He leaned against the wall, overcome with excitement.

In the distance Count Otto laughed.

"Farewell, Brothers Erlau," and silence fell with blank darkness, as the light faded out in the neck above him.

For many minutes Helmuth remained as if spellbound. If ten-feet thickness of stone and mortar separated the two dungeons, how came it that he could hear the words spoken by his brother so distinctly? There must be some channel of communication. Helmuth moved along the dividing wall, listening, feeling. All at once, he heard sounds at the other side of the masonry, as of a man groaning.

"Heinrich! Heinrich!"

"It is you, Helmuth. Where are you? From where do you speak?"

"I am near you, in the next dungeon, but speak softly, lest we be heard. I hear you so plainly, that there must be some opening—some means of communication. Search on your side. I can find none here."

"Wait! I will search. Yes, here is a hole."

"Can you pass through it?"

"It is a rough tunnel—small enough for a man's shoulders—I am coming."

A few moments passed, then there was a noise of stones falling. Helmuth helped from his side, and soon the two brothers clasped hands.

"I don't understand this at all," muttered Heinrich. "I have heard often enough of the bottle dungeons of Count Otto, but——"

"Let me go into your dungeon," exclaimed Helmuth. "I think I can understand. Remain in the opening until I speak."

Heinrich heard him groping and moving slowly round, and suddenly he uttered a low cry.

"It is as I thought. Heinrich, I can explain. A man was imprisoned in my dungeon fifty years ago, and was supposed to have died there, yet his bones are here. He made that passage. Think of it! Through ten feet of stone and mortar—— He must have worked at it for fifteen years, and then to discover at the end that his labor was in vain, that he had only made his way into another dungeon! Poor wretch! I touch his bones with my hands, and the chains he wore are among them."

After a time, Helmuth asked his brother how he had been captured by the count's people.

"I heard of all that had happened to you. Karl, the son of Hans, who is my friend, came and told me. Then I tried

to escape secretly to the capital to lay your case before the emperor himself; but they were too clever for me. They ambushed me before I reached the pass, and here I am, and here I will surely remain until I rot to my death."

"Perhaps not."

"Not? What hope can there be?"

"Why, the prisoner who made that passage bored through ten feet of masonry. He must have had tools of some kind, in order to do that. We will seek for them. We are heirs to all he left. We have years before us in which to work, and we may be more lucky than he, and win out to possible escape. And before us, like a star toward which we can strive, shines the hope of revenge. Brother Heinrich, perhaps it may be given to us to speak once more face to face with Count Otto!"

"That would be a pleasant hour!" returned Heinrich.

"I will go back to my cell now, in case they feed us. They come at long intervals—every four-and-twenty hours, but I have already lost count of time. We must be careful to be found always in our cells. And do you, Heinrich, if the count comes, beg for mercy and make lamentation."

When next Helmuth joined his brother he found that Heinrich had thoroughly searched the space within his dungeon.

"The man who made the passage worked with fragments of his chain. I have found some pieces that prove it. But how slowly can one excavate with such tools! Think of the courage that kept him to his purpose through all those years!"

"Perseverance is the virtue of prisoners. It is forced on them. We must produce it in our turn. Let me feel the links of chain which the man before us used to excavate."

Heinrich thrust a sharpened bit of iron into his brother's hand.

"I have made another discovery, Helmuth. This man had actually broken out the beginning of a new passage when he died! The saints befriend him!"

"Where is it?"

"Here in the east wall."

"You mean the west wall," said Helmuth, as he felt the opening to which his brother guided him.

"No, this is the east."

"No, it is not, and I will prove it to you," Helmuth persisted. "My dungeon lies south of yours, because to come to it we passed through the great hall where the antlers hang, and the great hall faces north."

"You are right. But if we cut our passage out east, where will it lead us?"

"Who knows? I have been but rarely in the castle. If we work long enough we will, at least, find the answer to your question—and perchance to some others also."

"Work long enough? You mean if we live long enough in this foul place!" cried Heinrich.

"We *must*," said Helmuth fiercely. "I have spent a terrible week, brother, a week without hope, cut off suddenly from life—with hatred of Count Otto as my sole companion. We owe a debt to that fiend that we must pay. We can at the least work unobserved and unsuspected. Unless they hear us, we shall not be discovered, nor hindered, for it would take a braver man than any of the castle servants to pass through the neck of the dungeon to visit us. Come, we will begin at once. We will take turns to quarry and to clear. Come! I wonder what Count Otto would say if he knew what manner of rats are beginning to gnaw this night through the bowels of his castle!"

So, without the delay of a moment, the long labor began. Presently, in a pause, Helmuth spoke:

"There is one question I have not asked."

"What is it?"

"Is the great stag truly dead?"

"Yes, that is true."

"Then who shot it?"

"Have you not guessed? Who but Count Otto himself?"

"The count! You're mad!"

"Far from it! The emperor sent a letter, saying that he had heard tidings

of the wonderful stag, the great stag of the Schwartzberg, and, as he was about to journey north, he would turn aside to the mountains and come shortly to pay Count Otto a visit, and to shoot the stag, the antlers of which, being now at their grandest, would surely decline in the future."

"And the count—I begin to see. But how did you learn the truth?"

"I searched, and found the tracks. They were close beside your own, as you passed over the shoulder of the mountain from our high pastures. He must have been but a mile or two ahead of you. Whoever the forest guards found on the Schwartzberg would have been accused. You, for your own ill fortune, were the man!"

"I understand."

"By this time the count's messengers have met the emperor on his royal progress, bearing a letter expressing the deep sorrow of the count that the stag is dead—slain by an accursed poacher, named Helmuth or Heinrich Erlau, upon whom justice has fallen."

"May justice fall on the head o Count Otto himself, and by my hand and thine, brother. Come, to work!"

III.

Five years passed away. During every day of those years, for over seventeen hundred days and nights, Helmuth and Heinrich toiled at the cutting of the passage which should perchance once more unite them with the world without.

They had worked unremittingly. Sometimes the result of a week of toil would be the loosening of but a few handfuls of masonry, sometimes a great stone would be pried from its bed. But in good time or bad, the tunnel ever grew. At the end of the first year it was eight feet in length—the two men had, in truth, lost all count of time save vaguely, by the changes of warmth and cold—at the end of the second more than fifteen. Then it was that a huge block of granite barred the way, and a year was spent in boring round it, since it could not be removed. Afterward came a period when the mortar was rotten and crumbling, and the rats gnawed swiftly, until the tunnel stretched full fifty feet, or so the prisoners judged.

Of late they had worked with caution, for they fancied that the masonry through which they burrowed rang hollow. Their tunnel was nearing completion—both were sure of that—they toiled by night and day. Where, oh where, would this work of years lead them?

It was finally Heinrich who broke through to emptiness. His little tool pierced suddenly without obstruction, and the piece of mortar fell outward. At the sound of its fall, Heinrich felt an intolerable snatching at his heart. This was the end, at last!

He crawled back to his brother, who was sleeping.

"Awake, Helmuth. The end has come. I have broken through."

Helmuth was up in an instant. "Can you see anything? Where have we come to?"

"I saw nothing. All was black."

Helmuth passed quickly through the tunnel and peered through the little hole, then returned to his brother.

"Yes, it is utter blackness, yet it must be near the dawn. Our count of the hours has rarely failed; we have always been ready for the man who brings our food."

"We have, perhaps, come out into some cellar," suggested Heinrich.

"Possibly! We shall know to-night."

"Yes, to-night."

That night they broke through. They waited till the small hours were well advanced before they ventured to make the hole by which they emerged at last into an open space. The darkness was absolute, close, and stuffy. Helmuth advanced a step or two, and, putting out his hand, drew it back with a little gasp.

"I touched wood!" he whispered. "Wood!"

He then went four paces to the left and six to the right, and so round.

"It is a little room, but I can find no door," he said. "What is this?"

His fumbling hand had slipped back a tiny panel, and he found himself looking into the great hall. Then dawn, showing through the high window, was faintly touching with its silver light the white points of the great collection of antlers.

No more happened that night, for though the brothers left not a foot of the woodwork unhandled, they discovered no outlet from the apartment to which their tunnel had led them. It was evidently one of those secret chambers that are not uncommon in old buildings, and the deep dust within it proved that human foot had not been set in it for many years. It was not till the third day that the brothers found the panel that gave entrance to the hall. In the dim, late hours of that night they crept forth, two shambling creatures with crooked backs and wounded hands; beards swept their chests, and their red eyes blinked even in the soft rays of the moon. They opened a window, and stood long drinking in the pure, sweet air.

"Come! We waste precious time. Let us escape, if we may, during the hours of darkness that remain," whispered Heinrich eagerly. "Come!"

"Nay, you forget, Heinrich! Escape we can think of later. I will not leave the castle until I have seen my kind host face to face, and thanked him as I should for his generous hospitality to me and to you."

"Helmuth, this is madness! What matters anything, so long as we escape?" urged the other.

