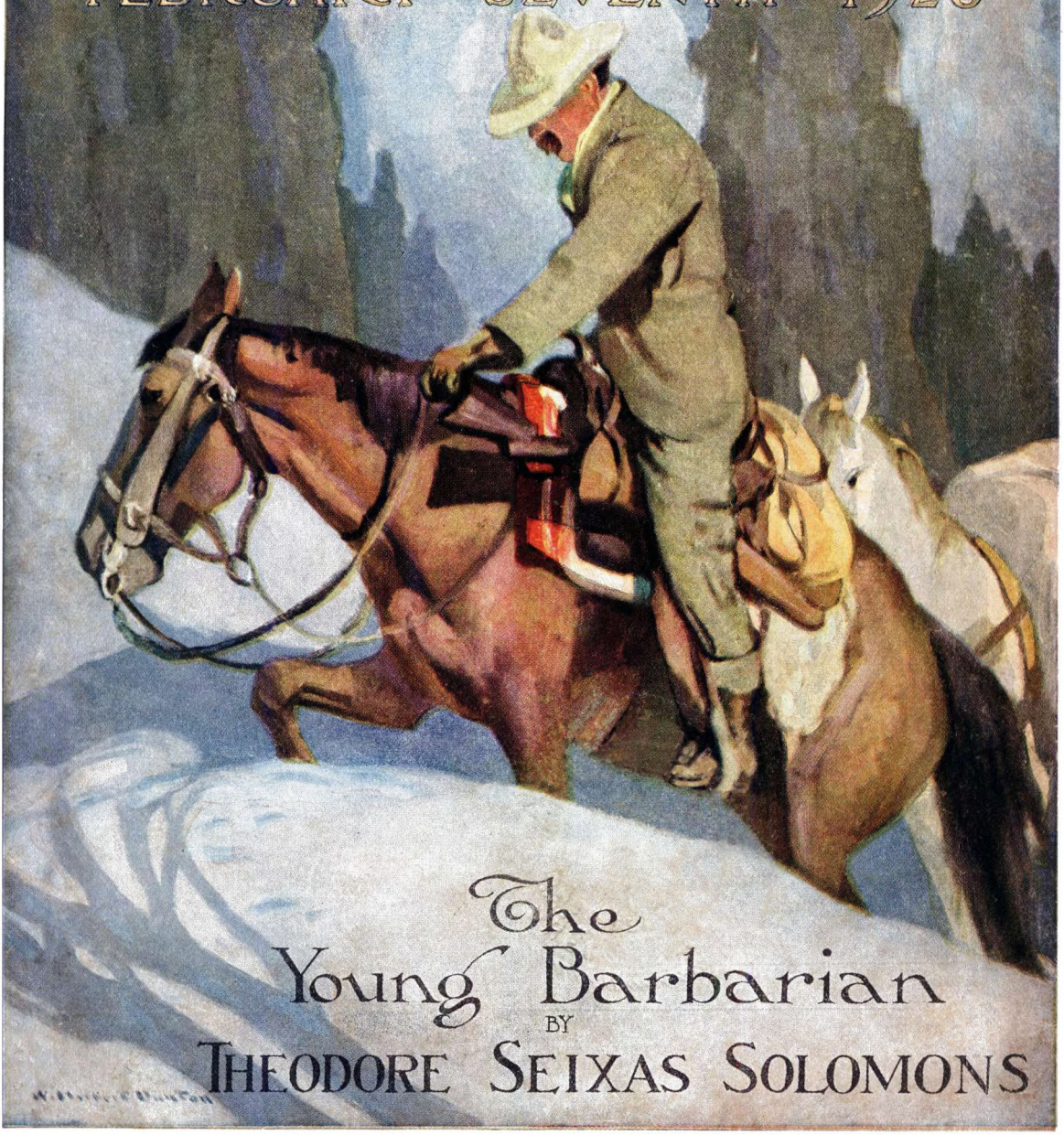
ONCE READ – ALWAYS READ

TWICE-A-MONTH 20 CENTS

The Popular Magazine

VOL. 55
NO. 4

FEBRUARY SEVENTH 1920



The Young Barbarian

BY

THEODORE SEIXAS SOLOMONS

FREE

$100 SCHOLARSHIPS

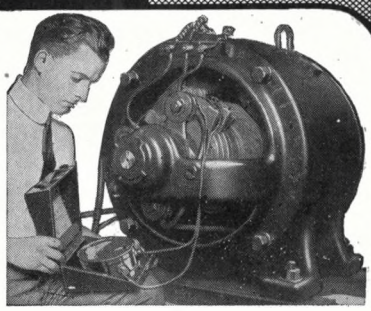
MATERIAL APPARATUS TOOLS

EMPLOYMENT SERVICE

CASH BOND GUARANTEE

SUPPLEMENTARY COURSE WORTH $60

Do You Want Big Money? and Quick Success?



Earned in clean, interesting work? Then get into this wonderful profession of Electricity now—take advantage—without another day's delay—of the present tremendous shortage of trained men, and fit yourself to earn

$46 to $150 a Week
IN ELECTRICITY

You Can Do It with my help. I will teach you "boiled down," *practical,* modern Electrical practice by my wonderfully simplified, fascinatingly interesting *home study course.* I will teach you by my unique method—by my delightful system of diagrams, text and *pictures*—right in the privacy of your own home. In a few short weeks you can be fitted, by pleasant *spare time* study to go out after the real money.

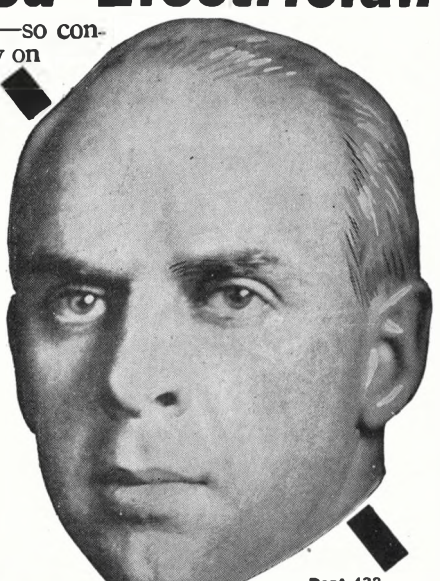
Be a Certificated Electrician

So sure am I you will make good with me—so confident am I of my ability to put you surely on the road to a fine electrical position—that

I Guarantee Your Success

in the study of this course with a *cash bond.* Get onto my system—it's a world beater. My students enjoy privileges that are *exclusive.* See a few of them "nailed up" above. Think of it! *Free* tools, materials, apparatus, scholarships, supplementary course, employment service. And that's not everything. Learn about all I will do for you in my big, *free* book. Get the sample lesson sheets and see how simple and interesting this course is. Get all particulars with facsimile of your certificate—and do it *now.* Send Coupon or a postal *today.*

(As Chief Eng. of the Chicago Engineering Works, the greatest shops of their kind in America, I promise to GIVE YOU advantages unobtainable elsewhere.)



TEAR OFF—And Learn Something to Your Advantage

L. L. COOKE, Chief Eng. CHICAGO ENGINEERING WORKS, Dept. 432, 41 East Illinois St., CHICAGO

Sir: Send me at once, free of charge or obligation, fully sealed, prepaid and *free,* sample lesson sheets, your big book, and full particulars of your *Home Study* Course in Practical Electricity.

Name.....

Address.....

L. L. COOKE, Chief. Eng.

Dept. 432
41 East Illinois Street,
CHICAGO

CHICAGO ENGINEERING WORKS

To Our Readers: Owing to labor difficulties, it will be necessary for a while to issue the POPULAR more frequently than semimonthly, in order to make up for lost time and miss no numbers. Watch the news stands

Vol. LV. No. 4 February 7, 1920

CONTENTS

Twice-a-month Publication issued by Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York. ORMOND G. SMITH, President; GEORGE C. SMITH, Secretary and Treasurer. Copyright, 1920, by Street & Smith Corporation, New York. Copyright, 1920, by Street & Smith Corporation, Great Britain. *All Rights Reserved.* Publishers everywhere are cautioned against using any of the contents of this Magazine either wholly or in part. Entered as Second-class Matter, September 20, 1903, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, $4.52. Foreign, $5.44.

WARNING—Do not subscribe through agents unknown to you. Complaints are only made by persons who have been thus victimized. IMPORTANT—Authors, agents and publishers are requested to note that this firm does not hold itself responsible for loss of unsolicited manuscripts while at this office or in transit; and that it cannot undertake to hold uncalled for manuscripts for a longer period than six months. If the return of manuscripts is expected, postage should be inclosed.

YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION $4.00 SINGLE COPIES 20 Cents

Watch the news stands for the next POPULAR

Famous Violet Ray Treatment
for Health, Vitality and Beauty
Now Possible in Your Own Home

IT was in the discovery of Violet Rays that the ideal way was found of applying electricity to the human body and obtaining all its wonderful, beneficial effects without any of the dangers that might attend its use in its more violent forms.

It is just like the refreshing, invigorating effects of a shower bath upon the system as compared to the shock of a solid torrent of water.

The Violet Ray, as used in the treatment of the body, sends a spray of mild, tiny currents through every part and organ, flowing through each infinitesimal cell, massaging it, invigorating it, and vitalizing it. That is why after a Violet Ray treatment one is left with such a delightful feeling of health and buoyant energy. You have only the suggestion of this feeling in the effects of an ordinary massage. You know how restful and refreshing it is—how it brings a glow of health to your skin.

Now imagine this massage applied not only to the surface of the body, but to every part, every organ, every single cell, internal as well as external. No wonder that a Violet Ray treatment makes one feel "completely made over" and has such a delightful tonic effect upon the system. It acts upon the brain cells just as upon the other cells of the body, and that is why it is so often used by business men to overcome brain fag and mental sluggishness.

This illustration shows the wonderful new machine which enables anyone to enjoy the remarkable Violet Ray treatment at home.

This man is using the Violet Ray machine for a local trouble—in this case rheumatism. Clothing offers no obstruction to the passage of the Violet Ray.

Wonderful New Machine Now Brings Violet Ray Treatment to Your Home

Violet Ray machines are now a part of the equipment of hospitals and sanitariums in the treatment of specific diseases and have been adopted by famous beauty specialists because of their effectiveness in eliminating skin diseases and blemishes such as eczema, blackheads, pimples, etc., bringing the glow of healthful color to the complexion.

It is almost impossible to list all the various disorders for which Violet Rays are used. For example, they remove the *cause* of headaches, catarrh, nervousness and insomnia. The same principle applies to the treatment of neuritis, rheumatism, lumbago, indigestion and neuralgia.

Hitherto, however, the costly apparatus necessary for giving Violet Ray treatments has limited them only to the well to-do who could afford the time and money to go to an establishment equipped with the Violet Ray machine.

But now scientists have perfected a new Violet Ray machine, operating on the same principle, but smaller in size, more convenient to use and infinitely less expensive in cost. This little machine is adapted to home use and requires no special electrical equipment. The wire which supplies the current simply fits into any electric light sockets and the machine is ready for use. Where no current is available, special equipment is furnished at small extra cost.

Now, anyone can enjoy all the benefits of the famous Violet Ray treatment. Those who are suffering from some particular ailment will appreciate the wonderful help this handy new instrument brings to them. And others will be delighted to avail themselves of its wonderful tonic effects in creating health and strength, vitalizing the nerves, energizing the cells of the brain and body.

Already users of the machine have written enthusiastic letters to the manufacturers, telling of the results obtained through it—how it enables them to sleep better, how it has soothed their nervous troubles—how it has cleared and beautified the complexion. And even those who thought they were well before say that Violet Rays have brought them an entirely new feeling of health, strength and energy.

Interesting Book Sent Free

It is impossible to tell in this small space all about the Violet Ray—what it is and how it acts and all the disorders and diseases it is used to treat successfully. But an interesting book has been prepared, fully illustrated, which describes in full the Violet Ray treatment and explains the New Violet Ray machine for home use. It tells just how to use the machine to get the same results as are obtained by physicians, druggless healers, sanitariums and beauty specialists. A copy of this book will be sent free upon receipt of your request on a postcard or the coupon below.

As the special Ten Day Trial Offer is made for a limited time only in order to introduce the remarkable machine and to enable you to see for yourself just what it is and how it operates, you are urged to send for particulars at once. Just write your request on a postcard or fill in coupon and send it to the manufacturers. There is absolutely no cost or obligation in doing this.

VI-REX ELECTRIC CO., Dept. 72, 326 Madison St., Chicago, Ill.

VI-REX ELECTRIC CO., Dept. 72, 326 West Madison St., Chicago, Ill.

Please send me your free book and particulars of your 10 days free trial offer, without any cost or obligation on my part.

Name .....

Address .....

THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. LV. FEBRUARY 7, 1920. No. 4.

The Young Barbarian

By Theodore Seixas Solomons

Author of "Garments of Failure," Etc.

It is with more than the usual pleasure that we give you this novel, because it is an original conception delightfully carried out, and at the same time presenting the favorite elements of a POPULAR story. The author brings together two antithetical types and works out their destiny along parallel lines in spite of all social barriers and differences. Eric, the woodland hero, is a young fellow after our own heart, while Clara, the society heroine, is a girl after our hearts in quite another sense. Let the author tell you the reason.

(*A Complete Novel*)

CHAPTER I.

AN UNFINISHED LETTER.

ERIC drew on wool-lined buckskin gloves. "How do you feel about yourself, father?" he asked.

A gray-haired man with scared-looking blue eyes shifted uneasily on his bed, while Eric watched him anxiously. Then he replied as they had always replied to each other. It was very hard to do it now, but he did not flinch

"I think I am going to die," said Elliott Straive.

The son's long lashes flickered for a moment over the gray eyes. That was all.

"Very likely it will be slow—days or weeks. It would be foolish to lose your fall meat. By all means, go."

Eric bit his lip a moment. Then, lifting his head, he glanced admiringly at the slight figure on the bed, strode swiftly to his father's side, and found and shook his hand.

"Well, good-by, father," he said cheerily, snatched up his rifle, and left the room. On the shore of the lake a stocky old Indian waited in a canoe.

The clearing, covered with a light snow fall, lay bright under a late October sun newly risen over the bristling crests of the encompassing woods. Yesterday they were ensilvered by this early storm, but a wind had shaken them darkly green again; and the water of the narrow, fiordlike lake, curving away to its far-distant outlet, was sparkling gray. Moose had gone by before dawn, their spraddled tracks making toward the clearing and down the lake shore.

At the water's edge were some food and camp gear. This Eric threw to the Indian, sprang into the boat, and the two were off—after a furtive glance at the big stone-and-log house, which was the only home Eric Straive could remember.

His thoughts were of his father as he plied his paddle, and they were thougths of death. Not because his father himself believed his end near, for Eric knew from his reading that only when the dying see the true face of death is their prescience sure. But he had learned from their life of solitude, seeing almost none of their own kind, to rely upon his instincts, and these told him a great change impended. And against this imminence, charged with the vague contingencies of the unknown, he strove sturdily to fend his spirit. For the law of his life, the only law his father—supreme lawmaker of

his outer life—had given him, was to face with smiling courage whatever *was!*

Down the lake there were two portages to the larger stream that lay to the east, the nearer one well worn by the Straives, and John, their Indian retainer, the farther one that of the moose and deer, which they had never pursued except when hunting. Strangely enough, the moose had taken the man-made route.

"Feeling pretty fit this morning, John Skimperimish?"

The old Indian grunted and smiled out of his great black beads of eyes. Binding the "outfit" securely in place, they lifted the canoe from the water, inverted it and hoisted it upon their bended backs.

Three days later they returned with the canoe, set it on the bank, and went back to the river four times for moose quarters. Ice having formed on the still water, they plied their knives, skinned bark from a large birch, and bound it, four-ply, to the cutwater of their canoe to protect its bows from the ice. Then they loaded the craft with their meat, and poled homeward in the waning, frosty light, their sturdy strokes forcing the boat to sheer through the brittle mantle of the lake.

Leaving John to unload the canoe, Eric hurried into the house to his father's room. It was dark and as cold as out of doors. Yet no colder than was Elliott Straive, whose head the Indian woman had covered that morning when she put out the fire and opened the windows so that the body might be preserved against the uncertain return of the son. Eric drew back the cover.

Years ago—some time in Eric's boyhood—Elliott Straive had scourged the last fear from the heart that had ceased to throb. But the look of the eyes, as fixed as their color, he could not mend. Now, Eric's gently filial finger drew the lids, and the scared blue eyes were closed forever.

"I will!" murmured the boy sturdily. It was his answer to that admonition to fortitude which would have come from the lips of his father if death had not stilled them. He touched the brow; he touched the hand, striving mightily for calm. Quickly, noiselessly—for he could not yet act as though his father were not merely asleep—he sought John Skimperimish's wife, Mary, in the kitchen. He found her sitting still. She had cooked food. Then, for hours, she had not moved from her chair.

She looked him mournfully in the face and read that he had seen his father's body. She rose and in her own language bade him return with her. His father had been writing on paper, she told him, for it was still under his hand when, hours later, she found him dead. The day before a white man had come and gone. She gave Eric the paper, which read:

> My Son: Being very tired this morning, perhaps because of a long talk a stranger insisted on having with me yesterday, I am impelled to write you this note, lest I may be unable to do so later. In the library, among my private papers, is a longer message to you prepared some years ago. As for this stranger, he appeared so disturbed over a mistake some one had made in some affair of lands and right of way to the westward, I gave him a letter——

There the hand had rested when the heart, which had long threatened, suddenly stopped.

Eric laid the paper carefully away and tiptoed from the room with old Aunt Mary. In the kitchen he sat by her side and held her hand. John came, conversed with her briefly and sat down, too, folding his arms. For an hour none spoke; but the old Indian woman, a kind of foster mother to Eric, put her other hand over the boy's bony knuckles.

Next morning Eric, aided by John Skimperimish, uncovered a crypt long prepared in a mound of granite at the head of the clearing and laid within it the body of his father. Then they replaced the close fitting slab and the Indians left Eric seated upon it.