"Do as you will, brother, but I must wait," replied Helmuth, and Heinrich would not leave him.

So a week passed, and none in the castle who crossed the great hall guessed that eyes watched them from the shadows, eyes of the prisoners supposed to be fast in their dungeons in the bowels of the castle.

"What do you wait for, brother?" asked Heinrich, in weariness.

"I wait to find him alone. If he eats here, he eats with others, he gives orders, he passes out to hunt, to ride, to do all that a free man may do. We must wait. Fear not. Our hour will come."

And it happened that very day Count Otto stood in the hall and bade his men carry in the horns of the Schwartzberg stag.

"Let the antlers be fixed to the head carved by Rusiloff, and to-day it shall hang in the place of honor among all these that I and my fathers have gathered from our forests."

(At that date horns were attached to a carved wooden facsimile of a deer head; the real skin was not set up, as it is in modern times.)

Count Otto stood by and saw the work done, and presently the head was hung in its place with the aid of ladders and men, while the master raged and fumed at their awkwardness.

"He looks well up there, highborn," said Fritz, when all was done.

"True. If only I had shot him with my own hand!" said the count gloomily. "See the inscription. 'Shot by a poacher upon the Schwartzberg.' But he has been paying for that pleasure these five years! Aye, it is five years to-day since Helmuth Erlau killed the great stag."

Fritz nodded. "It is, indeed, five years, highborn."

"Dimitri, remember that I dine here to-night. I can never forget the day that crime was committed. I will keep the anniversary and curse Helmuth Erlau as I drink."

And all this incident was watched and overheard by Heinrich. As soon as it was over, he hastened back to his brother with the news.

"Heaven send he dines alone!" said Helmuth.

"And if he does, what will we do?"

"The hour must decide."

"How comes it that the great head has not been hung long ago?"

"Doubtless it has been hidden, lest the emperor should demand it for his own collection."

It was past midnight, and the count sat alone, his table drawn up below the mighty antlers that hung above the chimney. And there he sat and drank

and brooded blackly, and in the dim light the carved faces of the deer looked strangely down upon him.

He had long since sent away the last of his servants, and, after a long time, he rose and stood as if listening. Then, seeming satisfied, he returned to the table and filled a huge goblet with wine. Taking it in his hand, he raised it toward the antlers on the wall.

"I drink not to you, great stag of the Schwartzberg, but to your conqueror! To the hand that sent you your death! The emperor would have robbed me of the glory! But not even a royal hand was worthy to slay you! You were mine, mine in life and death! I drink to you!"

And as he poured the wine down his throat, the panel was slipped gently back, and, one with a club stolen from the wall, the other with a gag of wood and rags, two wildly bearded, wolfish men crept, barefooted and noiseless, across the flooring.

The count flung the silver cup from him, then stood a second. It may be he heard a creak, a movement, for he half turned as the iron-shod club crashed upon his head.

"Quick, Heinrich, the gag! I did not strike to kill. Take the rope that lies there. We will tie him to his chair. So! Now let us await his waking."

The brothers sat themselves down to eat and drink sparingly, while Count Otto slowly came back to consciousness. As he opened his eyes, he saw two faces clothed in hair and dirt glaring at him across the table. For long they eyed each other in silence. At last Helmuth spoke:

"Do you recognize us, Count Otto? You should do so, for we have been your guests these five years, or six—I know not which."

Count Otto only stared.

"Now, Heinrich, lift that curtain. Look, count, look, from the window, and tell me what you see. You cannot answer, but I will answer for you. You see the night and the stars. Look well upon them, for after to-night you will never see them again."

Heinrich dropped the curtain.

"Now, look upon the great stag of which you boasted yourself the slayer, unheard and in solitude, as you believed. Look well upon those noble horns, for whose downfall we have lived long years in the dark at your command. It is our turn now."

Count Otto struggled in his bonds. Helmuth bent forward and struck him upon the face.

"As once you struck me," he said. "Heinrich"—he turned to his brother—"we cannot hope to make him suffer as he has made us suffer, but it is only fair that we should give him a taste of his own meat. We could, indeed, fling him into our dungeon to die by inches, as he would have had us die, but we can run no chances. *He* must not escape!"

A servant coming in the morning fled shrieking from the hall, for he found his master, Count Otto, sitting stark in his chair, staring with sightless eyes at the great stag.

He had been dead for some hours.

At about the same moment that the uproar following on the discovery of the count's death swept through the castle, far away on the heights of the Schwartzberg, Helmuth and Heinrich Erlau rested among the bracken and talked together. They spoke of Count Otto and his last moments, of their perilous climb from the window by the ivy, and of their plans for flight into Italy.

This last was simple enough, for none recognized in the two bent beggars clothed in rags the once stalwart brothers, who, their friends believed, had long since perished in Count Otto's dungeons. Many years after, the truth filtered back to the foot of the Schwartzberg from across the Atlantic, where, on a freer soil, Helmuth, in the last days of his life, told the story of the escape to his descendants.

More stories of remakable escapes from great prisons coming in later issues of the POPULAR.

A Chat With You

OVER six months ago we published in THE POPULAR a complete novel entitled "North of Fifty-Three." It was by Bertrand W. Sinclair. When we read it in manuscript we felt that it was the best thing he had ever done. We said so in these pages. If we were to try to print all the letters we have received since then agreeing with us in our estimate of the story, we could easily fill an entire number of the magazine with them. It was a rare, strong, vivid sort of story. The incident—unusual in itself—was of the sort that really brought out in relief and showed to us plainly the good and bad points of the strong and human characters who enacted the drama. Some wrote to us and said that Bill Wagstaff was a brute. Others, and more of them, said that he was a hero, and we ourselves think that while Bill was, or is—for he still exists for us—somewhat of a rough diamond at times, there is in him a clean, fine strain of the magnanimous and heroic. After all, the best men are seldom the most suave and polished, and we are sure that Roaring Bill would be a better friend and companion that many a one who spoke more gently and felt less strongly and sincerely.

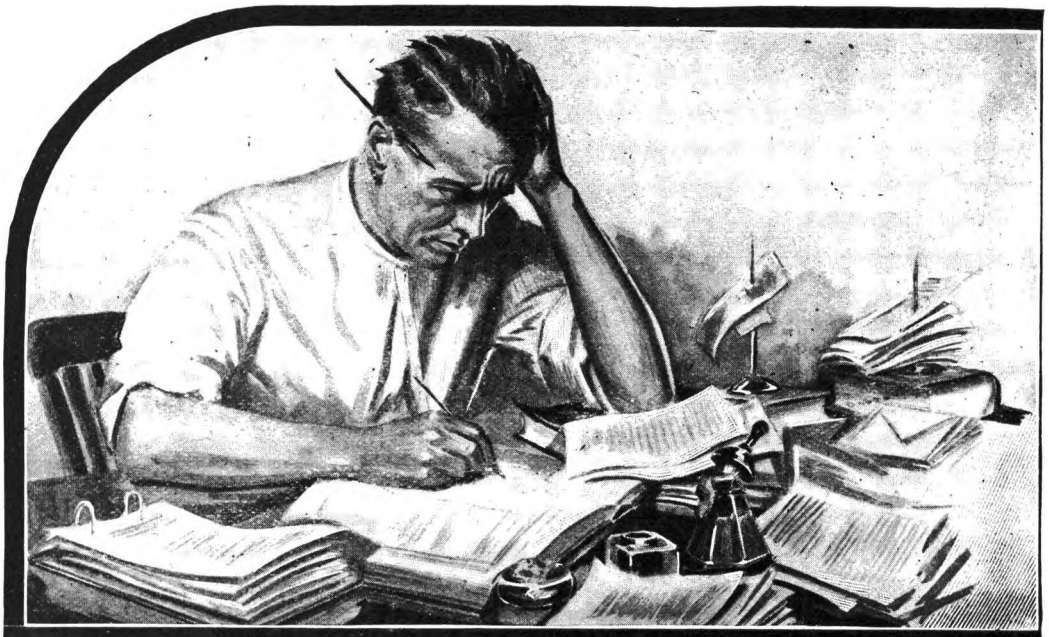
OF course you remember the story, and, of course, you remember the ending, charming on account of its unexpected quality, but still not altogether satisfactory to one who knew the characters and liked them. What became of Hazel? Did she ever see Bill again? Were they married! Or did they soon forget each other? We always think of Bill as one who does not readily forget, and is still less readily forgotten. He has lingered in our memory and in yours, and we have all wanted to see him again. We don't know how many requests we have had for "the rest of the story." We have it now. "The Rest of the Story," with capitals this time, for it is the title of the new Sinclair novel, will appear complete in the next issue of THE POPULAR, out on the stands two weeks from to-day.

SEQUELS are often disappointing. The reason they are is that in so many cases the author has told all there reasonably was to tell in the original story. Of course you remember "North of Fifty-Three." Whatever fault it had as a story lay in the fact that it didn't tell enough. "The Rest of the Story" does what its name says it will—tells you the rest. It does more. The life and adventures of Bill Wagstaff did not end with his marriage or his failure to marry Hazel. He still grew and developed. In the next issue of the magazine you will meet him again in the city a successful man of business. You will recognize him at once, however. His is a personality not easily disguised. No amount of wealth or polish can conceal his rugged individuality. Yes—he and Hazel meet again, and as they did in the first story, so they do again. They like each other and still they disagree. You see Bill in a new light, but you see the same man in him. To us the most refreshing thing about the story coming to you in two weeks is the contrast between Bill's stubborn and simple honesty and the hypocrisy and double-dealing of the financiers among whom he finds him-

self. "The Rest of the Story" opens in the Northern wilderness and ends there, but for a while its scenes are laid in the money exchanges and drawing-rooms of the city. Hazel is the same as ever. She has her faults—a certain obstinacy is one—but all of her, both faults and virtues, are humanly engaging, and you will like her in two weeks from to-day, better than ever. A magazine like this continually gains new readers. Of the old it may be said that few die and none resign, but if you are one of the new and have not read "North of Fifty-Three," don't be afraid to plunge right into "The Rest of the Story" when it appears. It is by no means the ordinary sequel. You don't need to know what happened before to understand and like the story. Read it and you will agree with us that it is one of the best of THE POPULAR novels.

DO you remember Lincoln Colcord's story, "The Drifting Diamond," which appeared some time ago in this magazine and was afterward published by Macmillans in book form? Colcord has another story in the next issue of the magazine, a sea story, and an unusual one. Do you remember Chisholm's novel, "Shores of Refuge," which appeared recently? Chisholm has another splendid story in the next issue. Also there is another railroad yarn by Frank L. Packard, and another story of the prize ring by Charles E. Van Loan.

WE hope that before this you have read the first installment of "The Time That Was," by Francis Whitlock, which appears in the present number of the magazine. There are those who know the Balkans, and there are those who know how to write a good story, but as for those who have the two kinds of knowledge combined in them we can only think of Whitlock at present. The rocky, debatable country of the Balkans besides being the worry of all the diplomats of Europe, is the last outpost of Old World savage romance. The spirit of the crusades has not quite perished from among those rugged hills, and the children of the Black Mountain are still eager for war and adventure. No nice distinctions of ethics, no marble peace palaces at the Hague, disturb their dreams of glory. In his romance Whitlock has caught the spirit of the people of the hills, and if you will follow the fortunes of Jones-Morgan, the American, in whom there lived once more the soul of old Skanderbeg, the epical hero of the Balkans, you will be well rewarded. In the same issue, also, is the final half of "Jane Hardy, Shipmaster," by Ralph D. Paine. It is every bit as good an adventure story as "The Time That Was," but as different as could well be imagined.



Are You Doing the Work

Salaries are regulated by knowledge

The untrained man has to ***work hard*** for his small wage—the trained man is paid well for what he ***knows.*** The untrained man is paid ***only*** for the value of his job—the trained man is paid for the value of his brain.

Raise yourself from the workers to the thinkers—don't waste another minute—***you*** can do it as well as others. You can start ***now*** and begin your advance quickly.

The way to ***raise*** yourself is to ***train*** yourself, and the way to train yourself is easy with the aid of the International Correspondence Schools.

I. C. S. brings the *training to you*

In your own home—in your spare time—no matter where you live or how little schooling you have had.

The I. C. S. have made engineers of machinists; advertising managers of printers; architects of carpenters; managers and superintendents of men in the ranks.

They give you thorough working knowledge of the business of your choice, and advance is ***sure.***

What's the Matter?

SOMEBODY HURT. An automobile turning a corner struck a man crossing the street who had become confused and did not get out of the way. The crowd is gathering to see the ambulance carry the man away.

Every hour of the day such accidents are happening on the streets. The carelessness of others and your own hurry puts you in constant danger of accidental injury.

There are a thousand causes of accident. Not the least numerous are those at home, office, travel and recreation.

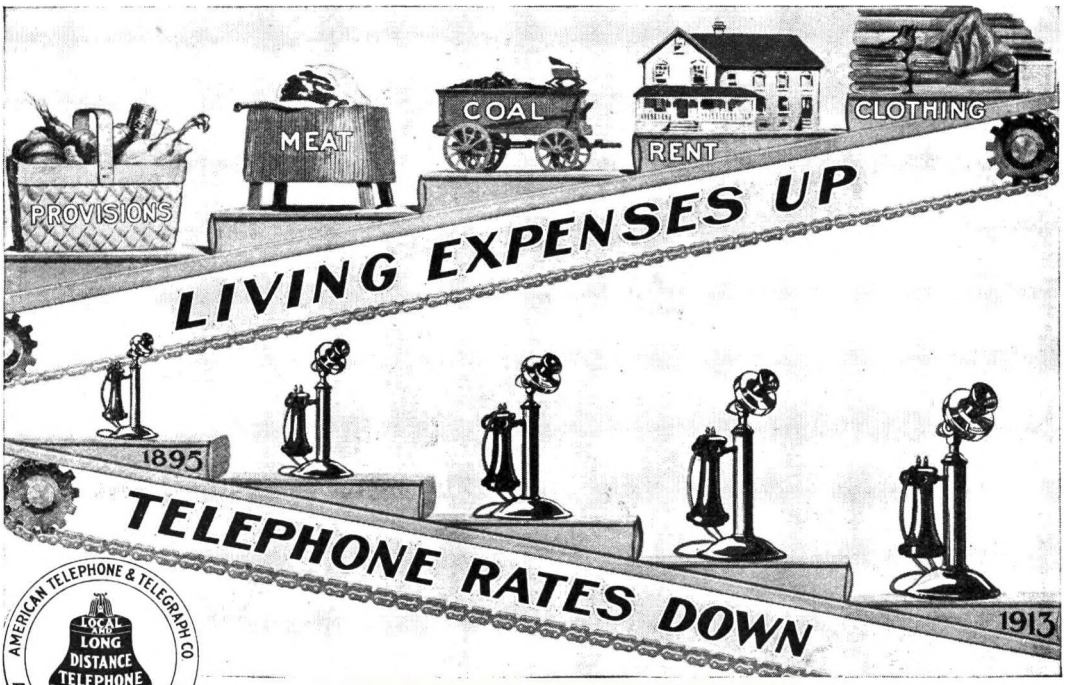
A $3,000 accumulative accident policy, the best on the market, costs at the rate of about 4 cents a day.

You need accident insurance. You need it now.

MORAL: Insure in The TRAVELERS

The TRAVELERS INSURANCE CO., Hartford, Conn. *Popular N* **Tear off**

Please send me particulars regarding Accident Insurance. My name, address and date of birth are written below:



Economy of the Bell System

Consider this significant fact: While most of the necessaries of life have gone up, the price of telephone service, which is one of the essential factors in our commercial and social life, has moved steadily downward.

Although a pound of these necessities still contains but sixteen ounces, the telephone user has been getting more and more service for less money.

On the average, the people of this country pay 49% more today for food, fuel and clothing than they did in 1895. Since then, the decrease in the average rates for telephone service has been more than one-half.

At the same time, the efficiency and value of the service to the subscriber has vastly increased. Today he can talk to an average of five times as many persons in each exchange as he could eighteen years ago.

This is the inevitable result of the comprehensive policy of the Bell System, which brings together the associated Bell companies and the communities they serve.

Through the very size and efficiency of their organization they accomplish improvements and effect economies which give the greatest service at the lowest rates.

AMERICAN TELEPHONE AND TELEGRAPH COMPANY

AND ASSOCIATED COMPANIES

One Policy ***One System*** ***Universal Service***

You'll Never Forget

You who bake beans in home ovens, and find them hard to digest.

You who buy the wrong kind of ready-baked beans, and find them flat.

Some day you will try Van Camp's. You will find the beans nut-like, mellow and whole. You will find a sauce of superlative zest. And you will never forget.

"The National Dish"

Van Camp's

BAKED WITH TOMATO SAUCE

PORK AND BEANS

"The National Dish"

Nobody has ever baked beans like Van Camp's. Here a famous French chef has given this dish a matchless zest and flavor.

Here we pick out by hand just the white, plump beans.

Here we make a sauce which costs five times what common sauce is sold for. And we bake it with the beans.

And here we use modern steam ovens. Here we bake in small parcels. Here we bake without crisping, without bursting a bean. And we bring to your table the fresh oven flavor.

Van Camp's, when once tasted, are never forgotten. They will bring you a new idea of baked beans.

One can will prove this. Get it today. Then leave the decision to the folks at your table. A 15-cent can serves five.