His eyes upon the dark billows of the forest, his thoughts upon the past, unknowingly he sighed, sobbed, and let the slow tears fall. A little later he felt his eyes and looked frightenedly around as though caught in a shameful act.

"Forgive me, father," he whispered. Then he dried his eyes with the back of his buckskin sleeve and rose, stalwart and strong again.

CHAPTER II.

INDUSTRIAL SECRECY.

In the wilderness, miles northwestward of that hidden, spacious domain of the Straives, there had been left for the winter some cruisers, packers, batteaumen, several engineers and their surveyors, and a distinguished geologist or two, all drawing pay through the North Lakes and Rivers Timber

Company. It was worth keeping them there for the idle months in order to have them on the ground when the first open spaces thawed. In fact, along certain exposed low rocky ridges, the surveyors and geologists had worked well into December and during a thaw in January. Late March found them trending eastward: this unexpectedly. But they had to follow the old glacial drift wherever it might lead.

Early in April reports of this reconnaissance, closely sealed and sewed in the pocket of the superintendent of field operations, started on their way southward, via Winnipeg, convoyed by men who could sled a boat or boat a sled with equal facility, and slosh through some way. Weeks later, at St. Paul, the rail transport member of certain pooled interests—the Canadian-American Railway Syndicate—sat up and took notice of the eastward trend of the drift. Clarendon, their V. P., handling the northern extensions project, was sent personally first to Duluth, where he conferred for two hours with the president and chairman of the board of a certain holding company for several iron-interest corporations concerned. There was not even a confidential secretary present.

Both the chairman of the board and Clarendon then took a late afternoon train for Chicago and asked for an immediate conference with representatives of financial powers merged to break the hold of the existing trust upon the useful metal reserves of the Northwest. An hour later, after some veiled talk over private phones, four elderly men left buildings in the banking district, got into waiting motors, and—within a few minutes of each other—entered a skyscraper, ascended to the sixteenth floor—that highly concentrated, executive sixteenth floor—and the first conference was on. Finally Heathering himself, on the top floor of the same building, had to be summoned into the game.

His chief secretary, Farwell, from his own room, answered the switchboard operator in the entrance suite, who gave him a message from the sixteenth floor. Farwell went into Mr. Heathering's office.

"James Otis Ordway, speaking from the Central Trust executive offices, asks to speak to you at once over your private wire."

"All right," said Heathering instantly. He took his desk phone, ordered the connection made, and, chewing his cigar, listened—a tall, graceful, somewhat gray man with deep-set brown eyes, bland-faced when good-humored except for the almost constant play of the concentration lines between and above his brows. He frowned slightly as he listened, and his strong teeth took a deeper hold on his cigar. Otherwise he showed no irritation.

"Now," concluded Ordway, "if it's true that the proposed route must be substantially changed at the northern end the lower end may have to be changed too, and that brings new competitive problems with the opposition that will have to be met at this late day. The trending eastward of the ore reserves is not so serious—at least not so immediate a difficulty, though it will have to be met, too."

"Sure of your engineers, up there?" snapped Heathering.

"They are confidential, long-service men of the C. A. R. S., with a technical representative of the water-transport interests constantly with them."

"Better all come up at once," decided Heathering. Hanging up, he jammed Farwell's button.

"Meeting of iron-projects interests here immediately. See that they enter directly from the corridor with at least a two-minute interval between. No communication except for vital business from their private offices. And no stenographer. Stay yourself." A smile wreathed his face as he added: "I've given my word to my family—they've been six years in extracting it from me—that I'll take a vacation with them in June. Looks as if *they'll* have to take it with me."

Thirty minutes later, the conferees having left Heathering's office two minutes apart, Farwell got into communication with the law offices of Wells, Barling & Heathcote, personal counselors of James M. Heathering, and summoned the senior member.

"Hullo, Wells!" said Heathering, giving his hand to the portly lawyer. "Smoke? In the matter of these options, rights of way, and so on, in the Canadian ferric deposits and the waterways. A—eh—new feature has developed that requires that we determine exactly how far eastward of the line of main holdings of our Iron Deposits Syndicate we have extended our control, or potential control."

"Why, the ground was pretty well covered last fall. What seems to be the trouble."

"Why, primarily the field men, I should say," replied Heathering with some irritation. "Hampered by the forest cover, of course, but—well, they find now that the lines of heaviest deposits swing more to the eastward and will probably have to be handled from that side on the Tutowa River waters—I believe it is. That shifts the transport system, and the question is as to the rights of way there." He frowned. "Even the ore lands themselves may not be all covered by the options, although, in order to be entirely safe, I gave instructions——"

"Which were carried out, I'm sure. My understanding was that you wished to cover both sides as well as the line itself."

"Precisely, and as this appears to be a considerable swerving to one side, you've got to see what you have on that side of the north portion of the tract and build on to it if necessary. More secrecy than ever will have to be used now since——" He paused, revolving the cigar in his mouth. It is a cardinal policy of the Heatherings when explaining a function required that one octopus limb shall know as little as possible of the movements of other limbs. "Since with the passage of time many clews to our plans must naturally have leaked out here and there. Now, the fact is, as you know, for you personally drew the contracts, we are committed to the absolute delivery of the rights of way and all necessary collateral rights and franchises on long-term leases of all tributary ore reserves."

"But if the mistake in their location has been made by others——"

"That has been my affair, too," smiled Heathering. "The details are irrelevant, but again the fact is the ore people, through certain other contracts, look to us also."

"Heathcote has been handling the title and rights-of-way matters," said Wells. "He was up there personally several times last summer and fall. I'll get him busy at once."

"The utmost celerity, Wells. Spare nothing. I've *got* to have them complete if it involves, as I have no doubt it will, my personal attention in the North."

"Oh, I hope not, Mr. Heathering," protested his lawyer, almost perspiring at the idea.

Richard H. Heathcote, junior partner of Wells, Barling & Heathcote, was not averse to extra work. Work of any sort, mental or physical—he was rather distinguished as an outdoor man—was pleasure to him. But so was dancing with certain people. And the night of the day following the secret conference of the iron-project interests was to be a very gala occasion among some of the most exclusive of Chicago's exclusive wealthy; and "certain people" were sure to be there. Heathcote, however, sipping coffee at nine o'clock, dictating abstracts, scrutinizing lists of township descriptions typed for him by many clerks of the firm—whose offices were all alight—rather doubted whether *he'd* be there. But there was a chance of it, so he was in evening clothes, though he had shifted into an office jacket when he returned after a hasty dinner served in his own apartments at the Lawyers' Club.

At ten o'clock the prospects were better—he had a really remarkable capacity for work. Before eleven-thirty he saw the end. The night was still young. He rang for a taxi, and while waiting gave final instructions to the faithful chief clerk of the firm to put the finished results on Mr. Wells' desk in the morning. Then he was off.

He walked nimbly up the awning-covered stairs into a gayly lit mansion, tossed his coat and hat to an attendant, and reached the ballroom between dances. As luck would have it, Miss Clara Heathering, who was especially one of the "certain people," was almost alone, not more than half a dozen youths hemming her in. While they were not exactly callow, these young gentlemen, by contrast with the handsome junior partner in Chicago's greatest law firm, were in a sense negligible. He cordially shook hands with Miss Heathering—a glowing, dark-eyed beauty of nineteen—and glanced at her card as though he hoped against hopelessness. She laughed in frank amusement.

"How many other affairs have you taken in to-night?" she asked. "And have you reserved this for the last and least or last and best?"

"Miss Heathering," said Heathcote gallantly, "since I knew you were to be here, can you fancy that anything short of your father's vital interests could have kept me away so long?"

"Mr. Richard H. Heathcote!" She lightly courtsied.

He bowed again.

She raised her finger. "Don't presume to hint that my father intrusts any *vital* interests to so young a man." She meant to

a "junior" anything, Heathcote knew, but he was not sensitive. He did not need to be. His position was an assured one both socially and professionally.

"By the way"—a thought suddenly occurred to her—"I have a fancy it's something to do with mines in the North." Daughter of her father, she said it in a lower voice. "He's hinted that our summering this year, which we bullied him into promising to share with us, may be way up in Canada where some of his bunch are doing things."

Heathcote laughed. "'Some of his bunch,' as you disrespectfully term the most frowningly portentous magnates of the West, are doing things always and everywhere. Your father must have a lot of trust in your discretion, Miss Heathering, to take you into his confidence."

"His confidence!" she echoed ruefully. "He does not. Father's an old clam. What I said was all he told us. So," she added with an angelic smile, "I thought I'd pump you."

"U-m, try to, you mean," countered Heathcote. "Devoutly as I worship you, my dear Miss Heathering, and all that—— However, as long as he's mentioned it to you there'll be no harm in saying that he does appear to be concentrating his attention on something up there. But you do me too much honor in assuming that I know what or why. I had charge of the acquiring of some rights in some lands in that region. I was up there. Charming country. No end of fishing, hunting, paddling."

"Oh, I'd *love* it," cried Clara with enthusiasm. Her partner had claimed her, but she held him off for yet another moment by an imperious gesture of her lovely arm. "I do hope we'll go. With father, too. Can you imagine *him* in such an environment?"

"I'm more interested in imagining *myself* in it—if you go."

"Is there any chance? That would be nice, experienced woodsman as you are."

Once more he bowed. "If there's any tangle in the titles, I rather fancy I'd have to go. It would be—not nice, but——" He picked words now as Clara might have selected bonbons. "Deliriously enchanting." And he gave her a look of half serious adoration.

"How *love-ly*," she acknowledged with mock emphasis, dropping him another little curtsy from the arm of her captor.

CHAPTER III.

A BEAUTIFUL ANIMAL.

Roads end at Minsington, forty-three miles from the most northerly of Canada's rail lines in that region. At least, all motor roads end there. Woods roads, mostly abandoned, might be found, or an occasional straggling horse or ox-team approach to some outpost of the hardy rancher, reclaiming a bit of the wild. But the village, half trading post, half prospectors' winter quarters, and Indian settlement, remained the virtual bridgehead into an unconquered wilderness.

It was here that once yearly for many years Straive and his young son, accompanied by their Indians, had received their supplies sent them by an agent in an American city. Latterly the younger Straive, now man-grown, had come without his father. But he followed exactly in his father's footsteps in his dealing with the few denizens of the hamlet. He was not shy or, if he was, none knew it. But he was strange—a thing little to be wondered at; and he was liked as a wild thing of gentle aspect is liked—the more, perhaps, from the pity its wildness so curiously evokes.

This year he came, as usual, with pelts to trade and a list of goods to receive from the log freight shed of the river men. But all knew his father was long dead. Indians had told it, and a stray white trapper confirmed it with the first breaking of the dog trail well before Christmas. To Eric's wildness had now been added the character of the solitary, and he was spoken to with a new constraint.

His freight had not arrived. The war that had long involved Canada had spread to the States, his birthland. Papers and magazines he saw were full of it—of the scarcity of men, of railroads behind time. It was no wonder the big batteaus were late. He retired to his camp on Long Lake, three miles away and idled in a mood of listless melancholy. His "crew," John Skimperimish and his cousin, Isaac Sohoshim, visited with old native friends in the environs of the village

It was early in June and the woods were alight with a new green foliage that brightened the dark-hued conifers, and colorful underfoot with a weft of spring flowers in its carpeted aisles Young Straive in the late afternoon followed an old bear trail

up through the brush a mile or more from his secluded camp to a rocky eminence beneath which was the long-abandoned lair of generations of trail-makers. He had no thought of these. It was the rock itself he liked, of which there was too little to suit him in this forest-covered land.

Up from the timber shades, out upon the lower slopes of the sun-dazzled granite, walked a slender girl. A moment she paused, bewildered at the sudden apparition of the rocks. She shaded her eyes with her hands, looked through the treetops at Long Lake, and, apparently satisfied that this was her objective, plucked something from her dainty walking boots, adjusted the leggings above them, and walked on.

It was a strange sight to Eric, who had watched her intently over the roof of the old bear cave. Annually he had seen a few village slatterns; oftener than this Indian women, seldom young, their bodies always of the shape of thick, short slabs. This female, whom he could see was very young, reminded him somewhat of a panther, still more of a deer. He followed her instantly and, overtaking her before she heard his almost silent footfall, seized his cap and tossed it on the ground—for he was not an ill-read youth and knew of this ceremony of uncovering the head.

She swung round upon him in time to see this performance, which somewhat reassured her, though the manner of his greeting was no less singular than his whole appearance. She looked him over with considerable assurance for, as the daughter of James M. Heathering, she had had no experience of rudeness. She was not a timid girl, and her impressions of this accoster were curious rather than alarming.

He was dressed entirely in soft, gray, tanned deerskin, with long shoepacks on his legs. His hair, light and curly, was short, and his clear, sun-browned face was clean shaven. He had a cool, imperturbable look in his singularly clear gray eyes—a look she could not fathom. His costume, which he wore with a supple, easy grace, she took in at a glance and thought no more of it. But the look of his eye almost fascinated her.

"Who are you?" he asked casually.

"Well," she replied, a little nettled, "might I ask who *you* are, sir?"

"My name is Eric," he answered evenly.

"I am Miss Heathering," she returned, somewhat grudgingly. She missed the verbal deference to which she was accustomed even in chance encounters.

"That means nothing to me," he informed her. "I know nobody."

"Indeed," she replied. She knew not whether to be the more amused or disquieted by this singular young woodsman.

He stepped close to her and felt the texture of her soft brown flannel waist, at which an instinct told her not to spring away. He stooped lower and felt her skirt, and then she drew back. It was with difficulty she did so slowly.

"I'll not hurt you," he promised. "We have never hurt any live things, father and I, unless we needed to eat them. Oh, it's quite true," he hastened to assure her, as he saw her gasp. "Stand still," he said, as he plucked her plaid cap from her head—and would have fingered her coiled brown hair, but she sprang farther back and looked wildly around for an instant as if about to run.

Although he did not understand her alarm, for he himself saw and heard nothing, he caught her look and purpose, and resolved to allay her fears. So he made a stride to her side and took her entirely in his arms.

"You are perfectly safe," he repeated with a soothing emphasis. "Don't struggle," he admonished, as she summoned her puny strength against him. "There's nothing around here that can hurt you."

She ceased struggling for a moment and looked up in his face. Astonishment began to replace terror. Always before a girl of definite judgments, she found herself now in a stutter of bewilderment. What was this fellow—lunatic or libertine? Brute or idiot? Egomaniac or wild practical joker?

His gray eyes flashed at the thought of harm to this lithe, soft female. "I'll not let anything hurt you, no, indeed," he repeated, as he pressed her most protectingly. For a moment, resigned to the inevitable, she had ceased to struggle. And he gave her an awkward pat on her soft, dark hair, motived half in kindness, half in curiosity. She closed her eyes. Her face and neck were pink.

"There," he said, "that's right."

Instantly she stiffened again and opened blazing eyes.

"Let me go!" she panted.

"Of course, if you're no longer afraid." And he released her and smiled. She took

one backward step and glared up in his calm face.

"How—dare *you!*" Her brown eyes glowed wrathfully.

"What is that?" He looked perplexed again—she seemed angry with *him!*

"You'll smart for this," she threatened in a low voice. Whereat she turned abruptly and walked rapidly off toward Long Lake. His thick brows drew together a moment—always a trick of them when thought or feeling pressed. Then he followed and shortly overtook her. She had found no path, and though the timber here was well spaced, small growth and brush waited to ensnare her.

"I prefer to walk alone," she threw at him over her shoulder. Nevertheless, he took her by the arm and halted her. She faced him again, breathing rapidly.

"Are you sure you know where you are going, young white woman?"

This time she searched his face long in the deepening dusk. He took the scrutiny with a simple, good-humored patience and waited for her reply. She shook her head baffled. Her fears, however, had gone—why, she hardly knew.

"I'm going back," she answered steadily, "to the camping place of my party, on the shore of the lake. I came from there an hour or two ago. If you are wise you will let me go alone."

Eric was puzzled. He knew little of people who do not know where they are going, and, of course, there was no party camped at Long Lake.

"You are mistaken," he said. "There's only my little camp at the lake, yonder. You are welcome to come there till morning, if you wish——"

She shrank from him, and he let go her arm instantly.

"But wouldn't you prefer to tell me more of this party of yours, so I could help you find them?"

She turned helplessly and looked about her. "I saw the lake distinctly from the rocks. It was in this direction."

"Yes, Long Lake is there," he informed her. "Is it possible you mean Deep Water Lake?"

"Yes," she exclaimed eagerly, "we are camped on Deep Water Lake."

"You've become turned around, white girl," said Eric gravely. "What did you say they call you?"

Clara almost smiled. "Miss Heathering."

"That's very long. Haven't you a first name like Eric?"

"Of course," she admitted, biting her lip. "But none but my personal friends make use of it. Please tell me where Deep Water Lake is."

"It's growing dark," he reminded her, "and you seem to get turned around easily. You'll probably sleep in the bush to-night if I turn you loose."

"Oh, don't!" she entreated, her fears swerving.

"It's not so very far. Come along," he said, and he took her hand and started back toward the rocks. "How far from the end of the lake are you camped?"

"Oh, half a mile, perhaps. Just far enough up to be pretty." An uneasy self-consciousness—master bane of her kind—disturbed her. "The way is not rough. You don't have to hold my hand, do you?"

He looked down upon her in surprise, as he released her hand. "Oh, no," he admitted. "It seemed more natural that way—and pleasant, too!" One probing glance she flashed him, and then followed at his side for many minutes.

Neither had spoken as he guided her skillfully among branching forest paths. The lake was visible now, reflecting the last light in the sky. In the woods it had grown almost dark. Feeling quite safe, she could no longer refrain from tampering with the enigma.

"I'm glad I had to walk with you," she finally decided to say. "It's given me a chance to find out that you aren't continuously brutal, at least."

"Brutal!" he echoed, as if he could not have understood the word.

"Don't you call it brutal to take hold of a girl's clothes; to suddenly—hug her, and—toy with her hair?"