Three sizes: 10, 15 and 20 cents per can (279)

Prepared by **Van Camp Packing Company, Indianapolis, Ind.**

Established 1861

Pabst Extract American Girl Calendar

FOR 1914

To say that the original of this new Pabst Calendar is the work of C. Allan Gilbert is to make everybody want one, for the "Gilbert Girls" are known far and wide as the highest type of modern art. The figures are beautiful, attractive, winsome — the colorings artfully and harmoniously blended. To fully appreciate this beautiful work of art, you must see the calendar itself.

As usual, the calendar is absolutely *free from advertising* on the front, even the months being printed on the back.

The Calendar is FREE

All you have to do to obtain one is to send us 10c in stamps or silver (coin preferred) to cover the cost of packing and mailing. The demand for these beautiful calendars grows greater each year, so send for yours at once to avoid disappointment.

The illustration herewith gives but a faint idea of the beauty of this handsome calendar. Picture in your mind's eye, the *real* calendar in panel form, seven inches wide and thirty-six inches long, printed in twelve harmoniously blended colors. The shape lends itself to the decoration of those odd places so hard to fill; and the color scheme is sure to harmonize with the furnishings of any room. Framed or unframed it will prove an ornament to your home.

In past years the Pabst Extract American Girl Calendar has won the enthusiastic approval of lovers of things beautiful and the 1914 "American Girl" is sure to receive equally as hearty a reception because of its true artistic merit. We have one all ready to send you, merely awaiting your order. And in sending you this calendar we hope it will prove more than an ornament to your home. We want it to remind you, and others, that

Pabst Extract
The Best Tonic

"brings the roses to your cheeks"—that it is a natural tonic which enriches the blood, rebuilds the wasted tissues of the body, steadies the nerves and tones the entire system. Being a perfect blending of choicest malt and hops, it is nature's own builder and reinvigorator—a splendid tonic, recommended by leading physicians for nursing mothers, convalescents, anaemics, all who are run down from any cause, and as a revitalizer for the aged.

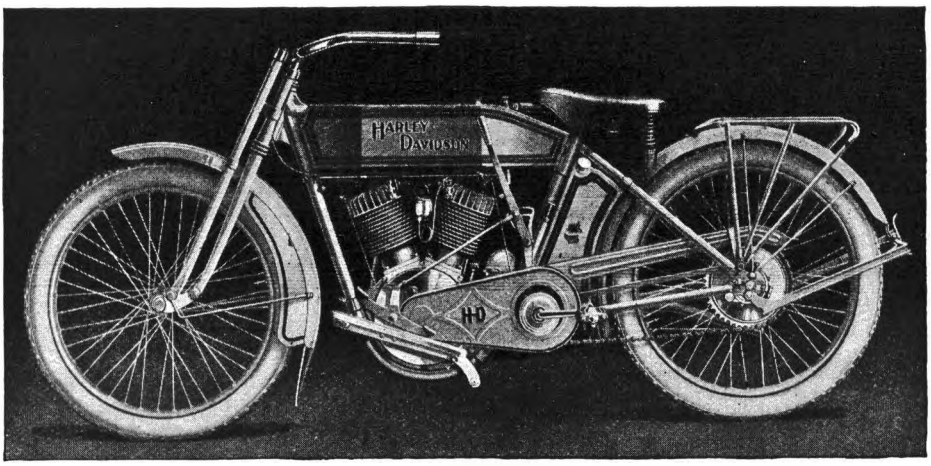
The United States Government specifically classifies Pabst Extract as an article of medicine—not an alcoholic beverage.

Order a Dozen from Your Druggist

Insist Upon It Being "Pabst"

Pabst Extract American Girl Calendar is now ready for mailing. Send ten cents in stamps or coin (coin preferred) and a copy will be promptly forwarded to you postpaid. Send request early to avoid disappointment.

PABST EXTRACT CO. Dept. 11 MILWAUKEE, WIS.



Startling Exclusive Improvements Mark the 1914 Harley-Davidson

Step Starter — Selective Two-Speed — Double Brake Control — Double Control of Free Wheel—Folding Foot Boards—Ful-Floteing Seat — Other Important Improvements —

Step Starter

This exclusive patented feature permits the starting of the machine with both wheels on the ground and with the rider in the saddle. A downward push on either pedal spins the engine sufficiently to start it.

Selective Type of Two-Speed

The Harley-Davidson selective type of two-speed (another exclusive patented feature) is located inside the rear hub, thus avoiding dust, dirt or damage. Its speeds are selective and the rider can shift from low to high, or high to low, or to neutral, at any time, whether the machine is standing still or in motion.

Double Brake Control

The new Harley-Davidson Band Brake (Patented) can be operated either by a foot lever or by back pedaling on either pedal.

Double Control of Free Wheel

The Free Wheel Control, another exclusive patented feature, can be operated either by a foot lever on the left foot board or by a hand lever. The foot control is an innovation permitting a very rapid engaging or dis-engaging of the Free Wheel Control.

Folding Foot Boards

All models are equipped with Folding Foot Boards in addition to the regular pedals.

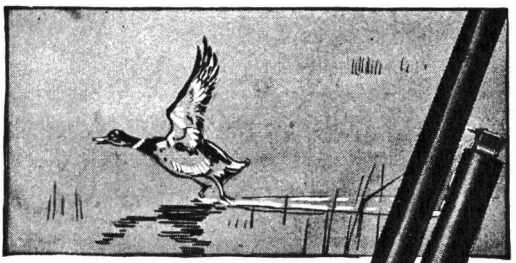
Ful-Floteing Seat

After building tens of thousands of Harley-Davidsons incorporating the Ful-Floteing Seat (an exclusive patented Harley-Davidson feature) no possible improvement of this device has suggested itself, therefore the Ful-Floteing Seat is retained unchanged. Floating, as it does, the weight of the rider between two concealed, compressed springs it assimilates all jars and vibrations due to rough roads. It is equally sensitive to the small rut and the big bump. It is impossible for it to strike bottom and there is no rebound.

We will be glad to send you descriptive literature giving full details of this and many other important improvements together with the name of our dealer on request.

HARLEY-DAVIDSON MOTOR CO., 343 B St., Milwaukee, Wis.

Producers of High Grade Motorcycles for over 12 Years



The Only 16 Gauge Hammerless Repeater—

Now ready—is like our famous 12 gauge gun illustrated herewith, but built smaller, neater, trimmer throughout. A gun of beautiful proportions, superbly balanced.

For snipe, quail, partridge, woodcock, squirrels, rabbits, etc., it has the penetration and power of a 12 gauge without the weight. It handles faster, with greater precision, in all the more difficult forms of bird shooting; it weighs only 6¾ lbs.

Marlin

Grade "A"

12 Ga., $22.60
16 Ga., $24.50

12 and 16 Gauge

Hammerless Repeating Shotguns

They have **Solid Top**—a thick steel wall of protection that also keeps out rain, snow, dirt, leaves, twigs and sand. **Side Ejection** (away from your face and eyes). **Matted Barrel**—a great convenience in quick sighting—costs extra on any other standard grade pump gun. **Press-Button Cartridge Release**—to remove loaded cartridges quickly from magazine. **Double Extractors**—they pull any shell. **Six quick shots. Take-Down Feature**—for convenient carrying and cleaning. **Trigger and Hammer Safety**—a double guard against accidental firing. **Solid Steel Breech**—the receiver absolutely solid steel at rear as well as on top.

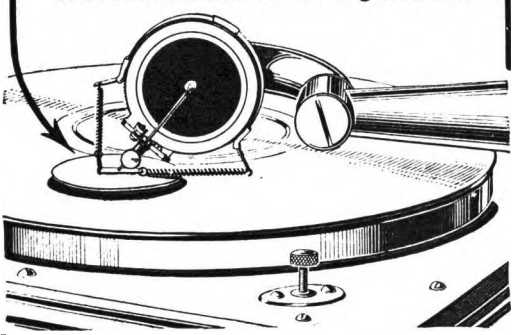
You will like to shoot this handsomest, best designed, most efficient pump gun—it's **the safest breech-loading gun built.**

Send 3c postage for 128 page catalog of all Marlin repeating rifles and shotguns. Do it now!

The Marlin Firearms Co.
9 Willow Street, New Haven, Conn.

"MASTERPHONE"

A Perfect Clarifier for Talking Machines



A Simple Device Instantly Attached to Any Sound Box Without Tools

The "Masterphone"—Clarifies, Articulates and Magnifies—eliminates the mechanical tone and greatly reduces the scratch.

Reproduces all the artist put into the record. Brings out detail never heard before.

A fine needle is used with the "Masterphone" which greatly increases the life of your records. The reproduction is clear and true.

The "Masterphone" may be obtained from your dealer. If he cannot supply you, send us **$1.00** and we will send you one with 50 needles by return mail. State if for Victor or Columbia and type of sound box. Money back if not satisfied.

Notice to Dealers: Write for trade discounts. Sells on demonstration every time.

THE MASTERPHONE CORPORATION
187 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

WHITE VALLEY GEMS LOOK LIKE DIAMONDS

Stand acid and fire diamond test. So hard they easily scratch a file and **will cut glass.** Brilliancy guaranteed 25 years. Mounted in 14k solid gold diamond mountings. **See them before paying.** Will send you any style ring, pin or stud for examination—all charges prepaid. **No money in advance. Money refunded if not satisfactory.** Write today for free catalog.

WHITE VALLEY GEM CO., 708 Wulsin Bldg., Indianapolis

How You Should Exercise

for vitality, endurance, nerve-strength and a perfect physique. **MY FREE BOOK, "PHYSIOLOGICAL EXERCISE,"** throws new light on the question of exercise, building internal strength, nervous energy, vital power, progressive exercise, the question of resistance, pure blood, the germ question and disease, etc. Do you want **ENERGY?** Freedom from colds and illness? Then learn what my vitality building system will do in ten days, with ten minutes per day. Just **ask** for the book. 4c. to cover postage.

THE HENRY VICTOR SYSTEM
14 and 16 4th Ave. Dept. 20 New York

STEEL LINED Scatter Load Shells

YOU'VE got to shoot quick when you are in the brush, and then with a standard shell in a choke bore gun, you usually blow your bird all to pieces.

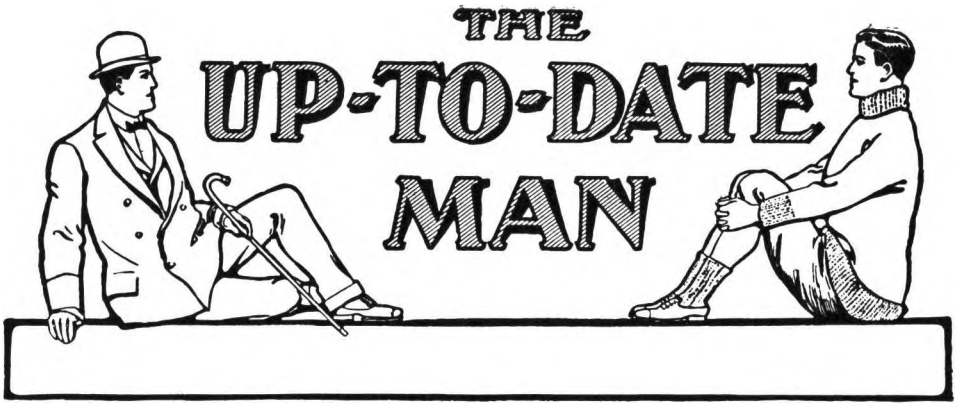
Next time you're out, take along a few Remington-UMC Scatter Loads—Arrow or Nitro Club—for close shooting. They give the same spread at 25 yards as the standard load at 40 yards—and greater penetration. Do not mutilate your bird.

The *steel lining* gives the speed, and the special system of wadding spreads the pattern.

Prove it on a paper target with your good old duck gun. Get Scatter Load Shells at your dealer's.

Remington-UMC—the perfect shooting combination. Look for the Red Ball mark on every box of ammunition you buy.

Remington Arms-Union Metallic Cartridge Co.
299 Broadway New York



The readers of the magazine may write to this department about any problem of dress. Every question will be promptly answered, provided that a stamped, self-addressed envelope is enclosed.

FASHION this winter brings a sheaf of surprises which add a pinch of "pepper-and-salt" to the sameness of men's dress. For example, there are the soft-bosom evening shirts, which are now worn not only with informal, but also with formal, evening dress. The vogue of these shirts, hitherto confined to the Tuxedo, is due to the renewed interest in dancing, especially twirly-whirly dances like the "tango," which necessitate comfortable shirts and bosoms that don't crumple.

In evening handkerchiefs, extravagant simplicity expresses itself by the finest white linen, embroidered with a white monogram. Colored monograms are "shocking form." These handkerchiefs are very large and often broad-hemmed. They are carried in the outside breast pocket or tucked up the left cuff, from which, however, they should never be allowed to dangle.

In order to make afternoon and evening waistcoats curve right and tight to the figure, an elastic strap is now sewed lengthwise on the inside of the garment under the front buttons. This elastic fastens to the top button of the trousers, thus keeping the front of the waistcoat pressed down and serving to accentuate the fashionable waist pinch and outward "spring" of the bottom points.

One of the modish forms in derbies has a tapering crown and a brim less level than that formerly in vogue.

In soft hats, the tilt of fashion is toward turbanlike ribbons, rather than the flat, stiff ones used hitherto. These are wound around the crown to achieve a "carefully careless" air.

Velour Hat With Silk under Brim.

Covert topcoats are again on view. Ushered in last spring, they made no more of a scratch on the surface of fashion than a clawless kitten.

This season, though, they will be worn more, because they are the only innovation of moment in overgarments.

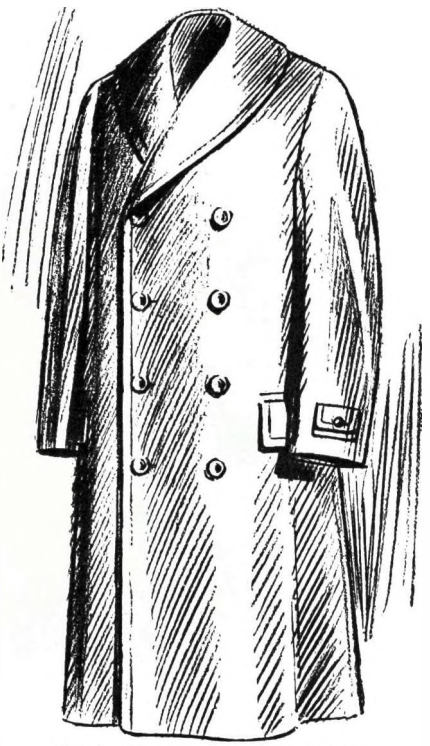
Sack coats of the newest English type are cut with broad, short lapels to conform exactly to the waistcoat opening. Indeed, the drift toward higher, blunter lapels on all jackets is marked.

This winter, trousers will be worn

without bottom "turn-ups," as well as with them. By cutting the front of the trousers bottoms with an upward slant, and abandoning "turn-ups," a closer-fitting, more symmetrical effect is possible.

One sees a sprinkling of link-button lounge jackets, like the link-button Tuxedo jacket. This single link button is meant to stress the fall-as-may, roll-and-ripple look of the jacket front.

In the English boots, the foot is given a longish look by cutting the vamp high



Shawl-Collar, "Throw-On" Overcoat.

over the instep. The "last" is flat-tread, with a very thin, tapering toe and a squarish tip, rather than pointed or oval. This is the "smartest" shape, procurable yet only of two or three advanced bootmakers.

Men used to dress with finical precision, until fashion turned a somersault, and the "carefully careless" or "carelessly careful" period—whichever you choose to call it—dawned in dress. To-day, curves have replaced corners, and soft, give-and-take fabrics have supplanted the hard, smooth-finished sort. To-day, stiffness and angularity are frowned upon.

Instead of the "just-stepped-out-of-a-bandbox" air in morning and business clothes, one goes in for the "just-ran-up-from-the-country" air expressed by the softest of fabrics, tailored in the softest way, and set off with hats, collars, cravats, shirts, and boots chosen to emphasize the free-and-easy "loungeiness" of present-day style.

Americans and Englishman dress very much alike. Indeed, many of our extreme fashions cross from London, for there is no blinking the fact that, in men's dress, the capital of England is the capital of the world, just as Paris is the way blazer in "ultra" styles for women. The line of demarcation between American fashions and English is that we hold fast to fit, while they hold out for drape.

English clothes are narrower and "mussier" than American clothes. The best-dressed American doesn't slavishly adopt English modes—he adapts, suiting them to his physique and personality. While the fashions for winter follow English standards in cut, this tendency is only general. The American, unlike the Englishman, is not content to be a type, but strives to be a unit, and to achieve intense individuality in his manner of dress, rather than be a colorless cipher.

The fashionable winter fabrics for sack suits are soft-finished, bright-hued worsteds, flannels, cheviots, and the like, in blues, grays, slates, greens, black-and-whites, browns, and "mixes" of these colorings. Green is the novelty color of the season, but it is too daring to commend itself to the generality of men. Brown still clings, but having been done to death by excessive popularity, it has dropped behind. Blue and gray are familiar friends, from the vogue of which the lapse of seasons does not seem to detract. Black-and-white—that is, white stripes upon a black ground—is a color motif that survives every whim and winding of fashion, and never "goes out."

Among patterns, stripes are foremost, as usual, but there is a well-defined leaning toward small plaids and checks in accord with the present indulgence in gayer effects—more "snap," as the saying runs. "Hair-line" and "chalk-line" stripes are also prominent.

BEAUNASH.

REAL BARGAINS IN HANDSOME FURS!

Nothing more acceptable for a Christmas Gift than beautiful Furs like these. Read the detailed descriptions below.