"Why, I supposed you were afraid of something that you thought you saw or heard."

"I saw and heard no other animal but you," she spitefully assured him.

"I like your saying that," he said, without a touch of irony. "Do you know I always feel I'm an animal; that we all are?"

"You do feel your kinship with the brute, then?"

"Oh, I never think of them as brutes. Your saying brutal a moment ago had quite a different meaning."

One aspect of the enigma was that his unbelievable crudity extended neither to his speech nor his faculties. His language, she noted, was equal or superior to her own, and he exhibited now and then a flashing acumen.

"You think, then, it was animal of you but not brutal?"

"Something like that—or, at least, if it hadn't been just protecting you."

"But if it wasn't protection?" Her feminine finger had to return again and again to the edged tool, touching it ever so lightly.

He frowned, and walked on with her, thinking. "Just at the end it wasn't protection. I saw you were no longer afraid, for your eyes closed and your muscles relaxed. You seemed to fit closely to me then, like warm, soft metal in a bullet mold."

She was glad it was nearly dark, for she felt herself flushing with humiliation and anger.

"That, I suppose, was animallike—both of us."

"Oh," she whispered furiously, "I could ——" The lured edge had cut the little inquisitive finger. She remembered the moment—the moment of yielding to the powerful arms of this young masculine creature of the natural world. And she loathed them both for it.

"Yes," he mused, "that's the queer part of it. You changed again at once and seemed afraid of *me*—and angry, as you seem to be now."

"Seem to be!" she almost hissed. A moment later she could have bitten her tongue, for he misunderstood her.

"Was it only 'seemed to be?'" he asked, quite relieved. "Then you acted it very well. But that is the way of females, sometimes. I have watched their acting with the males. You see," he added gravely, "we *are* animals."

"Oh, oh!" she sobbed with rage and shame. He looked at her with hurt amazement, despairing of understanding what had happened.

"But—but"—he floundered, putting his arm out toward her compassionately—"surely this isn't more acting? You seem really——"

"Brute!" gasped Miss Heathering hoarsely. "*Barbarian!*" She broke from his friendly hand and ran to the shore of the lake.

Glancing first up and then down, she saw the camp, its tents softly aglow from the light of camp fires between. In five minutes she had slipped into her own tent, unobserved, and when her mother sent to find her she had wrought a facial alchemy that removed all traces of her first tilt with a superprimitive. She told her mother, who was not easily frightened, that she had had so entertaining a walk she hardly realized how late it was.

CHAPTER IV.

YOUTH AND THE STARS.

As motionless as an Indian, Eric watched her disappear. He knew she would see her camp when she emerged from the bush. Then he rethreaded the forest mazes with a woodcraft bred in him from his babyhood. It was well that this was now instinctive, for he gave little conscious thought to the paths he followed through the darkness.

Here was a new thing in his life. Clara Heathering might indeed be said to be not only the first woman but the first person to enter it since Elliott Straive, faithful to the self-imposed covenant of a recluse, had taken his three-year-old son to dwell with him in the wilderness.

A long winter and spring alone in the big log house, with only the two faithful old servitors, had brought to the youth many realizations. His father had been the most of Eric's human world, and his father was gone forever. It took him months to gain from that momentous fact the meanings it possessed for him and his future. The letter written him by his father two years before his death had done little to aid Eric to any resolution, for he thought only of the man who wrote it; pondered, brooded only upon the life they had lived together. He knew he must read it again with a different purpose. And now, as he trod the darkened glades that purpose quickened.

"Brute, animal, barbarian." What did it all mean? He had rarely questioned the dictum of his father that it was such as they that lived as God willed, and that the strange, the unnatural, lives were those of the teeming multitudes of the southern lands whence came the cases of provisions, the woven garments aunt Mary could not fashion for them, and the books—so hard, often, to comprehend, to really comprehend, even with such aids as the big dictionary, the atlas, and the encyclopedia.

He strode into his lonely camp where soli-

tude, of late grown insupportable, was beautifully welcome now. Dewy stars, undimmed by moonlight, should be sole companions to a new communing with the past. He built a fire for light, lay upon his wolf robe, and reread the letter of his father—a great sprawled figure, earnest, intent. Long he conned it, striving for vision:

My Boy: Advancing years and that old bad heart of mine warn me that I may die at any time and leave you alone. When that time comes, and after, you will try to recall what I have taught you of the vital things of life. This letter then will aid you.

Not these spacious lands we have loved; not anything I can leave you in the outside world; nor anything in that world itself, can give you happiness, unless you can have peace within. That peace must be watchfully guarded and—true of all peace—sturdily fought for if need be. The lands and such other things as are yours by inheritance Baker, our man of affairs in Winnipeg, will see to faithfully. But I could make no provision for your immortal soul. I could only watch over and train you according to my light, and give you this last reminder of the things I taught you.

That I am your father is no warranty of the wisdom of my words, for I am only one intelligence in a world of millions. And that you know me as few sons have ever known their fathers should mean to you only that I speak with conviction and sincerity, and with your good at heart. Give to my words, therefore, only their intrinsic weight, according to your powers of judging them. And let them serve also as the key to the motive and purpose of that strange life we have lived together, with its stern precepts and its hard practices.

To kill out fear! This has been our supreme object, our final goal. It was easy for me to train you to it because you were a plastic child, and your inherited traits, thank God, are far less mine than those of your intrepid mother. But to train myself? I, that was born and brought up, schooled and drilled, in the hideous obsession of cowardice! Only you know the racks and torments that this resolution brought upon me. Those wrestlings of the spirit with the flesh may have shortened my life here on the earth, for which—except for you—I care little. But they have made me in some measure master of myself and given me freedom, and this is the better and greater life. As briefly as I can, and yet be plain, let me restate the past.

Your mother, finding her life linked to that of a coward, died. I verily believe, of grief. Of that cowardice I could not write. I told you of it on your eighteenth birthday. For expiation I made an oath over the dead form of your mother that I would rear her son to be the kind of man she would have prayed High Heaven to make him. To succeed in that undertaking there was needed, I soon saw, example as well as precept. I, too, therefore, must become a man of truth and courage.

I had lost what I most valued in life, and I was sick of a world peopled mostly by cowards like myself, and worse—by liars, hypocrites, and sneaks. But I did not seek this solitude on that account alone. To do so might have meant a greater wrong to you than I had done your mother. No, my conviction was that it would be far easier to mold you here than in the society of the world. Why? Because in the world every influence would tend to crush out your every natural instinct and aspiration toward truth, honesty, courage—manhood. While I might strive one way, the whole world would conspire to thwart me! And I feared myself as well.

I knew the disadvantages of such a course. Though you have much knowledge that is in books, and all that I could personally give you, you are utterly ignorant of that greater body of practical knowledge called knowledge of the world. If you go out into that world—as I hope you will, according to your desire and choice—your portion will be buffets, pain, and grief, perhaps, and disillusion surely. This, however, though no doubt in less measure, is the common lot of all young men and women once thrust from the shelter of their homes. But, long deliberated, it became my final judgment that a lad trained as I could train you here would meet the world's contaminations with a clean, triumphant strength impossible to one steeped in the taints of human society. I believe I have succeeded. It may be only the mistaken pride of a father, but I think I see in you—and I would that your mother could see it with fleshly eyes—the true portraiture of that erect, incorruptible, and fearless being "made in the image of God."

That God to us, my son, is Truth and Courage. As to love—it is locked in every human heart. Its fountains supernal, Truth and Courage, will set it flowing. Yea, pour but these between the black lips of shipwrecked man and he will no longer rend and consume his brother.

Truth and Courage. *Be these*, and attain your human godhood.

May the Almighty bless you and bring you to your blessed mother. ELLIOTT STRAYE.

Far into the night he lay awake and looked at the stars. That world, that hurrying, breathless, infinitely complicated world of the books was an actual world. *She* was of it—that young white woman—strange, illogical, contradictory—ice and fire, smiles and tears, rage and laughter, silent blushes and haughty disdain. The entering of a world of which this inexplicable creature was a part would call most certainly for courage. And truth? He feared—no, he did not fear—but he knew that truth would be hard!

His imagination kindled at the thought of plunging into the world. His body trembled with eagerness, his heart beat faster, daring danced in his eyes. The old log house, the clearing, the guns and boats, the rivers and lakes and black, drowsing woods—these were his home and always should be.

But they were empty now. The old comrade was gone, and had bidden him depart, if he would, and play the giants' game. Yes, it would ever be his home—a place of rest and quiet. But he wanted work, not rest. For his blood was young; his blood was up. He clenched his hand at the old stars—as youth has done eternally. And his fist, still clenched, dropped at length on his slumbering breast.

CHAPTER V.

CANVAS LUXURY.

Nothing pertaining to the widely ramifying interests of James M. Heathering lacked organization. And the camping trip of his family, though essentially a private interest, had been arranged with thorough competence and skill.

His characteristically brief instructions had been: "Pitch your first camp where the waterways converge at the head of the motor roads. Provide a double equipment for my family and throw it on ahead before camp is moved, so that complete quarters will always be ready and waiting for them. Though this is a hunting and fishing trip, mind you, you'll take your route and any special instructions from one of the project engineers that are working further up, whom I shall detail for the purpose. You will, however, be responsible for the safety and order of the camp."

Mainhall, to whom these instructions were crisply given, was himself a superintendent of transportation on a lakes branch of a Heathering-controlled railroad. It was a rather small game of management to him, but the novelty of it rather intrigued his fancy, and he put all his skill at work on the job. Of course, he hadn't the slightest idea what it was all about, but he didn't need to, because he was brought by one of the Heathering secretaries to one of the Heathering country estate managers, who conferred with him on all matters of equipment in any way involving the tastes and desires of Mr. Heathering's family, and he issued rush orders to the proper Chicago, St. Paul and Milwaukee concerns for tents, boats, and various—in fact, multifarious—impedimenta.

The first camp having been duly set up, Mrs. Heathering, Miss Heathering, and the two younger Heathering children, with sundry of their personal houseservants, got out of very heavy touring cars and inspected the camp with exclamations of delight. A camp on a pretty lake is always a delight to Heatherings when they first see it, and for an indefinite number of minutes afterward—reaching often into hours, sometimes into days, and—history has recorded—into a week or two, even.

The next day, Beckwith H. Hammond, water transport engineer of the Central Canada Iron Projects Syndicate, reached Minsington from the Northwest, found Mainhall, they exhibited their credentials, which were in the form of letters of introduction, which they presented to each other, and then Hammond directed Mainhall to proceed in all about thirty miles in a general north-northwesterly direction by the chain of waterways of the western branch of the Tutowa River. He himself, with his assistants, would be working south, southeastward from the other way—which he did not tell Mainhall, Mainhall not needing to know.

"Better get a guide," he added. "From here up there are probably no settlers at all. It's as nearly virgin country as you'll find anywhere in central Canada."

Hammond was off again in the afternoon. An hour or more before Clara essayed her first stunt in woodcraft.

Very early next morning, Mainhall sauntered into the village in search of a guide. The Minsington trader spat, and named an Indian who might go.

"Hell," said Mainhall, "I want a white man."

"Ain't many of them around here for any purpose, mister," was the reply. "And none that knows them string of lakes beyond close to here. Though there's young Straive. He knows all that country, of course—if he'd go."

"How can I find him?"

"Why, he's camped——" He looked out a side door. "Hey, there, old John," he called an old Indian walking soberly by. "Will you take this man to young Straive's camp out to the lake, wherever it is?"

Eric was eating a late breakfast when his uncle John Skimperimish came up the shore trail convoying a red-bearded and highly executive-looking man of about forty who introduced himself:

"Mainhall; Minnesota; moving some city people up into the back country, and need a guide."

"Sit," said Eric. His father had taught

him the commoner courtesies, but he rarely had occasion to use them. He was glad he remembered what to say.

"The people in the village could perhaps tell you of a guide."

"They told me you were the only one around here right now who knows the waterways of the region to the north and west."

It was a novel idea to Eric. "You want *me* to act as a guide?"

"Why, yes, if you can and will."

"Oh, I know the woods and water," replied the young man. He smiled a little sadly. "It's about all I do know. Where do you wish to go?"

"Can't say exactly," admitted Mainhall. "They are a party of very wealthy, very hard-to-get-at Chicago people who want to do a little fishing and hunting—for their health."

"For their health?" repeated Eric sympathetically. "That's too bad."

"Oh, they're all right," Mainhall dryly assured him.

"Where are they?" Eric had a sudden idea.

"Near the lower end of Deep Water Lake."

He would have asked if the party included a plumply slender young woman with brown eyes and a plaid cap worn over a billow of brown hair. But he felt a quite unaccountable hesitation to speak of this. Besides, he was quite sure of it, anyhow. He thought very rapidly in the next few moments.

He knew that when the outfit came John and his cousin could take it home. And there was no reason at all why he should not get his next lessons in worldly lore from the companions of the little person who had given him his first. Also—there was a degree of pertinacity in the youth—he would like to unravel the mysteries that were wrapped up in the quixotic behavior of that young person!

"Oh, very well," agreed Eric. "If all you want of me is information about the waterways I'll go along."

"And your price?"

"Money, you mean—for that?" Eric smiled at the absurdity of it. "Oh, I couldn't expect money for just telling you what I happen to know. Besides, I don't need any money. I have plenty."

Mainhall eyed him suspiciously. What was his game, he wondered.

"I shall have to leave the camp outfit with my men here, though," Eric remembered, "so if you don't mind I'll take my meals with the rest of you."

The superintendent of transport grinned. "You look a husky young brute to book up as 'board and lodging only,' but *I* should worry!" And telling Eric to report that afternoon, he genially grunted a "Good morning" and was off.

Eric threw his few personal belongings into a clean muslin sack, wrapped it in his robe which he strapped to his back, and looked up his uncle John whom he gave sundry instructions and said good-by. Then he took the road to Deep Water Lake.

As he approached the scene of his very first employment, he was astonished at the size and elaborateness of the "camp." Tents, large and small, dotted a long acre of lake front, below the road; but they were conspicuously divided into two groups. The nearer, which was also the smaller, group consisted of a number of very pretty tents among the trees, shaded with "flies," which projected, awninglike, over the front entrances, a large dining tent—as Eric surmised it to be—and a few small tents, unprotected by flies, set humbly in the rear of the dining room. These—as Eric could not know—housed the select retinue of house servants of the Heathering family. The larger group beyond Eric was quite at a loss to explain. Not that he failed to recognize it as the quarters of the various assistants and helpers which so large a camp must require. It was the very distinct separation of the two groups that raised instant question in his alert and active mind.

He strolled at once toward the nearer group, and as he passed around the corner of the pretty little tents, he beheld a half-grown girl swinging idly in a hammock and teasing an abbreviated and very fanciful caricature of a dog. Eric surveyed the creature with amusement, and then glanced inquiringly at Sylvia, the twelve-year-old daughter of James M. Heathering. He liked the crisp freshness of her frock and her pretty face.

"Hullo," he said.

"Hullo," said Sylvia. Eric again looked whimsically at the dog.

"Well, what do you think of him?" Sylvia was pithy and pointed.

"I suppose he's some kind of dog."

Sylvia sniffed. "*I'll* say he is. He takes all the prizes in his class."

"Prizes in his class?" Eric had read of school prizes. "You don't mean to say he goes to school?"

"Stupid!" exclaimed Sylvia with delighted disgust. "At the bench shows, of course."

Eric tried to recall what these were.

"Where did you get those clothes?" asked Sylvia.

"Oh, we make them at home," replied Eric. "My Indian aunt makes them."

"Oh, does she? Isn't that great! I started the Leatherstocking Tales as soon as mother said we were going to the North Woods. I sent Maida, my maid, to the bookstore to buy them. Do you kill Indians or white settlers?"

"Neither—yet," admitted Eric, much amused.

"Well, anyhow," she hurried on, regarding the young woodsman with a far from unfriendly eye, "whatever you are, you'd better beat it to the servants' part of the camp before mother catches you here. She'll swoon!"

Just then a boy of ten, completely togged in the finest Boy Scout raiment, came up on a shaggy Canadian pony. He almost yelled with delight when he had given Eric's costume his once-over.

"You're mine," he asserted with conviction. "Just the kind of a guy I've been looking for all day."

"Who are you children talking to out there?" came a woman's voice, with an inflection of lazy curiosity.

"Come and see, mother," called back young Roswell Heathering with vim. And presently a handsome, slightly gray woman with an exceedingly cold blue eye, came languidly from an adjoining tent and looked Eric over in a very leisurely fashion. Eric was petting the good-humored canine monstrosity.

"Come away, Yucatan," she called to it imperiously, as though she feared Eric might give it fleas. To Eric she said with crisp brevity: "Eh—what is it?"

"What is what?" asked Eric.

Mrs. Heathering slightly raised her eyebrows. Then she looked—almost amused. To almost amuse Mrs. James M. Heathering was a social feat. But, of course, Eric could not know what he had accomplished.

"I meant, what do you wish?" elucidated the lady. "Or"—as the absurdity of his having any business with them occurred to her—"have you lost your way?"

Eric smiled at that. "Oh, no," he said. "I'm sure this is the place. Unless there are two big camps on the lake here. Oh!" he exclaimed, catching sight of Clara Heathering who came suddenly up in an abbreviated skirt—and the balance of a most becomingly pretty riding costume. "Hullo, young woman!"

CHAPTER VI.

CLARA'S CLASS IN CLASSES.

Clara froze solid in her tracks—a pretty bird charmed to immobility by a serpent presence. It seemed so, at least, to the elder woman who looked from one to the other with something like actual interest. Her disapproving eyes remained on Clara.

"You seem to know each other," she observed incredulously.

"I can't say that I do," answered Clara haughtily. "This man showed me the way back to the lake last night, that was all. It was very kind of him." And she walked rapidly past her mother and entered the tent—and stood just inside the door of it and listened, her face flushed and angry.

Eric's eyes followed her with a very frank, very disturbed regret.

"I had nothing to do," he told Mrs. Heathering. "There was no particular kindness in it."