No. 29R30
THIS STYLISH
FUR SET
Only
$4.75
Postage or Express-age Paid

We pay all mail or express charges to your town no matter where you live

REMEMBER

We guarantee to please you or refund your money. Any article purchased from us which is not satisfactory may be returned at our expense, and the money will be promptly refunded without question or argument. Don't forget that we pay all mail or express charges. This means a big saving on your Christmas shopping. Send for our free illustrated Catalogue today. It will help you in your Christmas shopping.

No. 29R25
THIS HANDSOME
Fox Fur Set
Only
$17.25
We pay all mail or express charges

29R30—**A Fur Set of reliable quality made of Japanese Wolf.** This is a very durable fur with extra long shaggy hair which will give ample protection in the very coldest weather; although the price is moderate the fur is stylish in appearance and will give splendid wear. The set consists of a Russian Shawl Scarf which is 75 inches long measuring from the tip of the brush tails which finish each end. At its widest part in the back the scarf measures 8 inches but the extreme long hair gives it an appearance of being much wider. Lined with guaranteed satin. The pillow Muff is mounted on a feather bed and measures 15 by 13 inches. It is lined with satin and has silk wrist cord. We can supply this set in the becoming and popular **grayish blue** wolf, also in a rich shade of **dark brown** and in a deep glossy **black.** Sold only in sets. Be sure to mention color desired. Special Price for Set of Shawl and Muff. **Mail or express charges paid by us** ---------- **$4.75**

29R23—**Warm, Comfortable Imperial Russian Shawl Collar,** made of North American Fox. Long, thick, lustrous hair; very beautiful in appearance, pelt is very durable and the fur does not rub off. Fur piece is 78 inches, measuring from tip of full brush tail which finishes each end. It is extra wide, measuring in the back 8 inches. In addition to the brush tails each end is finished with two paws. The shawl is lined with best quality satin. We can supply this number in a beautiful medium brown Isabella Fox; also in the fashionable natural red Fox. Please state which variety you wish when ordering. **Special price** **$9.95**

29R24—**Medium Sized Pillow Muff** of selected North American Fox to match the Russian Shawl Collar described above. Muff is made over a soft warm feather bed and is lined with best quality satin. It measures 15 by 12 inches. Comes in natural red Fox or beautiful brown shaded Isabella Fox **$7.75**

29R25—**Special Price for North American Fox Fur Set,** consisting of Russian Shawl and Pillow Muff described above ---------- **$17.25**

Special Note: We can also supply this set in rich lustrous **BLACK Fox** as follows:

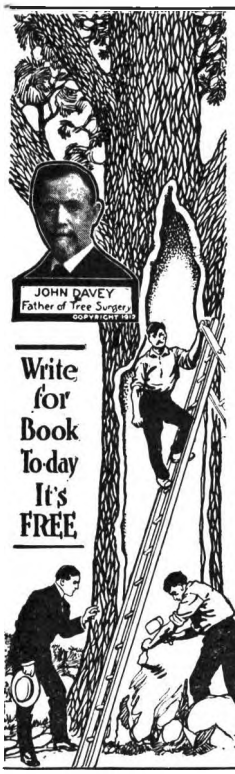
29R26. Black Fox Scarf, **$11.95.** **29R27.** Black Fox Muff, **$8.95**
29R28. Special Price for Black Fox Set, **$20.45**

WE PAY ALL MAIL OR EXPRESS CHARGES

BELLAS HESS & CO
WASHINGTON, MORTON & BARROW STS.
NEW YORK CITY, N.Y.

WE GUARANTEE TO SATISFY YOU OR REFUND YOUR MONEY

It took THE POPULAR MAGAZINE over two years to roll up a circulation of 400,000, but it has gotten there, and the publishers claim that it is now making rapid strides toward the 500,000 mile-post. All of which may be due to the fact that the quality of the fiction that appears therein is never permitted to deteriorate.—*Terre Haute Tribune.*



Young Man!
Your Greatest Opportunity

To the man who wants to improve his condition in life—to increase his earning capacity—to get away from the monotony, grind, and low wages of ordinary occupations—to elevate his social standing, the new profession of Tree Surgery, which is not overcrowded, offers the young man of today his greatest opportunity. The Extension Course given by The Davey Institute of Tree Surgery, will fit you to practice this profitable profession.

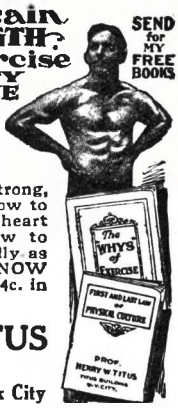
Learn TREE SURGERY By Mail

You can become proficient in this work without interfering with your present occupation. An hour or so a day will give you a training that will make your future bright and prosperous.

The work of a Tree Surgeon is healthful, fascinating and remunerative. The call for men in this profession is far greater than the supply, and the demand is growing. There are positions open at good salary and opportunities everywhere to establish a paying business of your own—Why work for others at small pay when you can be your own boss? Write today for our book **"Adventures In Success."** Read what others have done, and learn how easily and quickly you can improve your condition in life.

THE DAVEY INSTITUTE OF TREE SURGERY
303 Oak Street Kent, Ohio

How To Regain And Retain HEALTH and STRENGTH?
My System of Home Exercise will develop for you VITALITY VIGOR and PERFECT PHYSIQUE



My FREE BOOKS, the "WHYS OF EXERCISE" and "THE FIRST AND LAST LAW OF PHYSICAL CULTURE," tell you, if you are weak or underdeveloped, how to grow strong; if strong, how to grow stronger. It explains how to develop lungs and muscle, the strong heart and vigorous digestion—in short, how to improve health and strength internally as well as externally. Send TO-DAY—NOW—for these FREE BOOKS. Enclose 4c. in stamps to cover postage.

Prof. HENRY W. TITUS
Department 325,
56 and 58 Cooper Square, New York City

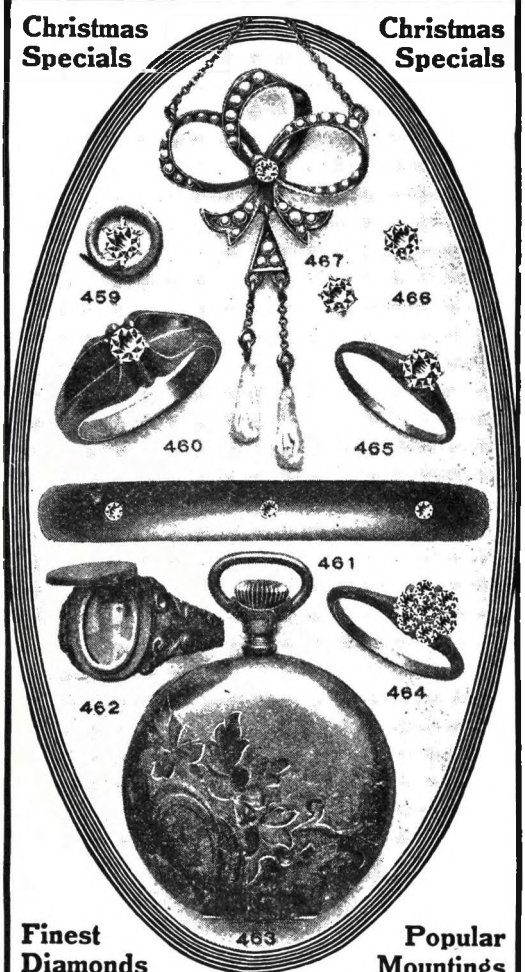
New Typewriter $18 in U. S. A.

A remarkable typewriter, carried in grip or overcoat pocket. Standard keyboard. Does all that higher-priced machines do. Over 31,000 in use.

Has less than 250 parts against 1700 to 3700 in others—that is the secret of our $18 price. All important improvements, visible writing, indestructible type, reversible ribbon, etc. Handiest typewriter built. Easy to operate. Built in famous Elliott-Fisher Billing Machine factory, sold on money-back-unless-satisfied guaranty. Guaranteed one year. Weight 4½ lbs. You can carry for home use, business, trips, or anywhere. Send for catalog and AGENTS' PROPOSITION

Y.M. Bennett Typewriter Co., 366 Broadway, New York

DIAMONDS ON CREDIT



These handsome selections are our **Great Leaders**, meeting the popular demand in Style, Quality, Price and Easy Terms of Payment. No need to look further for suitable Christmas Presents. There is something appropriate for every one. We have cut prices to the lowest notch—in some cases almost in half. We are heavy buyers and direct importers, and get lowest rock-bottom prices in all foreign Diamond centers. You get all the benefit.