The mother of a very pretty girl finds little difficulty in explaining a situation like this. Nevertheless, Mrs. Heathering was angry. The fellow was, of course, presuming on the strength of a chance service.

"On the contrary, it was *very* kind," she assured Eric, the chill of absolute zero in her voice and manner, "but——" She paused and raised her eyebrows significantly—as she supposed!

"But what?" asked the youth, who was accustomed to plain and completed sentences.

Mrs. Heathering flushed. Very well, then, if she *must* say it: "But you will excuse us now, I am sure." She turned to the youngsters. "Come away, children, and get ready for dinner."

Eric was trying to make out what the offense had been for which this queer, elderly, dressed-up woman asked him to excuse her, when up came Mainhall, who had been eying the scene from a little distance.

"You've strayed into the wrong part,

young man," he said in a brisk, businesslike way. He entered with his big felt hat in his hand. "A guide that I employed this morning, Mrs. Heathering," he said to the lady, who paused a moment in her retreat. "Not accustomed to this sort of thing, I suspect."

When the two men had left, Mrs. Heathering turned to the children.

"You had better not make so free with every chance person up here," she admonished with vexation.

"He isn't a chance person," contradicted Roswell. "He's an Indian guide, he is. Gee, he's some big feller!"

Clara heard it. "Queer—very queer," she mused suspiciously.

Eric followed Mainhall to the men's quarters, some one hundred yards away.

"Here, Straive," said the camp manager, "bunk in here with these river boys, and go in and eat when the cook hollers. This afternoon I'll get out the maps and have a talk with you. We'll be leaving to-morrow morning with the duplicate outfit and pitch a new camp higher up."

The cook "hollered" very soon, and Eric did full justice to a meal which included a number of dishes that were new to him. The men stared a little at him, but being an unself-conscious young man he did not notice this, and he quite enjoyed the new experience of eating dinner with a dozen white men!

Upon cleaning their plates the rivermen rose, and after a midday pipe scattered to their divers tasks, leaving Eric with time on his hands and a far from slaked curiosity regarding every feature of his surroundings. What more natural, then, than, after a brief inspection of the men's quarters and the boats and equipment, he should stroll back to the Heathering's quarters to see the children and the dog again? A latent big-brotherliness had made him enjoy the droll winsomeness of Sylvia and the frank admiration of Roswell.

First he walked around the place and was stared at by several pretty maids in caps—not exactly outing caps! He looked into this tent and that, and narrowly escaped severe rebuke. It would have been better if he had not escaped it, for in that case he might have seen the wisdom of beating a hasty retreat to the men's quarters. Instead, he found himself in the place of hammocks and other devices of out-of-door luxury. The children gave him a joyous welcome.

"What I want to know," said Roswell, without preface, "is all about you. This guide stuff is great. How do you do it, and when do you begin?"

"I told you you'd better read the Cooper books," reminded Sylvia.

"Too old," condemned Roswell. "*Juvenile Life Magazine* is right up to the minute."

Mrs. Heathering, in the hands of her maid near the wide-flung flap of her private tent, saw and heard this conversation. Clara, in a kind of steamer chair, just outside the tent, was lazily turning the pages of a big, illustrated periodical devoted to camp craft for city people.

"Clara, can't you explain to your rescuer" —her mother sneered most charmingly— "that we prefer to be alone?"

The girl let the magazine fall on her knee and looked at the happy little group by the lake. In fact, she had been watching them covertly since Eric first appeared.

"I shall do nothing of the sort, mother, if you don't mind. I'm not ingenious enough to make him understand that. He's simply a barbarian."

"Indeed!" Mrs. Heathering looked skeptically at Clara for a moment. "You're usually quite able to protect yourself from impossible males. Well, perhaps Mr. Mainhall will be clever enough, though even he is none too desirable a person. Betty, run over and ask Mr. Mainhall to step over here at once."

"What are you going to do, mother?" asked Clara directly the maid was gone.

"Oh, get rid of him once and for all," replied Mrs. Heathering testily. "I don't like to hurt your feelings, Clara, but it seems to me you might try to restrict your conquests to persons more within your own sphere."

"Of course it's *my* fault," said Clara sarcastically. She bit her lip. "Say, mother, he'll keep the children amused," she ventured a few moments later. "That would be something. We don't need to associate with him."

"A very practical suggestion," returned her mother ironically. "However, I think I'm still able to choose companions for Sylvia and Roswell."

"You may hurt his feelings."

"You rather intimated he hadn't any. I

presume you know, after your evening stroll with him in the woods."

Clara sprang from her chair as Mainhall approached. "I detest him," she exclaimed with more vehemence than she intended. "But if he's to be our guide, it certainly wouldn't be very prudent to antagonize him. Mr. Mainhall doesn't look any too tactful. I suppose I'll have to do it myself."

And before her mother could interpose she had met the camp manager and explained that the message was a mistake. Mainhall, who was very busy, turned back gladly, and Clara, carefully side-stepping her mother, approached Eric and the youngsters.

"Mr.—Straive, is it?"

Eric nodded amiably.

"I should like to talk to you a moment."

"Aw, say, Clara, he's just telling us——" protested Roswell. But the spoil-sport of a big sister walked on down the shore and Eric obediently followed her. When midway between the two sections of the camp she said to him casually:

"You see the camp is conducted in a very methodical way. This part over here is just our family and our personal servants, and that part over there is for the men who do the work and move the tents and everything like that. They all stay over there."

They had come to a halt, facing each other. Since she had begun to speak, Eric's eyes had never left her lovely face, with its lowered lids and dark lashes.

"It's a sort of military camp, is it?" he asked, thinking he saw a little light. "I've read all about those things. It's discipline?"

"No," replied Clara, "not that. It's just custom." Then, angry at herself for believing—as she almost had believed—that it was a case of simplicity and not cheek, she looked up at him and said with petulance:

"I'm trying to make allowances for your limited opportunities, though *nothing* could excuse your cold-blooded rudeness last night, Mr. Straive, and I assure you that if I'd known anything about it this morning I'd have requested Mr. Mainhall not to employ you. But it's done now, and——" Clara looked at her shoe and twisted her dainty handkerchief. After her little tirade she felt better again. "And I did not want him to hurt your feelings."

"I thank you for that, young girl," said Eric. "By 'hurt my feelings' you mean his telling me about this custom or rule of the men not coming over here?"

"Yes."

"What is the reason for this custom? I should think you'd all naturally stray about in your leisure time and learn what you could from each other, and tell each other things."

Clara opened wide eyes, in which glimmered the dawn of comprehension—just glimmerings of it, notwithstanding she was as bright as a new pin. But you see when nothing you have ever known in your life suggests the existence of such a creature—well, Clara, if profane and ungrammatical, would have said to herself, "Hell, there ain't no such animile!" Perhaps she did, anyhow.

"No, it isn't done," she informed him politely. An unaccountable impulse then made her say: "We belong to a rich and proud class that employ and pay, but never associate with those they employ or pay. We ourselves are particularly rich and proud."

"I've read of them," said Eric. "It must be a fine thing to be so proud. I'd like to be able to do things that enabled me to be proud, but I don't think I'd want to shut myself away from people just for that."

Clara was smiling—at herself. "I can't think of any special deeds of valor that the rich and proud *I* know anything about have performed. But it's most certainly the rule to discriminate very closely when it comes to friends and acquaintances."

"I think I understand," said Eric, "and since none of you have chosen me as a friend or acquaintance, you'd prefer not to have me come around here. Well, do you know, Miss Heathering, that makes me feel in a way I don't like to."

"And what way is that?" she asked.

"A very unworthy one, I apprehend. I've heard men express it in a way that seems to fit—I don't care a—damn."

Clara recoiled and bit her lip. But something sportsmanlike within her strove for him.

"That's unutterably common. Profanity added to your brutality. But I must say it's spunky of you, and I don't blame you a bit," she confessed emphatically. "I'd hate you—more than I do—if you didn't feel that way."

He scarcely understood her allusion to profanity, for he had heard the words so rarely that he had only caught their sturdy independence without learning that they were taboo in women's presence.

"Of course I'll not stay," he told her, "since you hate me and would have forbidden Mainhall to employ me. I'm sorry, for it seemed as if I'd enjoy it. I'm very lonely."

"Are you?" she asked with seeming indifference.

"And I like the children; and, of course, I like you."

"Indeed?"

"It's queer that I do, of course, since you say such strange and bitter things to me about my conduct, and don't believe me when I tell you I don't understand. But I do like you just the same," he assured her brightly. "I liked you a great deal when I held you in my arms."

"Never dare speak of that again!" she said with wrathful earnestness.

"How could I?" he asked curiously. "I'm leaving now. But if I really committed an offense just by mentioning a little simple thing like that—why I ask your pardon, Miss Heathering."

He was very, very winning. So winning that though he had turned to go—had gone a little, in fact—she called him back and said to him frowningly:

"You'd better stay. For we do need a guide, and *I* know that you're a good one. Only don't think that I believe you. You're really clever. I've got to 'hand it to you,' as the boys say. Only please don't speak to me. I couldn't tolerate it after what's happened."

"Oh, no, I'd better go," said Eric a little bitterly.

She touched his sleeve. "Please don't," she urged. "I really *do* want you to stay and guide us. I'd feel—*safer*."

Poor Eric! A proud and happy feeling infused him.

"Very well," he agreed, and walked away.

CHAPTER VII.

ENTER HEATHCOTE.

Another report from the engineers had come—more directly this time—to the Heathering offices. Farwell boiled it down to a memorandum and handed it to James M. Heathering.

"Bring me Heathcote's abstract again," he directed, "and call Heathcote at once.

Their interview was epoch-making in the history of the great competitive movement against the existing Steel Trust to meet the actual and prospective demand for steel.

"It's resulted just as I told Mr. Wells I feared it would," Heathering said to the suave young counselor. "The drift of the ores has continued trending southwest into the basin of the Tutowa River, the transport outlet of which is through the Straive estate. You hoped it wouldn't, you know."

"Mr. Heathering," answered Heathcote, "I hope you agree with me that it was hardly to be expected that those outlying lands would be affected. And you know you can't tie up a whole province."

Heathering frowned slightly. This young Heathcote rather presumed on his connection with the great law firm. But he was a family acquaintance as well—and Heathering permitted the hyperbole to pass unchallenged.

"But you have a contract there, Heathcote. The abstract shows it with an interrogation point—meaning not entirely satisfactory, I suppose."

Heathcote nodded.

"Because only rights of way and timber rights have been secured, and no options on the lands themselves?"

"Eh—yes, but—more than that," replied the lawyer, choosing his words carefully. "I handled the matter myself. It was one of the cases that finally were put up to us for direct action. Not because of any importance the land agents attached to it, of course, but because of the size of the holdings—a domain, you could term it, almost the size of a county. And also the character of the owner, an old recluse, very unbusinesslike and presumably hard to handle—known to be aloof and suspicious. I—I was unable to obtain a witness to authenticate the signature to the right of way. The man was ill—dying, as it turned out."

"Get one," snapped Heathering. "You can see the crucial importance of putting our rights here beyond all question. Or at least—you know it now. The Central Trust itself and at least a dozen interests close to me are responsible for the complete control of these ore bodies and a clear transport field besides. Between ten and twenty millions in various construction projects depending on that control are now being let. Confidential, of course!"

"I'll have to go up there, I suppose?"

"At once," directed Heathering instantly. "Authenticate your right-of-way contract.

That, of course. But also try for an option on the whole tract. However, if you foresee resistance, let me know. And *don't* let the other people get near him."

Farwell entered. "I know you'll want any news relative to the Straive lands," he said. "I have just noticed in a report from your camp at Deep Water Lake—it's from H. K. Mainhall. They're going to move on up and have employed a local guide by the name of Straive——"

"Must be the surviving son," said Heathcote.

"Of course," agreed Heathering. "Eh—*treat him well.* Tell Mrs. Heathering. I'm hoping to get up there in seven days, but in case you have any difficulty wire in cipher and I'll go at once." He held out his right hand. His left had already seized other papers.

Thirty-six hours later, Heathcote was at Deep Water Lake, where boatmen awaited him. Six hours after that he arrived at the second and considerably more beautiful camp of the Heathering party on the upper arm of Big Sky Lake.

Eric had remembered the spot and guided them to it—a gardenlike strip of curving shore that had remained untouched by voyageurs and vandal cruisers. That sort of thing—and portages, of course—was Eric's job, nothing more. When he had shown the way and piloted the first boats to the new camp he was through.

That was two days before, and time hung heavily on his hands. Had he been alone he would have investigated rocks, for he had a taste for their study. He was not alone, however. Indeed, he was in the company of more human beings than ever before in his life. But as he had not yet learned to avail himself socially of this propinquity of men, he remained smilingly quiet, unobtrusive, unwittingly aloof. And yet he was living what to him was an exciting, gregarious life which kept him in no mood for his wonted avocations. The consumption of very small portions of this social life required a great deal of digesting. Indeed, his encounters with the Heatherings had not been assimilated yet!

When the family had been brought to the new camp, with Eric in the boat ahead for safety of navigation, they had been thrown together for a few moments while the boats were being hauled up and passengers and luggage disembarked. Clara had clapped her hands—as young as Sylvia, for the moment—at sight of the grassy cove set with the duplicate tents, hammocks and dining place, all ready for them, and half circled by straight, clean, feathery spruce, with silver birch shining among them.

"Oh, a beautiful camp you've selected, Mr. Mainhall," she exclaimed.

Mainhall waved his hand toward Eric. "He brought us half a mile out of our course to pick this spot."

Clara was forced to glance at Eric before following her mother. He met her glance with so strangely mute a face that Clara paused a moment, her little brow a tangle of pride and pity.

"Thank you very much, Mr. Straive, for thinking of the place," she said.

It was the only word he had had with her; the only contact, indeed, with any of the family, though if he himself had not been careful to avoid it, many times he would have passed some of them, for they were well up into the woods now, rightly deemed the country theirs, and ventured about in the listless, aimless fashion of the alien from the city.

This evening the canoe men who brought daily mail and packages brought also a passenger. Mainhall read the letter the passenger presented, showed him to a guest tent, and sauntered through the family quarters to give Mrs. Heathering the mail and tell her that a Mr. Heathcote had come from Chicago. When Mainhall left, she told Clara, to whom the announcement was less of a surprise.

"Another and more fitting admirer," laughed her mother. "Strange! I supposed no one was to come till your father told us we might have people."

Presently, however, she found the explanation in a letter from her husband.

"It's business—partly, at least," she told Clara. "Your father says—this is strange! 'Do just as Heathcote suggests in regard to any other person he may mention.' Whatever on earth do you suppose he means?"

"I can't remotely imagine. However, I hope I'm not the 'any other person' referred to," replied Clara with sly humor. "Much as I like Dick Heathcote, to 'do just as he suggests' might be a large order, as they say!" And Clara looked archly at her mother.

Half an hour before dinner, while Clara was off in her tent dressing, Heathcote pre-

Our 21 Jewel SMASHES PRICES

Look!

- 21 Ruby and Sapphire Jewels—
- Adjusted to the second—
- Adjusted to temperature—
- Adjusted to isochronism—
- Adjusted to positions—
- 25-year gold strata case—
- Genuine Montgomery Railroad Dial—
- New Ideas in Thin Cases.

Only $3.50 A Month

And all of this for $3.50—only $3.50 per month—a great reduction in watch prices -direct to you—positively the exact prices the wholesale dealer would have to pay. Think of the high-grade, guaranteed watch we offer here at such a remarkable price. And, if you wish, you may pay this price at the rate of $3.50 a month. Indeed, the days of exorbitant watch prices have passed.

See It First

You don't pay a cent to anybody until you see the watch. You don't buy a Burlington Watch without seeing it. Look at the splendid beauty of the watch itself. Thin model, handsomely shaped—aristocratic in every line. Then look at the works! There you will see the masterpiece of the watch makers' skill. A perfect timepiece adjusted to positions, temperature and isochronism.

Practically every vessel in the U. S. Navy has many Burlington watches aboard. Some have over 100 Burlingtons. The victory of the Burlington among the men in the U. S. Navy is testimony to Burlington superiority.

Send Your Name on This Free Coupon

Get the Burlington Watch Book by sending this coupon now. You will know a lot more about watch buying when you read it. You will be able to "steer clear" of the over-priced watches which are no better. Send the coupon today for the watch book and our offer.

Burlington Watch Co.
19th Street and Marshall Blvd., Dept. 1432 Chicago, Illinois
Canadian Office: 355 Portage Ave., Winnipeg, Manitoba

Burlington Watch Co.
19th Street and Marshall Blvd.
Dept. 1432 Chicago, Ill.

Please send me (without obligation and prepaid) your free book on watches with full explanation of your cash or $3.50 a month offer on the Burlington Watch.

Name _____

Address _____

_____

say and how to say it. But be careful. He's baffling—far from a fool!"

CHAPTER VIII.

GUIDE AND GUEST.

Heathcote found "handling" Straive not impossible, and yet not easy. He met him casually, introduced himself as "a friend of the family invited for a short stay," and brought him their invitation—now that the women were no longer alone—to join them at mealtimes. They had only just learned that he was receiving no salary, and wished to show their appreciation of his kindness in guiding them through these lakes and woods he seemed to know so well.

Eric was impressed but skeptical—or, rather, mystified. But that was Eric's chronic condition in these wonderful days, and he was growing used to it.

"You are sure they really want me?" he finally asked.

"Oh, absolutely," replied Heathcote, who so far could find little of the barbarian in the son of Elliott Straive. He brought him to the family camp, where Mrs. Heathering greeted him with that lady's charming grace of manner—which was an accomplishment rather than a quality. She did not overdo it, however, for she was sufficiently conscious of her first manner toward him to avoid a glaring contrast. Clara had given him a pleasant nod—no more. But Sylvia and Roswell were so unfeignedly glad to hail him as a lost brother that the elder girl felt her retreat well covered. Heathcote's manner was a finished study in simulated friendliness.

It was not an unsuccessful meal. Eric's fine freedom from self-consciousness was not unmarred by what Clara had told him of the class distinctions between employer and employed; but much of it was still pristine and showed no trace of the uneasy effort at manners and decorum of the humble guest bidden to eat and drink with the great. If Mrs. Heathering had promised herself a treat in the way of eccentric table maneuvers—of plain and fancy sword swallowing, or other feats—she was self-cheated. His behavior at table was exactly what Elliott Straive's had been—faultless, of course.

He had little to say, and, fortunately for his peace of mind, that little chanced by sheer luck to lack the frank crudities by which he had won his title from Clara and her mother. But luck turns at last. The meal finally ended—it was but little less formal and elaborate than if served in one of their country mansions—and the children rushed off, after extracting a promise from Eric to give them a paddle on the lake before dark.

"Let us sit out in the air," suggested Mrs. Heathering, and they rose. Heathcote drew cigars from his pocket, but Eric, after examining one curiously, thanked him and handed it back, saying that he had never smoked. They followed the ladies to camp chairs in front of the dining tent, and here the guide, instead of sitting down, prepared to depart.

"Stay, Mr. Straive," invited Mrs. Heathering. "Both my husband and myself will be glad to have you consider yourself our guest while you are showing us up the lakes."

"It is very pleasant, being with such intelligent people," said Eric, but he did not sit down. "I enjoy it, even though I feel, somehow, very uncomfortable."

"Why, my dear Mr. Straive!" protested his hostess, satisfied that amusement was now at hand.

"You see, I don't understand your change. Mr. Heathcote has explained that it's because you found I was not taking money for my guiding. But you gave me food and that is compensation enough. Besides, you are very, very rich, Clara told me." The young lady he had named flashed him an astonished and malignant glance. "And I should think your way of righting my compensation would naturally have been to insist on my taking money and not upon my becoming your guest, as you call it. Clara made it plain to me that rich and proud people like you choose your friends with great care from among your own class, and unless a man or woman is chosen in that way your kind of people consider it a great impertinence to come near you. I do not dislike you, Mrs. Heathering. You are very interesting. And I like your children—especially Clara. But I must say, I feel extremely ill at ease. You see I have the feeling that you are all lying to me. But why you should do so, and in so pleasant a fashion, I do not know."

His manner was diffident and modest; his tones amiable and confidential. He smiled deprecatingly, almost apologetically.

Mrs. Heathering was disappointed. She

found that though the man was amusing, she was *not* amused. She told him that he was much too sensitive, advised him to forget his morbid fears, and bade him a chilly good evening. Clara, with a scarcely audible echo of her mother's adieu, followed that lady into the inner tent, and Eric was left to pursue his thoughts with Heathcote—for he was gifted with considerable pertinacity.

"You, too," he continued. "Though I have known you a much shorter time, strike me in the same way. I hope I'm wrong. You are not lying to me, too, now, are you, Mr. Heathcote?"

Heathcote laughed uncomfortably. The barbarian at least should not drive *him* to the shelter of his tent. Clown that the fellow was, in a certain light he was a foeman worthy of his steel.

"The fact is, we don't say that except the provocation is grave," suggested the new friend. "Also, it's rather a useless question, you know, because if I were lying to you you could hardly trust me to admit it."

"That's so," agreed Eric. "Then what's the game?"

"By the way," suddenly interjected Heathcote, striking his thigh as though the thought were as diverting as it was sudden, "I'm told your home is near here. Tell me about it. I'm interested in country places here in the North Woods—very much indeed. Where is your land?"

Eric answered all his questions with the utmost accuracy, patience, and good humor.

"Like to sell it?" asked Heathcote offhandedly.

"No, indeed," was the reply.

"Never have given any papers concerning it?"

"Not I. Father may have, of course, before he died. What kind of papers do you mean?"

"Oh, such as rights-of-way over lands?"

Eric remembered those queer words in his father's unfinished message to him. "I think he did," was the reply. "But he died before he could tell me about it. I was away at the time."

"I see," said Heathcote, his heart beating. The boy knew just enough for corroboration of one thing and too little for denial of another. He committed the reply to memory. So far, so good.

"Why do you ask?" inquired Eric.

"Some friends of mine are thinking of building a road through this country somewhere—a very worthy and useful project. And doubtless they got privileges to do so from what few settlers there are in this region. Much of the lands are crown lands, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, I believe so."

"You are very much attached to the place?"

"It's my home," replied Eric simply. He paused. "But I must be doing something. If I can't do it up here, I must go elsewhere, for part of the time, at least."

"Why not sell it, then?"

"Poor father would turn in his grave at the thought!"

"Or a part at least—say the western part which, I suppose, you seldom use, or even see?"

"Father's feeling about it was that its very spaciousness was its charm and its value, as a home. A little world, we called it, where we could court solitude and think and grow strong."

"Queer," murmured Heathcote.

"It must seem queer to you, but my father had theories."

"What theories?"

Eric made no immediate answer.

"I find it difficult to talk about it—to a stranger," he finally said. "My father was also mother, brother, sister, and chum to me. We were pals—tillicums, as they say up here. His memory is an almost sacred thing to me; his ideas and wishes things I hold in very tender respect."

The children's importunate voices called to him, and with a nod to Heathcote he shouted, "All right!" and bounded to the sandy beach.

The man who had pumped him finished his cigar and then sought his hostess and her daughter. Both women had been embroidering, but had ceased with the failing of the light. Mrs. Heathering had long ago regained her composure. Outwardly, Clara had, also.

"Will you admit a fellow liar to your charmed circle?" asked the lawyer facetiously. He sat down and studied Clara's countenance.

"What do you make of him?" asked the elder woman.

"Delightfully frank."

"That's delightfully frank of *you*, Mr. Heathcote," commented Clara, "in view of what he called us."

Heathcote declined to recant. He turned

to her mother. "Miss Heathering was right," he decided. "He's far from a fool."

"We're the fools," asserted Clara.

"And you're his favorite, he says," reminded her mother. "I hope that bit of subtle flattery won't turn your head, Clara."

"I'll turn his with one of those nice round, smooth stones that the little wavelets lap," threatened Clara hotly, "if he don't keep some of his naïve thoughts to himself."

"Shall we call him for breakfast?" asked Mrs. Heathering of Heathcote.

"By all means," he answered.

"I'm wondering," remarked Clara sarcastically, "what he'll *call us* for breakfast."

"Oh, thieves, most likely," prophesied her mother.

The canoe men, departing at sunrise next morning, took the following cipher messages, signed "H:"

To JAMES M. HEATHERING: Rights of way probably safe. Option to purchase very difficult. Special influence necessary. Advise or come.

To WELLS, BARLING & HEATHCOTE: Send representative of North Lakes Company to executor Straive estate, exhibit right-of-way contract only, and exert pressure as arranged.

CHAPTER IX.

HEATHCOTE'S STORY.

Heathering came. Heathering himself—in three days. He used a special to St. Paul and thence to Winnipeg, whence a private motor, sent ahead from his town garage, bore him swiftly to Minsington and Deep Water Lake. Here a motor boat, previously hauled in a truck from the railroad and launched two hours before, chugged him up the lake to a point where rivermen and a young engineer from the upper camp were waiting for him. No one in Chicago—or elsewhere—knew that James M. Heathering was in the field.

He walked the portage between Deep Water Lake and Big Sky Lake in the late afternoon, and found the forest good. He had seen it, not a hundred miles from this spot, thirty-five years before, during a college vacation. He told this to a secretary, who would not permit him to carry an ounce. They reached the camp, which had moved once more—to Tutowa Lake twenty miles northward—long after dark, and not even his wife knew that he was sleeping near them in the silent woods.

The second shifting of the camp had again given Eric something to do; but that activity filled for him no such want as before, when he had been debarred the society of the congenial Heatherings and was very lonely. These three days had been days of joy—clouded somewhat by the unsolved mystery of their change of front, disturbed by an uneasy feeling about Clara and Heathcote, which answered to a kind of unconscious jealousy—but still joy, ringing with the hearty laughter of the children and the silvery merriment of beautiful Clara, spiced with the cryptic observations of Mrs. Heathering, and enlivened by the conversation of the brilliant Heathcote, who studied to gain the good will and admiration of the buckskin-clad youth.

Indeed, it had not been difficult for the lawyer to produce by innuendo the impression that it was largely to him that Eric owed his altered relation to this charming group of cultivated city folk. In suggesting this he also essayed a subtle flattery. He had spent his vacations in the open and considered himself highly skilled in woodcraft. Yet he pretended to sit at the feet of Eric in such matters. These summer excursions of his had taught him, he made it plain to Eric, to understand and to admire the ways of the forest dweller, and it was very natural, therefore, that he had wished to see the young guide accepted for what he really was, and not as a mere ignorant hireling. Grateful, finally, for the woods lore which Eric shared with him, he was glad to talk to him most instructively and entertainingly of the great world with which Eric confessed he had had no contact.

Though the two men had many conversations, the abundant leisure of the life enabled Heathcote to spend still longer hours with Clara. Eric, on the other hand, if he did not avoid her, at least made no effort to companion her. He could not forget nor cease to brood upon the strange, harsh things the girl had said to him, and as she had never expressly condoned his offenses, he was not the sort of fellow to presume upon the truce which her mother's invitation to fraternize with the family had tacitly declared between them.

To Clara, accustomed in the men who paid her court to an outward rather than an inward bearing of courtesy and good breeding, Eric's ready yielding of her was a continual irritation. She had expected him to

make amends for his outrageous behavior by an avoidance of the slightest repetition of it: but this was very far from meaning that he should seem indifferent to her. She was used to being sought at every opportune moment, and though she would have resented as coarse and ridiculous any open admiration on Eric's part, she expected from him a discreet admiration evinced by a desire to see and talk with her whenever he possibly could. That she had forbidden him to do so was a circumstance of but slight extenuation. Besides, that was days ago! That he interested her peculiarly, that her resentment of his inattention was largely disappointment, she had not yet discovered.

The situation was entirely satisfactory to Heathcote. He enjoyed the lion's share of the society of James M. Heathering's daughter at the same time that he was gaining from young Straive the confidence necessary to finish a piece of business which was of the utmost importance to Clara's father.

Heathering surprised them by coming unannounced to the breakfast table, creating quite a hubbub from the children. As it subsided Mrs. Heathering introduced Eric to her husband, who greeted the stalwart youth quite affably, and breakfast was served.

"Where are the people you were going to bring, father?" asked Clara, and Sylvia and Roswell echoed the demand.

"Not yet, children," he replied with a smile. "The doctors have ordered complete rest for all of us. Besides, you have two very fit-looking companions here." He looked first at Heathcote and then let his eye rest upon Eric.

"It seems to me you mentioned Mr. Straive in one of your letters, Estelle," said the man whose greatness in the fields of finance and industry was unknown to Eric, who saw in him only the father of these delightful young people.

"Yes, indeed," said Mrs. Heathering, "Mr. Straive is guiding us down the lakes —entirely as a friend. Aren't we fortunate? He's lived up here all his life, you see."

"Very interesting," said Heathering admiringly. "You've got to tell me all about this wild country, Mr. Straive—after I look about a little."

"All right," consented Eric offhandedly. Quite unimpressed, he made an excellent breakfast.

"Get rid of him for a while," Heathering told his wife after the meal was over. A moment later, she cornered Clara, who was shouldering a green paddle.

"Take your barbarian with you, instead of Heathcote," she directed.

"Humph," said Clara, tossing her head. Nevertheless, she managed to do it very neatly. "Come on, Mr. Straive," she called. "I've been deserted."

Eric went for another paddle. When he returned, Clara was in the bow. He held the canoe for the other children, who were not slow to accept the silent invitation. It had not occurred to Eric that the elder sister might prefer to leave the youngsters on the bank. Clara frowned—inwardly.

"Have a cigar, Heathcote," said Heathering. They had seated themselves on a log, out of sight and hearing. "Now you're going to have more time in one interview than I've ever been able to spare you before. Tell me all the facts about this Straive affair, for I'm going to give it personal attention from now on till it's out of the way."

Opportunity was surely at the door of Richard H. Heathcote. He had felt its gentle tickling under his fifth rib when he was alone with Clara, and now he heard it knocking farther up, where he housed his ambition. For several days he had rehearsed this statement:

"Elliott Straive, as I've learned since, was an educated man of some little means, who came up here from the United States about twenty years ago with his infant son and became a recluse. He got together a considerable tract of land, the larger part of which had been granted to a timber enterprise, long defunct. It was useless for agriculture, and had only a remote future value for timber. He seems to have wanted to be let alone, and few white men ever saw him. As nearly as I can learn, he made one or two trips to Winnipeg to see his man of affairs, Foster R. Baker, whose name you may have noticed in the abstracts. He had means enough to live, apparently, for he made no effort to derive any revenue from the land. Whether he gradually drew what funds he had or lived on an income, I've not been able to learn. Baker knows, of course, but I did not care to have him pumped. He is reported to me to be a keen, highly connected lawyer, with a small but very substantial clientele. An elderly man, I believe —barrister at law, of course.

"The titles are sound—only two transfers

—and no chance to cloud them in any way. A will, dated ten years ago and filed after Straive's death last fall, left everything to the son, Eric, and appointed Baker executor without bonds. You already know how I came to go personally up there. The details of the interview, however, are important:

"I reached Straive Lake, where the father and son lived—or, rather, existed—in the early afternoon. We camped out of sight of the log houses, and though I had a young man from the office with me, I thought it best to leave him behind with the Indian canoeists and to go alone—informally, you know. These old solitaries are very suspicious.

"He was quite different from the man I expected to see. The boy, by the way, was off hunting or something. Elliott Straive was in bed, ill and weak, but quite master of himself and a most perfect gentleman. A man of the world in every way—language, inflection, manners. Only out of practice: a kind of hesitation—an old pianist, picking up the notes haltingly.

"I made the explanation that the land men had made to all the others—a right of way for a timber enterprise on the extreme western side of his lands, out of the way entirely of his beaten paths. I had studied over the topography, of course. He declined at first—was quite obdurate about it in a very courteous way. But he finally gave me a letter to his attorney, Baker, suggesting that if, in Baker's judgment, a worthy enterprise—that was his phraseology—was likely to be hampered for lack of it, Baker might, if he saw no objection to it, prepare the necessary easement. He was rather uncomfortable, and I left—dissatisfied, of course."

Heathcote looked up and met Heathering's questioning "And?"

"And later," continued the lawyer very smoothly, "I returned and, finding him quite comfortable again, I gave him a very earnest talk, making it quite frank and confidential, apparently, though in reality telling him nothing—nothing true, that is. I explained that it was an urgent matter, and that the delay that might occur before the instrument could finally be executed would entail a great loss to my principals. I showed him again the form I had prepared, and gave him my word that, should any objection be made by his attorney either to the form or the substance of the agreement, we would give his attorney a separate agreement making the desired correction. That seemed at last to satisfy him. At all events he signed it. It was almost dark. I thanked him and left. There was nobody about the place but an old Indian woman, as I understood, but I didn't even see her. And I knew that in the very unlikely event of the agreement being needed, we could easily have the signature verified. I didn't even witness it myself, though, of course, I can do so at any time. But being myself virtually the adverse party, my acknowledgment of the execution would be least valuable. A few months later I learned that Elliott Straive had died shortly after I left."

"Let me see them," said Heathering, and he looked thoughtfully at Heathcote as the latter drew two papers from his breast pocket and handed them to the elder man. Heathering read them and handed them back with no comment.

"Well, on sounding young Straive, I decided I'd better not risk springing them on him. It required an older head than mine. The way you had put the matter, it was evidently too important for me to take the responsibility of an effort which, if it failed, might arouse suspicions and ambitions which would give you no end of trouble and expense."

And Heathcote finished his narrative by repeating, almost word for word—with sundry embellishments, however—his first and only conversation with Eric on the subject of the land that his father had loved and which was now his own.

"Well, all that we need, then, is proof that the signature is genuine," summed Heathering.

"Yes," agreed Heathcote. "That, or the admission of young Straive or his solicitor that it is genuine. If they don't admit it rather strict proof is essential, the man being dead. A disinterested witness would be sufficient, but I am hardly that. Failing such a witness, and in the event of a contest, we should have to bring experts to prove the signature is really Elliott Straive's signature."

"Well," judged Heathering carefully, "viewing your procedure last October in the light of the circumstances at the time, it seems to me you did all I could have expected. In fact, you were commendably persistent," added Heathering sententiously. "Also your handling of young Straive was—

discreet. You're very much on your job, Heathcote."

"Thank you, Mr. Heathering." Heathcote strove to veil the depth of his satisfaction. "And what shall we do now?"

Heathering lit a fresh cigar. "Nothing here. That young elk is too ignorant and sentimental. He's got to be prepared. So, Baker first. He's likely to decline and put it up to young Straive finally, but—Baker first!"

"We have already," smiled Heathcote.

"How?" asked Heathering, frowning.

"Preliminarily only. Getting rounded up all sources of influence and pressure. Of course, we'll not show him the photographic copy of the right-of-way contract till you say so."

"Have Wells direct the handling of it down there, and *don't* show Baker the letter!"

"I should say not," agreed Heathcote. "He'd certainly suspect one or the other."

"Any one would," said Heathering as they walked away; and Heathcote pondered this comment for many days thereafter.

Heathering sauntered about his camp respectfully attended, now by an engineer, now by Mainhall. But his eye was on a canoe with a splash or two of color in it, and when he saw the same colors on the shore above the camp he sent a maid to tell his eldest daughter to come to his tent.

There was a big chair there and he sat in it and surveyed her sunburned face and arms with satisfaction. They were as like each other in feature and expression as two peas—a small and a large one. He winked his eye and beckoned to her, and at that signal she bounced upon his knee and stroked his dark, graying hair.

"I've a job for you, puss cat," he said. "A very congenial one, I'm quite sure."

"Oh, I'd love it," cried Clara, who fancied she had a taste for finance.

"No doubt," he said dryly, "and I wish it were harder, for you lead too easy a life. I want you to be particularly nice to that barbarian, as you call him." Clara sat up and took notice.