459—Diamond Stud, 14k Solid Gold Mounting . . . **$50**
460—Diamond Ring, 14k Solid Gold Tooth Mounting . . **75**
461—Bracelet, Incrusted with 3 fine Diamonds. Solid Gold, Roman finish, secret catch and joint **30**
462—Signet Ring, Locket Top, Rose Gold **9**
463—Ladies' Watch, O Size, Gold Filled Case, Warranted 20 Years, Fine Elgin or Waltham Movement . **15**
464—Cluster Ring, 7 fine Diamonds set in Platinum. Looks like a single stone 1½ carat, 14k Solid Gold . . **70**
465—Tiffany Diamond Ring, 14k Solid Gold . . . **75**
466—Solitaire Diamond Ear Screws, 14k Solid Gold . . . **75**
467—Bow-Knot La Valliere, Solid Gold, Pearl Incrusted, 2 fine Pearl Drops, 1 fine Diamond . . . **28**

Credit Terms: **One-Fifth Down, Balance in Eight Equal Monthly Amounts.**

Write for Christmas Catalog. Over 2,000 beautiful illustrations of Diamonds, Watches, Solid Gold Jewelry, Silverware and Novelties for Christmas presents. Select anything desired, have it sent to your home or express office, all charges prepaid. If entirely satisfactory, send us one-fifth of the purchase price and keep it, balance in eight equal monthly amounts.

LOFTIS BROS. & CO., Diamond Cutters
Dept. G845 100 to 108 N. State St., CHICAGO, ILL.
Branch Stores: Pittsburgh, Pa., and St. Louis, Mo.

HAIR AND SKIN BEAUTY

PRESERVED BY CUTICURA SOAP

Assisted by occasional use of Cuticura Ointment. No others do so much for the skin, scalp, hair and hands.

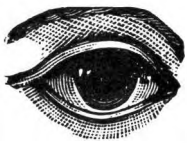
Cuticura Soap and Cuticura Ointment are sold throughout the world. Send post-card to nearest depot for free sample of each with 32-page book: Newbery, 27, Charterhouse Sq., London; R. Towns & Co., Sydney, N. S. W.; Lennon, Ltd., Cape Town; Muller, Maclean & Co., Calcutta and Bombay; Potter Drug & Chem Corp., Boston, U. S. A.

☞Men who shave and shampoo with Cuticura Soap will find it best for skin and scalp.

EYEGLASSES NOT NECESSARY

Eyesight Can Be Strengthened, and Most Forms of Diseased Eyes Successfully Treated Without Cutting or Drugging.

That the eyes can be strengthened so that eyeglasses can be dispensed with in many cases has been proven beyond a doubt by the testimony of hundreds of people who publicly claim that their eyesight has been restored by that wonderful little instrument called "Actina." "Actina" also relieves Sore and Granulated Lids, Iritis, Cataracts, etc., without cutting or drugging. Over one hundred thousand "Actinas" have been sold; therefore the Actina treatment is not an experiment, but is reliable. The following letters are but samples of hundreds we receive:—



Mr. David Suttle, Glen Ellyn, Ill., writes: "I sent for your 'Actina,' and when it came I told my wife I would throw my glasses away and give the 'Actina' a fair show. I did so, following directions, and soon felt my eyes were getting in normal condition again and now I can say my eyesight is as good as ever, and my headaches practically vanished."

Mr. Emery E. Deitrick, 7124 Idlewild Street, E. E., Pittsburg, Pa., writes: "My eyes were very weak, and my vision was so bad that I could recognize people only at short distances. Since using 'Actina' I have discarded my glasses, my headaches are gone, and my vision, I believe, is as good as ever it was."

Mr. J. H. Frankenfield, 522 E. 20th Street, Cheyenne, Wyo., writes: "Regarding what the 'Actina' has done for me, I am proud to say that I am not wearing my glasses at all. As for my catarrh, it is almost gone and I have been troubled with it for more than sixteen years.

"A great number of my railroad friends are buying 'Actinas,' as you know by the orders you have received."

"Actina" can be used with perfect safety by every member of the family for any affliction of the eye, ear, throat or head. A Free trial of the "Actina" is given in every case.

Send for our FREE TRIAL offer and valuable FREE BOOK. Address Actina Appliance Co., Dept. 96N, 811 Walnut St., Kansas City, Mo.

Don't Wear a Truss!

C. E. BROOKS, the Discoverer

Brooks' Appliance, the modern scientific invention, the wonderful new discovery that cures rupture will be sent on trial. No obnoxious springs or pads. Has automatic Air Cushions. **Binds and draws the broken parts together as you would a broken limb.** No salves. No lies. Durable, cheap. Pat. Sept. 10, '01. **Sent on trial to prove it.** Catalogue and measure blanks mailed free. Send name and address today. **C. E. BROOKS, 1759 Brooks Bldg., Marshall, Mich.**

FOR EXHAUSTED OR DEBILITATED

NERVE FORCE

Every reader of this magazine who is under a nervous strain lacks nerve force, power and energy, and particularly those who are subject to weakness and excessive drains on the nervous system, should not fail to send to **Winchester & Co.,** the Pioneer Manufacturers of Hypophosphite preparations (Est. 55 years), 1020 Beekman Building, New York, for their free booklet on Nervousness.

"I know of no remedy in whole Materia Medica equal to your Specific Pill in Nervous Debility."—Adolph Behre, M. D., Professor of Organic Chemistry, N. Y.

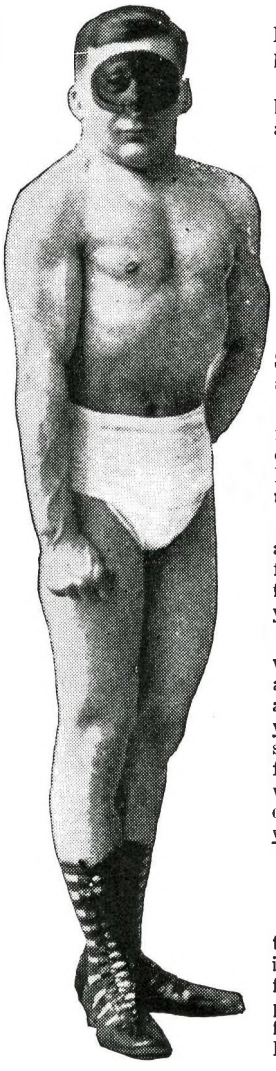
"For Neurasthenia the Hypophosphites are our mainstays."—Dr. J. G. Roberts, Philadelphia, Pa.

"I do not think that there is a more honest remedy for Nervous Debility than your Specific Pills."—B. R. Princeton, Ill.

No C. O. D. or Treatment Scheme. Price $1.00 per box or bottle. **Sent prepaid in the U. S.**

THIN FOR YEARS

"GAINS 22 POUNDS IN 23 DAYS"



"I was all run down to the very bottom," writes F. Gagnon. "I had to quit work I was so weak. Now, thanks to Sargol I look like a new man. I gained 22 pounds in 23 days."

"Sargol has put just 10 pounds on me in 14 days," states W. D. Roberts. "It has made me sleep well, enjoy what I ate and enabled me to work with interest and pleasure."

"I weighed 132 pounds when I commenced taking Sargol. After taking 20 days I weighed 144 pounds. Sargol is the most wonderful preparation for flesh building I have ever seen," declares D. Martin, and J. Meier adds: "For the past twenty years I have taken medicine every day for indigestion and got thinner every year. I took Sargol for forty days and feel better than I have felt in twenty years. My weight has increased from 150 to 170 pounds."

When hundreds of men and women—and there are hundreds, with more coming every day—living in every nook and corner of this broad land voluntarily testify to weight increases ranging all the way from 10 to 35 pounds, given them by Sargol, you must admit, Mr. and Mrs. and Miss Thin Reader, that there must be something in this Sargol method of flesh building after all.

Hadn't you better look into it, just as thousands of others have done? Many thin folks say: "I'd give most anything to put on a little extra weight," but when someone suggests a way they exclaim, "Not a chance. Nothing will make me plump. I'm built to stay thin." Until you have tried Sargol, you do not and cannot know that this is true.

Sargol has put pounds of healthy "stay there" flesh on hundreds who doubted and in spite of their doubts. You don't have to believe in Sargol to grow plump from its use. You just take it and watch weight pile up, hollows vanish and your figure round out to pleasing and normal proportions. You weigh yourself when you begin and again when you finish and you let the scales tell the story.

Sargol is absolutely harmless. It is a tiny concentrated tablet. You take one with every meal. It mixes with the food you eat for the purpose of separating all of its flesh producing ingredients. It prepares these fat making elements in an easily assimilated form, which the blood can readily absorb and carry all over your body. Plump, well-developed persons don't need Sargol to produce this result. Their assimilative machinery performs its functions without aid. But thin folks assimilative organs do not. This fatty portion of their food now goes to waste through their bodies like unburned coal through an open grate. A few days test of Sargol in your case will surely prove whether or not this is true of you. Isn't it worth trying?