"Want him for a son-in-law?" she asked ironically.

"Well, hardly that, my dear," replied her father decidedly, "though I've seen even worse mincing around you." He looked up at her gravely. "Listen to what I say, and then—forget I said it. But act on it. On that young man's good will to do a perfectly legitimate thing—a thing which it's his duty to do anyhow, depends the honor and interests of myself and my associates."

Clara looked her father very understandingly in the eye.

"That fellow," she declared, doubling her small brown fist, "doesn't seem to care a teeny bit about me. You watch me make him."

CHAPTER X.

CLARA SITS INTO THE GAME.

Heathering did. With what inner qualms, who shall say? Just his weather eye he kept on them. For though nominally on a vacation, he was in reality attending to business. Some of the treadles of his mill he had brought with him. Others came—another secretary, for instance, who arrived next day with a typewriter. The launch had been portaged to Tutowa Lake and, for rapid transit to Minsington, another launch was brought up from Deep Water Lake and moored securely at the Big Sky Lake end of the portage. Quick communication southward with the world was thus maintained. Nor was this the only means of contact with it. Quite as important, if the truth were known, was the water route northwestward to the big engineers' camp in the field. By some process of silent coördination, no sooner had Heathering reached his family camp than Hammond arrived and held converse with him in Heathering's isolated tent—he had two. And thereafter no alternative day passed without that engineer or one of his assistants appearing with a report. Thus was Heathering advised of developments in advance, even of St. Paul, Milwaukee, and Chicago.

Yet secrecy was maintained. If an axman or a riverman of the private camp engaged this messenger in talk, the messenger had brought greetings from a party of timber cruisers—timber, and timber only, being apparently the business of the Heathering interests in the North Woods. This tallied with the story the right-of-way agents had told the year before, and as it was a district inhabited by almost no intelligent white men, the ruse was not likely to be pricked until it had served its cautious purpose.

The camp was now in Eric's own domain. The land and the water, the very sky above them, were his. Northward and eastward

the splendid miles of his heritage stretched away in dark forest, glamouring lake and sparkling, foamy river. He was elated with the pride of it, though he made no boast to Clara. For it was, after all, a modest possession in comparison with the wealth and power implied in the almost sumptuous way of living in the woods of this multimillionaire family—an entourage combining an incredibly expensive equipment, the most lavish food supplies, and a retinue of servants and helpers of all sorts. The nightly illumination of the camp, effected by a portable electric plant, seemed but a final obedience to the conjuring wand of Artifice waved by wealth in the heart of the natural world.

Eric saw it from a hillock on the other side of the lake—a fairyland village that three times had risen on gossamer wings, wafted itself over the lakes, and fluttered down again like a cluster of butterflies answering only the caprice of their summer hearts.

By his side sat the daughter of the genius of magic that made and moved it, well representing that beauty and charm and high intelligence which Eric knew had ever been chosen by the key-bearers of the earth's treasure vaults with which to weave into themselves a never-ceasing heredity of dominance and power. Her lips caressed a spear of grass, her hand stirred bits of shell from the ancient inland lake beach on which they sat. It had become a favorite spot of theirs.

"A penny for your thoughts, Eric," she offered. It was the first time she had called him by his first name, and his tranquil eyes lighted.

"Thank you for the 'Eric,'" he said. "It makes me feel at home to hear that again. Not ten human beings before I came here, had ever called me Straive or Mr. Straive. Why do you say 'Eric' now?"

"Oh, I'm getting to know you better," she replied. "And you are not much older than I am—are you?"

He told her he was twenty-two.

"And I'm nearly twenty. You don't object to 'Eric?'"

He laughed quietly. "I like it. I've been missing a great deal."

"What?"

"Youngsters like you and me, and the still younger ones, too. I hardly realized it till I came here. Whenever you were near me and yet away from me with Mr. Heathcote I felt lonely and sad."

She looked away and said: "You needn't have walked off every time he came near me. You yielded your place to him every chance you got."

Eric was surprised. He thought a moment. "No, I didn't yield you to him, though I ought to like him and want to yield you to him, for he's been most kind and friendly to me. What I did was yield *him* to *you.*"

She looked at Eric with an equal surprise. It was a meaningful distinction.

"That was considerate of you," she said sincerely. That consideration was perhaps due her, both as woman and as social superior; none the less it merited acknowledgment.

"That was what I wanted it to be. It was common sense that Mr. Heathcote was better company for you. You seemed to know him so well, and you are both of the same class you described to me. I can see that. And, anyhow, he's a very entertaining person, with a wonderful mind filled up with all kinds of knowledge and wisdom of the world that I know nothing about."

"And so you yielded *him* to *me,*" said Clara. The subject being a pleasant one, she decided to draw him out. "You found it easy, I suppose."

"Very hard," replied Eric. "It was exactly like giving up a nice dinner to some one, when you're very, very hungry."

"I was the dinner. Dear, dear, would you have eaten me?"

Eric looked at her and smiled. "I'm not so sure I wouldn't have felt like it—or something like that." He was honestly and openly interrogating his emotions.

"You're so"—a most engaging and affectionate friendliness looked out of his happy eyes—"sweet," he said, as if he, of all the race of men, had found this out of young women. From Eric, somehow, it was anything but banal.

"Thank you."

"But just to take you in my arms, and move my lips over your face and lovely neck—which I suppose is as near as one could come to eating a beautiful woman—that wouldn't be——"

Clara turned pink.

"And I couldn't even do that," he added thoughtfully, "without——"

"Why not?" asked Clara, containing herself for the moment in order to probe this unexpected contradiction.

"It would do no good," he decided with profound conviction. "For the better part of you is within, I am sure of that, and I could not take you to me within; not until you had admitted me to dwell within you and you within me."

Eric gazed through the charming vision of her to the eternal verities.

Her color fled to paleness. How could she be angry with this boy. He was *not* a barbarian. He was a primitive—and swaying to the breeze of a pristine yet subtile poetry.

"Do you know you are making love to me?" she asked gently.

His brow drew. "I do not quite understand you."

"Don't you read novels—stories?"

"No," he replied. "I know what you mean. Father had a great deal to say of them at various times. There were a few he left me to read. The rest he had burned. In those I saw I don't think there was much of what you mean. Of course, I know of love and marriage and children. I've studied sciences of many sorts."

"Sciences? Oh, eugenics?"

"Yes, a little of that, too."

"But you know nothing of making love?"

"No," he admitted.

She looked at him roguishly. "You'd certainly make an apt pupil. In the cities they being at six. They're past masters at sixteen, and at your age it bores them to extinction."

Eric smiled vaguely. She knew he did not comprehend her in the least. But though he was completely unsophisticated, he was also safe—a very different thing, as she was quite aware. She had always been a little afraid of a repetition of his bearlike treatment of her at their first strange meeting. For though he had since been modest and considerate, she had not been able to rely on this to save her from his utter ignorance of custom, his impulsive yielding to desire. But now she knew there was no danger. Though relapsed to the barbaric in the physical life he had led, he was of generations of gentlemen and had the instinct that the female is first to be won, and won through the best of her.

In the security of that comprehension of him she put her hand confidingly on his sleeve.

"You're a nice boy," she said, "and I'll never, never be afraid of you again."

"I hope not." And Eric assured her that she needn't be afraid of any one else, either, when he was around.

"How nice to have so capable a bodyguard," she owned. "You're quite big, and though you move with very deliberate ease, I've noticed that you have an amazing quickness when you wish. Very well, you shall be my Sir Knight!"

It was more fun than she had thought—making the young man like her. Though it was proving a trifle too easy for her mettle. But punishing him for his past crimes was another matter. No, she couldn't do that. For she knew now that he had been conscious of no offense. So she would do nothing but—just enjoy to the full his naïve simplicity.

"And where are you going to get your lance and sword?" she asked gravely.

"That's just the sort of protector I could be to you and no more," Eric laughed. "And, of course, I'd have nothing to do. The things you'd really need protection from I'd never know, for how could I understand what anything or anybody meant?"

"Why not?"

"Think what causes I have for bewilderment already, just in regard to myself. There in the woods that evening I tried to protect you from something you seemed terrified at. First you struggle, then you lie content with closed eyes. Then you struggle again. You are angry and go. Then I take you back toward where you belong, and you walk peacefully and talk to me. We speak about the very thing. You question me, I answer you, and you become furious. Then I am asked to come to your camp as a guide. I come; I am friendly, and yet you resent my presence. Then as I am adjusting myself to this, along comes Mr. Heathcote and tells me you really want me. I am asked to eat my meals at your table, and you all talk to me—sometimes. But I know that you haven't really cared to. And you yourself had never forgiven me for whatever it was I had done. Yet I am encouraged to linger and mingle with you all. And, finally, you actually resented my giving place to Mr. Heathcote, though I knew you disliked my company and liked his. Then, strangest of all, these last few days you are with me nearly all the time. Can you not understand, then, my being puzzled at it all and feeling that you are all not honest and truthful?"

"Why, Eric, you are very rude."

"I'm sorry, but isn't it so?"

"Am I not truthful and honest?"

"Lately, yes; especially to-day. I like it very much."

"Well—Mr. Heathcote is busy with my father. Doesn't that account for—my being so much with you instead of with him?"

"No, there are the children for you to be with, or your mother, or even Mr. Mainhall."

Clara shuddered. "Why, Mr. Mainhall is only a——"

"You avoided me as much as you politely could. Now it is not so. You conceal. You all conceal. You are all liars in your acts, if not in your words."

She rose, but not in wrath. "You babe in the woods," she called him. "Where is your little twin, I wonder. *I'm* certainly not innocent enough for the part."

He rose, too. "You draw me out to tell you what is in my mind, but you do not tell me what is in yours. You make me no return. You give me no reply." His earnest gray eyes challenged her brown ones.

"Answer me," he said resolutely.

"It would be so nice," she soliloquized, "to commune thus, as babes in the woods. But how could we? I'm a little wolf cat and you're a lamb, and I'd just naturally eat you up."

He looked incredulous.

"It isn't all allegory. Or, at least, even if it's figurative it's true. Our lives——" The little novelty chaser, true to type, bethought herself of something "our lives" suggested. "I know!" She clasped her hands decidingly. "We'll explain it to each other—your mystery to me, Baby Eric, and mine to you. We'll tell what our lives have been. Of course, you'll tell me first." Of course! That was a foregone conclusion.

"That would help, perhaps," the babe in the woods reflected.

"And by way of beginning—who are you, anyhow, you most ingenuous youth?"

CHAPTER XI.

AN EXCHANGE OF MEMOIRS.

"There isn't much to tell," said Eric, in his modest way. They had seated themselves again quite confidentially. "But what there is will seem very strange to you.

"My father brought me up here when I was just past babyhood, and got an Indian couple to live with us, the woman to cook and take care of me when father was off at work or hunting, the man to help him. Father was a queer man. I've learned that he was. But, of course, he seemed natural enough to me. He was an embittered man, though more at himself than at the world. And he had a great grief—my mother."

"She was——"

"Dead, of course. And before her death something had occurred which caused it, he seems to have thought, and which, added to many other things in his life before, made him give it all up and begin again."

"Begin again? Up here?"

"Begin with himself—and me. He had the land—this wide land——" Eric waved his arms over it.

"Are we on your land, here?"

"Yes," said Eric reverently, "the land of my father is all about us."

"In—*deed?*" she murmured slowly.

"And he built a fine house. *I* think it fine. Perhaps you shall see it. I hope so. And we had books and tools and everything. And he taught me all I know—he and John Skimperimish."

"And who is John Skim——" She balked at the awful name.

"My uncle, the Indian."

"Your unc—oh, go on!"

"He taught me, father did, just as he taught himself—not to be afraid."

"Of what?"

"Of anything or anybody," said Eric.

"Not even God!"

"Him least of all. And always to speak the truth, when one speaks at all."

"Oh, how *awful!*" said the girl from a great city.

"How do you mean—awful?"

"I'll tell you later. But how did he teach you these things?"

"In every way he possibly could. We lived in some ways like Indians. We starved—on purpose. We stood great fatigue and bodily pain and measured ourselves with the creatures of the wild. I paddled noiselessly behind swimming bull moose, sprang on their backs and rode them in the water. I leaped to the lake from high places. We looked both life and death straight in the eye, as nearly as we could, and were happy. It took years for him. Me? Oh, I was bred to it, you might say, and it was a game. I've usually liked it—till you came."

She was round-eyed. "And now?"

"I fear—at least I'm afraid. No, I apprehend—father preferred that word. I apprehend, always, your anger or pain at what I say, and it makes me want to——"

"Fib, evade, give a politic, tactful answer?"

"Yes—lie!" asserted Eric.

"Oh!"

"Father said all those soft phrases were the coinage of hell! That, after all, they meant but the one thing—lie!"

Clara's lips were apart. And something almost beyond herself, or, at least, from very deep within, made her clap her hands and without smiling say "Good!" After a moment she asked, watching him closely: "And do you never lie?"

"Of course not."

"And are you never afraid?"

"Not yet."

"And if you ever are?"

"Father said 'You had better be dead!'"

"And you believe it?"

"Yes."

"Parrotlike, Eric?"

"No; father's training was too thorough for that. He brought to our courage class many books of science and art and history, and many, many philosophies. And I believe."

"Have you told all this before?"

"Never."

"Say, Eric——" She broke the little silence that followed. "You're a most distinguished young man, though only you and I know it. For I'm sure you're the only person like you in the world. There may have been some in old-fashioned novels—impossible creatures. I'd say you were likewise impossible, only——"

She gravely poked him here and there with her dainty finger. "Only you're a really and truly person, aren't you? Not stuffed or anything? Really alive!"

"And never more so than when I'm with you," Eric assured her.

"And yet," pursued Clara, "you don't correspond in the least to the young man that is called 'a live one.' It's horrid slang, but we girls fairly revel in horrid slang, especially if it pertains to a lower sphere of life. But that's the least of our transgressions, as I'm sure you'll consider them when I tell you how I've been reared." She settled herself close to him, and quite comfortably.

"It will probably be as queer to you as yours was to me. I'll try to sketch it for you, though I can't do it in your terse and graphic way."

She closed her eyes a moment.

"I can see at the beginning—white! Beds and washstands and nurses' aprons and caps and our clothes. Everything was clean and white and beautiful, but I didn't know it, for I had nothing to compare it with. Then I can see the big house, darkly beautiful, and the big dining room where strange people sat. I peeked through the keyhole, and the shocked butler carried me upstairs to my nurse.

"Then there was a governess whom I disliked. In fact, I disliked nearly everything. I still do, Eric—at least, a lot of things. I can just remember horses, before they 'went out,' bob-tailed and shiny, with shiny harness and shiny coachmen and footmen. We were driven in the park every day—Sylvia was just born, I guess, then. I was very much interested in clothes already, and used to scream for what I wanted to wear. I didn't see a great deal of mother."

"What!" exclaimed Eric, whose heart had ever yearned for that divinity.

"No, indeed. She doesn't come into the picture at all, scarcely, until about the time the governess—or the next—comes into it. Then there were visits and other children. We used to pay calls, and try to be dignified and prim and proud till we were bored, and then we'd scrap and call names we heard the servants use, and do some deviltry and tear our clothes, perhaps, and be glad—*glad* that there was something to be got out of life anyhow! That must have been it," she reflected.

"Then school came, and I began to meet more children. I was ten and eleven and then twelve, and I learned fast. Learned to inquire who the parents were of the other girls, where they lived and how rich they were, and if their mothers entertained a great deal like mine did. For I'd begun to learn that I was *Miss* Heathering, whose father's name was often spoken in awe. And I wore my hair up high and we began to have flirtations and read forbidden books and eat indigestible things. It was a very select school, Eric. So select that unless your father was atrociously rich or came of so old a family that its pedigree was an equivalent, you weren't admitted.

"Mother took me shopping, occasionally, in her limousine. They were gorgeous af-

fairs, then, made of wood but wonderfully varnished and ornamented. From about fourteen I went to dancing school and boy-and-girl parties, where they aped the big folks very successfully, and at sixteen—you see that's only three years ago—I had regular engagements just like mother—parties and dinners and luncheons and teas—all in between school, of course. I had had a maid since—oh, I can't remember.

"I wasn't a member of mother's crowd yet, you know. I had my own set, which consisted of the young folks of her set, mostly, though there were a lot of my girl friends and their friends that mother didn't know. But you can trust her for knowing who they were! And if she said 'No' to a certain name, no it was. It mattered not how perfectly lovely the girl or boy might be.

"I wore low necks when I was about sixteen and everything else I could browbeat mother into letting me wear. But I'll say the other girls were worse than I. Lately, though, I've gone the other way, and mother says I'm losing interest in my social career.

"You must know, youth of the simple, sylvan life, that the Heatherings are doubly blessed. They have blood *and* money, which is rather unusual. Therefore, we are *most* desirable as social connections. We are originally of New York which, with London as an elder twin, is a social center of the English-speaking world; and we spend nearly half the season in New York.

"The season, Eric, darling," she explained, "is *in* the winter, but it doesn't mean the winter season. It's the indoor social function time. The big affairs are all in the season—except love affairs. They know no season. And, by the way, all males make love to me—young men, old men, middle-aged men—in season and out. They began when I was sixteen—fourteen—ten—— Oh, Lord, I don't know when it began. Sometimes it's subtle love they make and sometimes—anything but subtle. I don't tolerate much of the common or garden variety, though. And even women make love to me—vicariously for their sons or brothers. It's—nauseous. And the talk of all of us? As clever as we can make it, but just chatter. And the things we say! Well, I don't, so much; but I have to hear it; you're old-fashioned and a hypocrite if you don't. Say, Eric, I just couldn't tell you what they talk about, and the allusions! To pour it in your innocent ears? Why, I wouldn't corrupt you for the world!

"You've always been alone or with your father. I've almost never been alone, not even with my father or mother, except when mother wants to give me a dressing down. Then we're due for a chummy little tête-à-tête for a few minutes. But it's usually anything but pleasant. And I hardly ever see anything of Sylvia and Roswell. Sylvia's got her own set now, and is going my old pace, and Roswell, too, in his romping way. I'm really getting acquainted with my brother and sister up here.

"Yes, there's always people. And they're always dressed—dressed for morning, dressed for luncheon, dressed for whatever you're doing in the afternoon—and the way you're dressed for that—tennis or motoring or something—is usually not quite right for tea. Oh, if I could tell you about teas, Eric! So you dress again. And you invariably dress for dinner. Only you do it by undressing! Yes, I assure you. If you could only see me in a dinner gown!"

She threw back her head and laughed. "Eric, you'd take off your coat and wrap it hurriedly round me. I'm sure you would, for you look as modest as a—I wish I could say 'girl.' As a—oh, well, just modest!

"Now, my dear child, think if you can of truth and courage in that swirling vortex of artificial life that I've tried to give you just a bare, inadequate glimpse of. Our idea of courage is certain people's pertinacious nerve in striving to get invited here or there. And as for the truth, I think I only hear it when some one feels so perfectly nasty that she flings it at you to hurt you or make you angry. Doubtless I've heard the truth from a man many times, but I've had absolutely no means of recognizing it—for sure. They all love me, as I told you, married and unmarried, callow and mature; and even some of the eligibles probably really do—in their way! But, you see, James M. is a *most* desirable papa-in-law, and Estelle J., as a mother-in-law, would make an exceedingly valuable social ally. And little Clara learned all this at the mature age of nine! Oh, it's a great life, if you don't weaken. Still, I suppose it's as good as any other. Do you think I'm beautiful?" she asked irrelevantly.

"The most beautiful living thing I've ever seen," replied Eric, gravely appraising her. "But I've seen few young white women, so

I can't compare you to other creatures of your kind. I can only compare you to animals. You come out well in that comparison."

Clara shrieked—till moisture came to her eyes, and she had put her hand on his arm and patted it softly.

"If I only had *you*—say at a garden party at the La Salle Murray's, and cut you in on the airy persiflage, you'd be a riot, Eric. And I'd become something more than *the* Miss Heathering. It would be the Miss Heathering who sponsored the début of Mr. Eric Straive, truth-teller extraordinary to all who may apply." Then her face sobered; her eyes grew stern. "But I'd back you," she asserted, "I'd wager a dinner that you'd get away with it. But I'd be afraid——"

"You mustn't say that. Of what?"

"That you'd get angry and spring at somebody, you big panther, you!"

"I don't think so," judged Eric. "Surely at nothing any one *said* to me. But why *don't* they tell the truth? What do you really mean?"

"Why, Eric, it's so—disagreeable. So—unclothed, as it were! And how can you accomplish your purposes—favor, pleasure, business, anything—with the truth? Especially when no one else tells it, which would leave you quite in the hands of the other person. You put your cards on the table—to take a simile from bridge—while your opponent, your pretended lover, or your business associate, keeps his carefully concealed in his sleeve. What a chance you'd have!"

The little worldling chuckled happily.

"And that has been your life," said Eric musingly.

"I know what you're thinking of," divined Clara. "That it's been very narrow, just as narrow in its intimate contacts as yours has been, and it's so. I've known that, lately, and what do you suppose I did to get even? Never breathe it," she whispered. "I've been running off when mother didn't know it—all alone and seeing things; mostly poor and dirty people. But you? You're neither poor nor dirty. So you're absolutely a new experience to me.

"And, of course——" She patted his hand, and noted his heightened color as she did it, "I *like* new experiences!"

Rather a diverting time of it, Clara was having. But her pleasure knew alloy: A still small voice was calling her a callous vamp.

Suddenly something louder called through the drowsing woods. It was the gong, summoning them to supper.

CHAPTER XII.

A LETTER FROM BAKER.

A knock came on the pole of Eric's tent while he was "washing up."

"Come," he called.

"A letter for you, Mr. Straive," said Heathering's secretary, entering. "In our mail, which has just arrived."

Eric did not know that the post trader at Minsington was aware that he was here. But Heathcote had seen to that. It was the third letter that Eric had ever received, and he opened it carefully with his sheath knife. Typed on the office stationery of Foster R. Baker, Barrister-at-law, it read as follows:

WINNIPEG, June 27, 1917.

MR. ERIC STRAIVE, Straive Lake, via Minsington, Kitt.

MY DEAR MR. STRAIVE: I have been shown a right-of-way agreement, creating certain easements upon and over your lands, purported to have been executed by your father just prior to his death. Although this instrument is unwitnessed, I am asked to accept it, on your behalf, as valid, and to waive any objection to its due recording.

I have thought it best to see you before giving my consent. Suppose you come down here immediately you receive this? There are other matters as well that I ought to discuss with you.

Very sincerely,

FOSTER R. BAKER.

Eric studied this letter over carefully and then thrust it into his pocket, combed his hair, and went to supper.

They made a very gay party now. The woods air had given them a remarkable appetite, the young folks were given rein, and good nature and freedom from constraint steadily gained headway. Heathering himself was, perhaps, an exception. It would take many more vacation days than the four that had already passed to divert his mind from its servitude to "affairs."

As he ate his soup, he studied Eric and noted his abstraction. He had been exceedingly sociable with that young man, avoiding, however, any extended conversations with him, in order that he might be the more impressive should the need arise. Heathcote, too, had remained most kind and self-eliminating! Late evenings, however, after Eric had gone—for he retired early and rose early, to walk in the woods before

breakfast—the young lawyer had sought to strengthen the impression he believed he had made upon Clara since his arrival in the camp.

A little paddle on the glassy waters of the lake, the moonlight piercing its depths with silvery daggers, gave him, indeed, a most romantic setting for the spell he endeavored to weave about her. At first their favorite topic had been ignorant, uncouth Eric, and Heathcote's wit had amused her greatly. Latterly, however, Clara had been less willing to discuss him and Heathcote, quick to note the change—and to regard it with disfavor—had talked of other things.

"What's on your mind, Mr. Straive?" inquired Heathering genially. "You're particularly quiet this evening."

"I've had a letter from our solicitor at Winnipeg," Eric informed him. "He wants to see me at once. And if you will not be moving for a few days, and don't need me, I think I'd better go to-morrow morning on the launch."

"By all means, my boy," consented Heathering. "And if you want any advise before going, Heathcote here, who is a very able lawyer, you know, will be glad to give it, I've no doubt. In Chicago he's a rather expensive consultant. But up here he's only your friend."

"Oh, thank you, both of you," responded Eric, looking appreciatively at Heathcote, who was smiling at him. "I'll think it over."

Clara glanced quickly from Eric to Heathcote and then to her father. On his unfathomable face, with its calm and kindly expression of command, her eyes rested lightly but very steadily. Mrs. Heathering was covertly amused—a little!

The financier and the junior partner of his firm of personal counsel lingered at the table over their cigars.

"What do you make of this letter?" asked Heathering.

"That Baker is uncertain what he ought to do. However, that's not altogether from sizing up the young man's face. I've a letter from the agent who saw Baker. He says he did not openly question the instrument in any way. He was noncommittal; told them he'd give them an answer in several days. They used the patriotic motive on him, too, from four different quarters—spruce for airplanes, for consistency's sake, though he'll probably learn, if he makes the right investigations, that it's iron—the need of which, however, is just as great, I suppose. Shall we talk to Straive before he goes?"

"Um—yes, I think so. He'll soon learn we're interested and will think it queer if we don't. And if he don't learn we're interested, our gaining of his regard and loyalty will have been useless to us. Get him in."

Heathcote found him telling the youngsters wolf stories, with Mrs. Heathering apathetically looking on, and Clara a silent listener. When Heathcote carried Eric away her eyes followed them till the two men disappeared.

Heathering asked Eric about the country northward, saying that they might move again, to be nearer the timber cruising. He also inquired as to the whereabouts of Eric's home. In fact, he was quite sociable and friendly. Then he said:

"I shouldn't wonder if that place of yours is the same that we hear of in reports that Mr. Heathcote has received. Have you happened to mention, Heathcote, that clients of yours are interested in resources up here?"

"I think I did," replied Heathcote quite casually.

"You said," reminded Eric, whose memory was photographic, "some friends of yours were thinking of building a road through the country. Are they the ones, do you suppose, who wanted some rights over our land?"

"Must be," replied Heathcote. "The lands are handled in Winnipeg by a man named Baker."

"He's our solicitor," exclaimed Eric. "Isn't that a coincidence?"

"Is there any difficulty?" asked Heathering, with a polite interest that Eric felt to be quite flattering.

"Some little agreement that was not—witnessed, he called it."

"Whatever you can do to smooth the way of these people," said Heathering, "we shall appreciate. In fact, a company in which I am interested is very directly concerned. It is doing a very necessary public work."

Eric was about to reply with offhand generosity, but inculcated caution restrained him. "You're all very kind, and I should be kind to you. And I will. But I don't know anything about this. Father relied on Mr. Baker, who was for years his personal friend. So I shall rely upon him, too."

"If we can do anything for you, wire my firm in Chicago," suggested Heathcote. "I'll write them that you are Mr. Heathering's guest here."

"Oh, thank you," replied Eric gratefully, and he left to bid the others good night.

CHAPTER XIII.

CLARA IS CONTRITE.

When he was gone, Clara strolled into her father's tent, and found Heathcote just leaving. She caught the latter's words: "I think he'll do it now. If not, we'll get it, anyhow. It'll take longer, that's all."

"Father," she asked, when they were alone, "what's it all about, with Mr. Straive?"

Heathering patted her hand. "I told you all you needed to know," he said. "And, by the way, I should judge you had succeeded in making him like you. Rather easy for my pretty little girl, hey?"

"He likes me," said Clara briefly. "I had no business to influence him."

Her father frowned. "It is a perfectly legitimate thing that we wish him to do, as I told you; and one that he ought to do, anyway. But being an ignorant young woodsman, and very sentimental concerning his father, it was well to gain his good will."

"Excuse me for seeming to question your course, father; but I hate to use my——"

"Stuff!" said Heathering. "Run away and play." And he kissed her and turned to his papers as he heard his secretary's step.

Clara ran away and played—her own game. If this they wanted Eric to do was so right—what could it be, she wondered? —Eric could be trusted to do it without fear or favor. Her father did not know that, but *she* did.

From the wood just back of his tent she called him softly, and he came, fully dressed. His ears were also eyes to Eric, and in a moment he was by her side in the deep dusk.

"Take me on the lake. I want to talk to you," she invited. Moored to the shore near his tent was a canoe, and they shoved off.

"The lake is the best place," she said as they faced each other, kneeling, "because you can't go away from me in disgust until I've finished what I have to say to you. Though, of course, you *could* throw me overboard!"

Eric met this afterthought with a quiet, happy laugh.

"I've been a liar," she began in a steady voice. "Like the rest of my kind that I told you about to-day. I've flirted with you."

"Flirted? Flirted?" said Eric, trying the word. "Oh, yes, what you called making love by a man or woman without meaning it. *No!*" It surely didn't fit. "You were kind and companionlike; very sweet and comradely, and we had a splendid time; but how flirt?"

"Why I've been spending my time with you every day, knowing you were thinking nice things about me, and liking me more and more, and I just did it because—well, you see you acted for a while as if you didn't care. And we girls want every nice young man to care."

"Why?" he asked.

"Oh, my dear, our vanity! And it's the game—the universal game of women with men and men with women."

Eric had stopped paddling. "You wanted me to care for you? Love you, you mean?"

"Not care for me so much as that, perhaps—though some do."

"And then what?"

"Oh, that would make you smart for your daring to be indifferent enough to let Mr. Heathcote take me away from you."

"But I wasn't."

She was kneeling close to him, and her hand went to him impulsively.

"No, I know now. You explained it, and so straightforwardly and simply—that's one reason I had to confess."

"Confess that you played a part? Sat close to me and called me Eric, and got me to talk about my father and my early life —and all to make me smart, to hurt me afterward?"

"Something like that."

"Oh!" It was like a cry of pain, and it went straight to her warm little heart and made her wince.

"But, Eric, you made me very angry that first time we met." She had not meant ever to tell him this, but she needed all the extenuation she could find.

"Because I—'hugged' you, as you called it?"

Her troubled eyes twinkled momentarily.

"No, goose. A girl doesn't mind that—from a nice boy—as long as she has an alibi. That means as long as she's sure he has

no reason to suspect that she—doesn't mind. And if he *has* reason—why, Eric, a wise boy knows that he must never, never tell the girl that he has seen that she really didn't mind it. But you showed me that you knew I liked it, in spite of my fright. And that enraged me. You tore my pride to tatters, you, an uncouth, rough creature of the wilderness—as you seemed then. That, I'm sure was the beginning. I wished to——"

"It is enough. I think I understand." He held his head up and paddled toward the shore.

"You despise me, I suppose," concluded Clara gloomily.

Eric frowned. "I can't tell. At least you've spoiled my journey—turned a sweet memory into——"

"A bitter?"

He thought hard. "Not that exactly. Into a thing I've got to think over." Then he touched her dark hair. "I couldn't be bitter over anything you're sorry for." Again his brow clouded. "I'll be more careful."

"Careful?" she repeated slowly. "Yes, careful, of course. But it's not going to make you refrain from doing anything what it's right and proper for you to do, is it, just because of wicked me? You wouldn't do that?"

"If I do—and know it," said Eric fiercely, "I'll join my father!"

"Good-by—forgive me, Eric."

He had walked with her near to the Heathering camp.

"Oh, all right," he agreed cheerfully. "I've got to ponder it all carefully. But I'll forgive you."

"But—but, Eric, don't think of *me* at all, please. It couldn't do you any good." Then she said something that was hard to say, because although courted, much-experienced Clara *knew*—yet Eric had said no word of love. "Remember what I said about classes—great wealth and social position. And, anyhow, I'm really not worth it."

"Aren't you?" Eric was a little dazed.

"So it's all settled. And *because* it's all settled—please stoop down a little, Eric."

He did so, and she lightly kissed his ear, and was gone.

Clara found her mother waiting for her.

"See here, my child," said that lady crisply. "This won't do. You're overplaying a very congenial game."

"I'm not," snapped Clara. "I've told him all about it."

"What!"

"At least I told him I'd been flirting with him and to—to forget it. *I'm* through!"

"You didn't tell him your father or I had said anything to you about——"

"Mother," said Clara in the weary, patient tones Young America chooses for the chiding of its parents, "I'm no fool. At least I'm not a disloyal one."

CHAPTER XIV.

ERIC WADES INTO THE WORLD.

Yes, he had forgiven her, Eric decided, as he lay awake and reënacted the events of that full day. For offenses of his that had been unwitting she had punished him in that most extraordinary way of which he vaguely remembered reading—she had used her charm upon him, that he might suffer later. It was a most detestable thing, and he felt that she could not wholly undo what she had done. But she was penitent—and brave! For when she made her confession of guile, she already knew that the thing he most abhorred was that untruth of which guile is a form. Yes, she had shown courage—and truth, at last. And he felt that this sort of guile was just woman's, as, indeed, she had intimated to him, while the truth was essentially hers, and all good women's, conquering in the end their instinct to allure.

But there was ache in the thought of something dear to him ended—a companionship with a young woman that had grown sweeter day by day. He slept very fitfully through the night, and morning came without banishing Clara. But it brought him an idea of a sort of which morning's gifts to the young and healthy are invariably made, of which morning itself is made. It was a very vigorous notion that dear things need not end; that, perhaps, *he* could have something to say about that. And he fell to musing again.

"This will never do," muttered Eric, and he leaped from his bed and plunged into the chilly water of the lake. He had an early breakfast with the men and was off in the launch that daily carried the mail away and brought mail and supplies back.

At Minsington he and another man got a ride on a vehicle which served as a kind of auto stage to the branch railroad; he slept at the small town where it joined the main line, and, bright and early, arrived

at Winnipeg. There he studied things, and especially people, to see how they were dressed, and after he had visited a men's furnishing store and emerged from a barber shop, he looked a thoroughly civilized Apollo and presented himself at nine o'clock at the office of Foster R. Baker. Here a young woman stenographer admiringly engaged him in conversation until at nine-fifteen the chief clerk came who, in turn, presented him to Baker when that tall, elderly, and bewhiskered barrister appeared at nine-forty-five.

"Hullo," said Baker. "Goodness, gracious me! You're two heads taller than your father and—young man, you look fit to wrestle with a panther!"

"I wagered father I could last year, if he'd clip his claws and file off his fangs."

"You're spoofing me, my boy," accused Baker.

"No—father wouldn't consent. Wrestling bouts with small bears were his limit for me."

For a while they talked of Elliott Straive, Baker studying the son with undisguised approval. He expected ignorance and found it. But he hoped for intelligence, and this he also found in a measure far beyond his expectation. So he plunged into sundry matters of the estate—some of which greatly surprised Eric—and having disposed of these, he drew out a paper and cleared his throat.

"This is the right-of-way agreement of which I wrote you," he said. "It's a photographic copy, the original of which they have, of course, retained for the present."

It was a typewritten document conferring upon the Northern Lakes and Rivers Timber Company rights-of-way for water, rail, and other transport, dockage, warehouse, and other privileges, including any necessary cutting of timber, this to be paid for at "market rates."

"Apparently you were not at home at the time this was executed," continued Baker. "Neither you nor any one else has witnessed it, and without a witness to verify its execution it will not stand against our denial of its authenticity. If we consent to it as being genuine, we can so attest and they'll file it. Or, if we don't, they'll perhaps try to make their own proof and file it, and it will be up to us to contest it if we wish. I suppose it's genuine enough. It certainly appears to be your father's signature."

"Yes, it does," corroborated Eric, "but it's strange that father signed it without consulting you."

Baker agreed with him.

"What is this Northern Lakes and Rivers Timber Company?" asked Eric.

"That's it! I find on making a good many inquiries, aided by some clients of mine whom I've indirectly questioned, that it is a company organized to mask the purposes of the real party in interest, which is the Central Canada Iron Deposits Syndicate."

"Iron!" exclaimed Eric, springing up.