50c BOX FREE

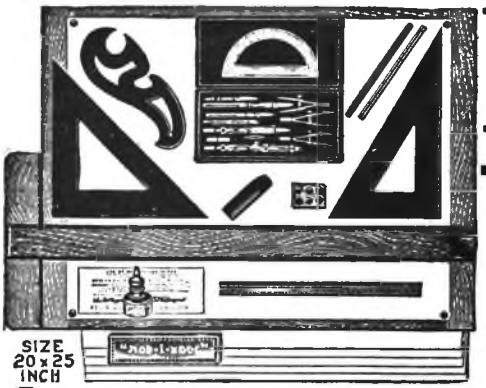
To enable any thin reader, ten pounds or more underweight, to easily make this test, we will give a 50c. box of Sargol absolutely free. Either Sargol will increase your weight or it won't, and the only way to know is to try it. Send for this Free Test Package to-day, enclosing 10c. in silver or stamps to help pay postage, packing, etc., and a full size 50c. package will be sent by return mail free of charge. Mail this coupon with your letter to the Sargol Co., 401 M Herald Bldg., Binghamton, N. Y.

If you want a beautiful and well rounded figure of symmetrical proportions, if you want to gain some solid pounds of healthy "stay there" flesh, if you want to increase your weight to normal—weigh what you should weigh—accept this Free 50c. Package to-day.

COME, EAT WITH US AT OUR EXPENSE

This coupon entitles any person to one 50c. package of Sargol, the concentrated Flesh Builder (provided you have never tried it), and that 10c. is enclosed to cover postage, packing, etc. Read our advertisement printed above, and then put 10c. in silver in letter to-day, with coupon and the full 50c. package will be sent to you by return post. Address: The Sargol Company, 401 M Herald Bldg., Binghamton, N. Y. Write your name and address plainly, and,

PIN THIS COUPON TO YOUR LETTER.



FREE

This $15 Draftsman's Outfit

But you must write at once. This offer is limited. I make this most exceptional great offer only to a limited number of selected students.—Just think of it! A complete, regular Draftsman's $15 Working Outfit with high grade Imported German Silver Set of **INSTRUMENTS—ALL FREE**

Drafting Work As Soon As You Enroll—

Earn While Learning

Yes, that's exactly what I mean. As soon as you become my student you can begin earning a handsome income while learning at home. Send the free coupon to me today and I will tell you just exactly how you can begin. I mean just what I say. This is a great extra special offer I am making. You should write at once. Absolutely no obligations of any kind in sending the coupon. But you must write at once. I cannot make this offer broadcast to everyone. So I will take the names in the order that they are received. Get yours in early.

Be a Draftsman!

Draw $125 to $175 per month at once

There is an urgent demand always for skilled draftsmen. Our companies are issuing calls every day for men to fill positions paying from $125.00 to $175.00 per month. Many positions paying $75 to $100 per week always open. Work is light, pleasant and profitable. Unlimited opportunities for expert draftsmen and designers. Mail coupon for valuable book, "Successful Drafting." It explains how **you** can become a skilled draftsman in a short time. It's free—Just think:

I Guarantee

To instruct you until competent and placed in a position at a regular salary, paying from $125.00 to $175.00 per month and furnish you free $15 Working Outfit at once.

Chief Draftsman

Will instruct you personally

A most wonderful opportunity for a limited and selected number of ambitious men! For over twenty years I have been doing the highest paying expert drafting work. I am **Chief Draftsman** of a large and well known company. Long ago I saw the urgent demand for practical, trained draftsmen and I organized my practical method for ambitious men whom I trained personally. Each month the demand for practical, trained draftsmen is growing—higher salaries are being paid right along. Never before have we felt the need as we do today for men who **really know** practical drafting—the way I am training my students. At this time I can accommodate a few more men (from the ages of 16 to 40) in my spare time. If you write me **at once** I will send you my book, "Successful Drafting," with full particulars—**all free.** But you must write to me—or send coupon now.

FREE Outfit Coupon

Chief Draftsman:
ENGINEER'S EQUIPMENT CO.
Div. 1149 CHICAGO, ILL.

Without any obligation on me, please mail your book "Successful Draftsmanship" and full particulars of your liberal "Personal Instruction" offer to a few students. It is understood that I am obligated in no way whatever.

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

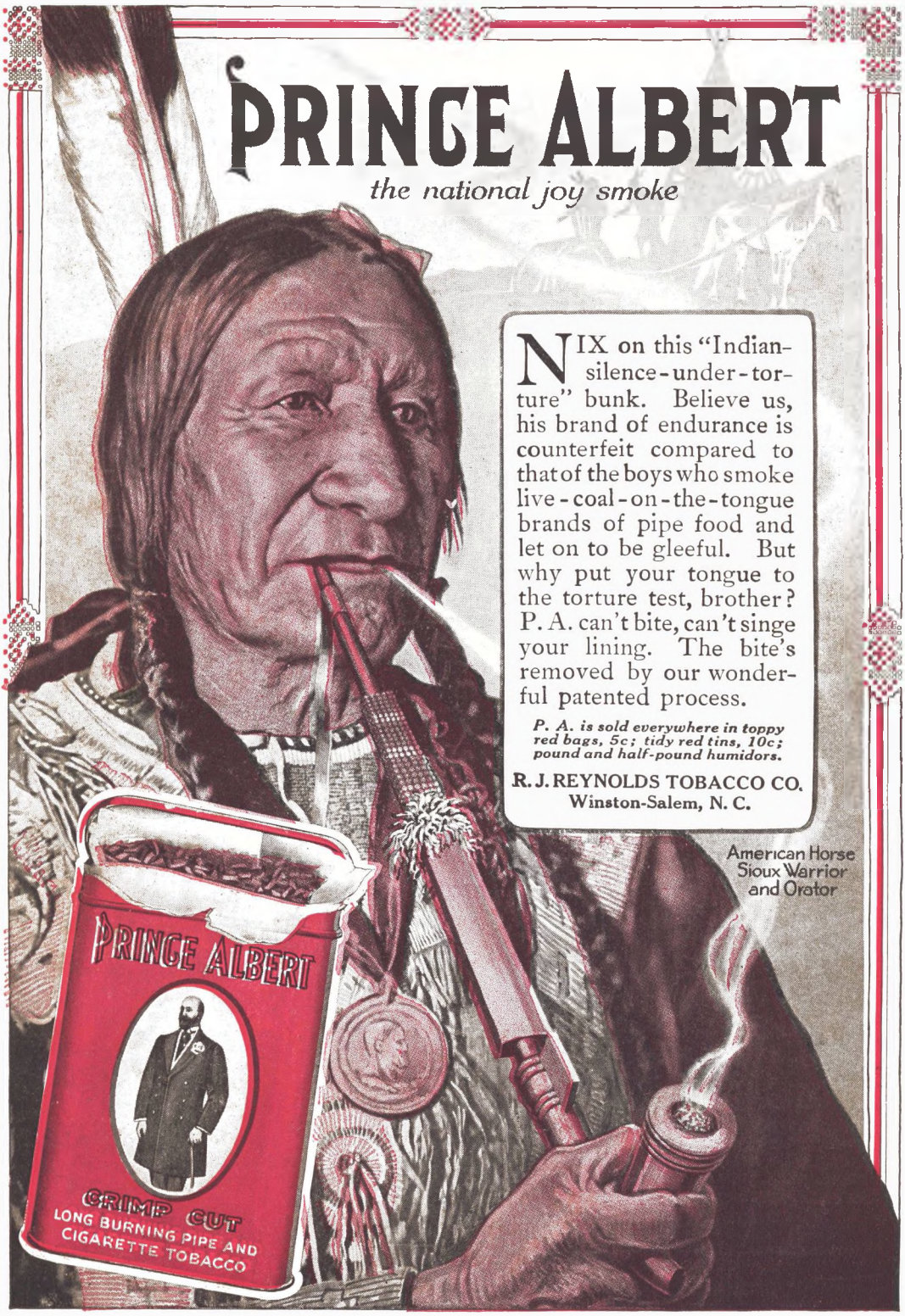
.....

Mail Free Coupon Now

Mail this Free Coupon at once and I will send you my book "Successful Draftsmanship" and full particulars—all FREE.

I will send my book if you write at once, absolutely free—also particulars about my offer to a few ambitious men who want to make from $2,500 to $5,000 a year. No obligations whatever on you in sending the coupon.

Address CHIEF DRAFTSMAN
Div. 1149, Engineer's Equipment Co. (Inc.) CHICAGO, ILL.


PRINCE ALBERT
the national joy smoke
NIX on this "Indian-silence-under-torture" bunk. Believe us, his brand of endurance is counterfeit compared to that of the boys who smoke live-coal-on-the-tongue brands of pipe food and let on to be gleeful. But why put your tongue to the torture test, brother? P. A. can't bite, can't singe your lining. The bite's removed by our wonderful patented process.
P. A. is sold everywhere in toppy red bags, 5c; tidy red tins, 10c; pound and half-pound humidors.
R. J. REYNOLDS TOBACCO CO.
Winston-Salem, N. C.
American Horse
Sioux Warrior
and Orator
PRINCE ALBERT
CRIMP CUT
LONG BURNING PIPE AND
CIGARETTE TOBACCO