"Iron, yes," repeated Baker in surprise, "why?"

"Oh, I'll tell you later. What is this syndicate?"

"It is apparently a holding company for several corporations owning rights in ore tracts through central Canada here, reaching northward from the great deposits in the Lakes region of the States. Besides this holding company, there are several large industrial concerns, all seemingly unrelated, but which, according to my confidential information, connect up with immense interests that are thought to have formed a combine to compete with the Steel Trust. There would be no opposition, I suppose, at present, since the market is unlimited, but after the war is over it would mean an industrial war in the greatest industry on the continent. Hence the secrecy, I suppose—in order that the project may be advanced beyond successful resistance before the Trust is aware of the magnitude and strength of their new competitor. Of course, the Trust knows all about it by now, but the public is only beginning to learn."

"Iron," said Eric, and his eyes sparkled.

"About the right of way, now?" reminded Baker. "Shall we acknowledge it and let them go ahead? Your land there seems to be the key to their transport system to the great reduction works which will be located here, the metal to go to the States. Of course, they don't admit any such importance. They talk only timber—spruce for airplanes. They are very clever. Nevertheless, it is evident from their haste and ill-concealed anxiety that it is of vital importance to them. What shall we do?"

"If the paper is genuine," said Eric slowly, "I wouldn't do anything to oppose them, notwithstanding it was father's desire that the land be kept intact. For if it is genuine

it was father's wish that they should have these rights. I wonder why they did not have it—witnessed? Is that it?"

"The agent who obtained it reported that your father was alone."

"Yes, he was, except for aunt Mary, the Indian woman who took care of me."

"Who cannot read or write, I suppose."

"No, she cannot."

"Yet she could have made her mark, as we say. That would have helped."

"Perhaps she was not about, or the agent did not know of that. Could not he himself have witnessed it?"

"Yes, but being an interested party, as the law terms him, his signature would have little weight if the genuineness of the document were disputed. However, he can witness it at any time."

"Why did he not do it at the time my father signed it?"

"Delayed it, I suppose, or forgot to."

"Who was this agent?"

"I don't know who obtained your father's signature. Some one of their numerous agents, I suppose. Do you doubt its genuineness?"

"Yes," said Eric, thinking hard.

"What shall you do, then?"

"I *think* I can learn at home what to do," the youth replied. "And I shall let you know promptly one way or the other. Meanwhile, now that I am here, I want to get some information about two things—iron and love."

Baker sprang up.

"Son of Elliott Straive," he exclaimed, striving to suppress his merriment, "what *do* you mean?"

"Two things I am interested in just now, and I'm sure my library at home cannot tell me what I wish to know. I want some up-to-date human testimony."

"As to iron, then," replied Baker, his mouth twitching, "I'll give you a letter to Douglass, an official of the Canadian Geological Survey, who happens to be in Winnipeg. You'll find him at my club. As to love—oh, ask any woman. They're all experts."

"Have you a wife or daughter?"

"Both," replied Baker. "Do you wish to experiment on them?"

"Of course not." Eric smiled. "It sounds ridiculous, I know. Nevertheless, I do need some facts."

The elderly barrister pursed his lips and drummed on his desk. "Facts—about love. Humph! Don't believe there are any—known, at least. However, Mrs. and Miss Baker will probably possess whatever knowledge is extant on the subject, so come up for dinner, and I'll turn you loose on them. They—may make fun of you!"

"I can stand that," young Straive assured him, and he jotted down the house address and took his leave.

Canada's iron expert was playing billiards, but he immediately granted Foster R. Baker's client an interview. The quiet little man was bored at first, but he soon became interested in what Eric had to say, and, in return, he gave him much information.

"And where is the eastern limit of the iron up there?" asked Eric. "We've not been getting the survey reports for a long time, and so our library is out of date."

Douglass produced a map and showed him. "Along here is the known limit; but the new American operations—which in these war times we're glad to foster—are uncovering the northern extension of the glacial drift detritus, which is the origin of the big iron deposits at the end of the Great Lakes."

"Isn't the eastern limit known yet?"

"No. Too much cover in that woods and lakes country up your way. Absence of rock exposures and presence everywhere of vegetation—forest litter and deep moss—makes recognizance work fruitless. A geologist would have to live there and be patient to gain much knowledge of it."

"Thank you," said Eric. "And can you tell me who are at the head of this gigantic combination to produce iron up here?"

"My boy," replied the quiet man indulgently, "I know officially only the names of the corporations which have applied for such rights and franchises in the Dominion of Canada as concern our survey. But unofficially I may tell you that though several of the great financial powers of the United States, together with the industries they represent, are directly or indirectly concerned, it is generally believed that the James M. Heathering interests are in control."

Eric's heart thumped, but he showed no outward sign. "One other question: Does the government of the United States favor this big competitive project?"

"I suppose that depends mainly on whether the administration believes that the project will increase the output of steel.

There are pros and cons to that question. It should, however, under favorable conditions, greatly augment the production in a short while. And that will please Canada also."

"How can I be sure?"

Douglass looked at him. "Tell me why you want to know, and if it is important enough, I'll find out for you."

Eric told him, and asked: "Is that important enough?"

"*It is!*" replied Douglass incisively. "I'll wire the American secretary of war. Meet me here to-morrow morning."

"Indeed I will," promised Eric. "I'm glad to be able to do it right."

And he left the club.

CHAPTER XV.

CLARA RELIEVES HER MIND.

"Where's Eric?" shouted Roswell, who was the last to take his place at the breakfast table.

"Yes, where is he?" echoed Sylvia in almost as strident a voice. "He's usually more punctual than we are."

"Mr. Straive left early for Minsington," said Mrs. Heathering with exaggerated calm. "But I see no reason for you to raise a disturbance over his departure."

"Ain't he coming back?" demanded Roswell. "He was going to take me where the big fish are—if Clara ever gave him a chance."

Clara gave her brother a sulky, supercilious stare, and his mother replied that without doubt he'd be back *for a little while*. At which Clara caught her mother's meaning eye and looked away again. Heathering and Heathcote had opened their newspapers. These were already two days old, but the more important items Heathering always received in the form of dispatches thirty hours before he got the printed news.

The children made their exit first, Clara went next, and Heathcote, allowing a discreet minute or so to intervene, followed her. Thereupon Mrs. Heathering turned to her husband.

"How long is this barbarian worship to continue?"

"Who, Straive? Why? What's the matter with him?" Heathering had not raised his eyes from the *Herald*.

"Oh, he's just a generally corrupting influence, and I'd like to see some of our friends when this beastly business is over.'

"Corrupting influence, you say?"

"Your daughter Clara——" They were so much alike, inside and out, that Mrs. Heathering was wont rather to emphasize her husband's responsibility for her—"left the camp very quietly last evening and took a long walk or canoe ride with him. It was pitch dark."

"Well, he brought her back undrowned, I suppose—or I'd have heard of it before this."

"Oh, James, don't be absurd. It wouldn't be an entirely correct sort of thing with Heathcote. With a person like Straive it's simply—impossible! It must stop."

"Well, he won't return for a number of days. When he does the whole thing will come to a head, and be disposed of very quickly."

"And you'll send him off then?"

Heathering gave short shrift to people that encumbered his industrial manipulative machinery. That was business, the necessary policy of men to whom minutes are as the hours of small fry. But in his home affairs he was inclined to reverse things. He was extremely tolerant. He did not care for general converse, with its clamorously iterated "Listen!" but he liked to see people about him having what they esteemed a comfortable time. Here it was Mrs. Heathering that doled out the minutes and used a stricter code of Dun and Bradstreet than any Heathering corporation. Casually he replied:

"Send him off? Why, no. Let him play around. He's harmless."

"That's hardly sufficient inducement to us, I should think, to continue to entertain him in his wild beasts' skins at every meal during our entire vacation. A good watch dog could play with the children without compromising Clara. By the way, I think she's spilled your beans, to use a very fetching symbolism."

"How?" snapped Heathering, alert.

"I scolded her for overplaying her rôle—a rôle I should never have approved of, by the way, if you'd consulted me—whereupon she informed me that she'd told him all about it. Or, at least, that she'd just been flirting with him. You know, of course, that they've been as thick as young thieves for the last few days, ever since you encouraged her to cultivate him."

"Tell her I want to see her, Estelle." He turned to his newspaper, while Mrs. Heathering sallied forth and nabbed the young thing as she was about to float away with Heathcote, who evidently proposed to make hay while the sun shone. Her mother brought her to the paternal presence.

Heathering folded his paper. "See here, puss-cat, what have you been telling that obstinate young Straive?"

Clara glanced reproachfully at her mother.

"I told him I'd been pulling his leg," she replied with cold candor. The phrase was current at the time in the best Anglo-American circles.

"Indeed? And had you?"

A nice question, that, after the instructions—yes, virtually instructions—given her. She had had a miserable night of it, and her temper was awry.

"*Yes,*" she replied in a manner that would have been more filial if it had been less emphatic, "I did just what you told me to. I flirted with him outrageously, and he's in love with me. And I couldn't stand it and told him all about it."

Heathering's eyes narrowed. "All about what?"

"Oh, you needn't be afraid," said Clara, her face pale with indignation. "I took the entire blame for it. I told him I was piqued at him for paying no attention to me. It had really been considerateness on his part, just courtesy and self-depreciation and—snubs we'd given him before, in our nice, contemptible, snobby way with our own guest. But I gave him to understand that I had flirted with him solely and only for revenge—and broke his poor, gentle heart, I suppose," sobbed Clara.

Her father whistled and her mother glowered.

"You needn't think I care, myself. He's nothing to me—this babe in the woods. He's just a helpless innocent, and all of us with our experience, and our wealth and our power, trapping him. Father, it seems to me the great James M. Heathering should be able to put over a perfectly legitimate thing with a boy like that without—well, at least without breaking his heart for good measure."

"Go to your tent, Clara, if you please," said Heathering, "and compose yourself. And when you can talk to me without impertinence, I'll explain a few things to you that you seem to have misunderstood."

Clara and her mother got out just in time to avoid an encounter—which their pride could ill have brooked—with Heathcote.

"The very man," said Heathering. "Hear the row?"

"No," lied Heathcote.

Heathering did not believe in intimacies. But in this rather exceptional matter the young lawyer became for the time a privileged person.

"Clara seems to have—sort of flirted with our right of way, and regretted it. Very high-spirited girl, you know, and at heart very kind. Young calf lost his head, and Clara told him she'd been flirting with him—wretched vampire—something like that. Question is, how'll it affect him. My wife says Clara's spilled the beans. About it, I expect—dammit!"

Heathcote nodded respectfully.

"That's just for your information, of course. I'm talking to Clara, so she'll smooth things over when he returns—just in the event that his personal relations with us become a factor in his decision. You'll be playing around with her the next few days. Do what you can."

Heathcote did. But he had also his own ax to grind. So while he sought to sharpen her liking for him he endeavored at the same time to shape her attitude toward the young woodsman in a way that should be safe for all of them.

On general principles he distrusted this pity of hers for Eric. It would have been a dangerous sentiment in many a young woman. But Heathcote was too thoroughly steeped in the callous worldliness of his sphere to be seriously anxious about Clara, whom he assumed to be quite as fully committed as himself to the conventions that ruled in her life. His task, then, was not to deflect her from another, but to turn her to himself. By flattery sufficiently subtle he would soothe her conscience, whose pangs were doubtless shallow, and in doing so he would not only put her in the mood to go on with her little game with Eric—if that proved necessary—but would use the incident as a lever to raise himself in her esteem. He knew she liked him a great deal. Most bright women did, especially if they were also sensible to a very definite physical charm he was conscious of exerting.

For the better part of a week he had a clear field. But it was over a hill—or so Heathcote imagined it. For two days he

toiled upward in the wake of a goddess nimble of foot, elusive, and very perverse. Then she seemed to yield, and metaphorically it was all downhill, and hand in hand.

Heathering had something to do with it. Clara, on the day of her outburst, had remained in no mood to come contritely to her father till late in the afternoon, and he had gone. An engineer had taken him northward to the ore bodies to straighten out a strategic tangle, and he did not return till the following night. After breakfast next morning, Clara penitently appeared.

"Now, young spit-fire, I'm going to talk to you," Heathering said, not unamiably. In his heart of hearts she was the dearest thing in the world to him.

"You got off on the wrong foot on that Eric Straive matter."

"Oh," thought Clara. "He's just a matter—rock, wood, sawdust—anything but flesh and blood!"

"You seemed to think I'd used you as a siren. Contemptible, impossible thing. Ashamed of yourself, implying anything so absurd. Ought to be spanked!"

Clara stared haughtily at the damask tablecloth.

"You're nearly nineteen, aren't you? Or nearly twenty, I guess. Time you were absorbing more of the hard facts of this fancy-dress ball we call the world. People don't live and prosper by their hearts but by their heads, and they all use them up to their limit. If we *don't* use them to the limit we go under and get stepped on. Or mashed, I should say."

"It's mash or be mashed?" she asked quietly.

"Precisely. And absolutely. So—we use our heads—all we've got. Now here we have a project, a very good thing for the country, though, of course, we ourselves stand to make a billion or so in the long run. For by the time the war is over we expect to be as solidly intrenched as the present Steel Trust. This is confidential, Clara. You're my daughter, and bright enough, Heaven knows!

"A very important thing, this. My honor and the honor and security of my largest corporations are pledged to it. It's vital, momentous. More interests big and little, more people, big and little, concerned in it than you can imagine. And the strategic point of it, the right of way over the only route that makes competition with the trust at all feasible, must run through this tremendous acreage this man Straive—Elliott Straive—carved out of the wilderness for a moose pasture. Through a miserable technicality—and technicalities count in Canada, where vested rights are concerned—we're held up until Elliott Straive's signature—his own signature, mind you—is admitted by his own son or his son's lawyer, or, failing that, can be properly attested and proved. The boy is ignorant, sentimental, avaricious. The land's worthless, but he can hold us up for months or years. For even condemnation proceedings by the government would take time.

"Now, in the name of common sense, who should cavil at gaining the fellow's good will in *every* way? Candy is what that suckling needs, and you're the prettiest candy in this neck of the woods. I'll underwrite that proposition for a cool million. I didn't ask you to marry him or even to flirt with him. We're simply trying to be nice to him. Imagine! With perhaps five hundred distinguished men who would give a toe off each foot to spend a week-end here, this cub has the whole pavilion. You could do your share, couldn't you, and with dignity and conscience and womanliness at that?"

Clara was moved. She *had* misunderstood, perhaps. Perhaps she had exaggerated the import of her father's suggestion to her. It was a strong case he made out now against her—and against Eric, too. But——

The two pairs of brown eyes met. They were so like—so like, these two! But one, a world-hardened man of fifty, the other a dainty girl creaming under the play of feeling forces strangely stirred—lately.

"It sounds fair enough, dad, but"—she added with prescient caution—"just to look at it on the surface, doesn't it seem stealthy and vile, all of us playing our part, as you put it, and this simple, kindly fellow spitted—dangling and helpless!"

Heathering's eyes smiled with the sardonic glint of years. "Your simple, honest fellows—if you could look into them you'd see very much the same aspirations you find in yourself, and the same cunning to achieve them. It's just the head that differs. Why don't he give the word and let us go on? It's costing thousands upon thousands every day."

"Have you come right out and asked him?"

"We haven't dared—yet."

"You don't know him."

"We will."

"Yes," cried Clara, "I'll *bet* you will! I'm going to wait. Let's see what he does, and why. As for treating him well—this way, that way; gain his good will; make him think this or that—— No sirree! I'll treat him well, never fear. But I'll treat him just exactly as I would if no great consequences hung upon him. He's nothing to me—nothing," declared Clara, stamping her foot, "but I'll not have him despise me for playing a part."

"Hurrah, little movie heroine," applauded the father. "Just so you treat him well and keep your mouth shut, you may hitch your wagon to all the stars in the firmament. Get out!" And he playfully boxed her ears.

CHAPTER XVI.

HIGHLY ESCORTED.

When Eric left the club he was not alone. In fact, he had not been alone since he left Minsington. At the Heathering camp, and on the lakes and rivers plied by their launches, Heathcote had reckoned Eric to be safe. At Minsington, however, an alleged traveling salesman on a vacation hung about, but his vacation was up when Eric left the village. At the railway station in Winnipeg the salesman looked hard at Eric's back, at the same time making signs to a chauffeur, who thereupon took over the alleged salesman's duties. From the automobile driven by this chauffeur an elderly gentleman had descended and entered the building where Foster R. Baker maintained offices, and had ridden up in the elevator with Eric. Another man dogged the young woodsman to the club.

The day was young, and so was Eric, and he managed a moving-picture show, a stroll of the entire length of Winnipeg's principal retail shopping street, sparkling with gay young birds in their lightest summer plumage, a luncheon in a tiled palace of din and commotion, a long poring over certain books in the public library, a visit to a recruiting station of the Canadian Expeditionary Forces, an automobile ride through the residential portions of the city, and the selection of a hotel where he might stay for the night. The chauffeur—another one—from a distant corner of the lobby saw him safely registered and went back to his car, which was parked at a discreet distance from the portals of the hotel.

Eric changed his collar—what a time he had with the beastly thing!—had his shoes reshined, and took a taxi—followed by the chauffeur—to the comfortable residence of Foster R. Baker. He was there cordially received by a handsome dame of fifty and a few minutes later by an entrancing young woman of perhaps twenty-five. It was an ordeal to Eric, but he stood it well by the simple device of comparing it with the superior embarrassment of that conversation he purposed having with them later.

Baker found opportunity for a brief aside with his wife and Agatha. Elliott Straive's boy was a wonder, he told them. Nothing special yet? "Oh, wait for his heart-to-heart talk with you. Nerve yourself, please, for my sake, or Elliott's. You don't remember Elliott, Agatha—or do you?"

"Why, yes, I think so."

"Fortify yourselves by an implacable inner resolve—'I *won't* laugh!' Can't have that boy's feelings hurt."

It was all he had time to say, and it left them—his daughter especially—in a state of rampant curiosity. They found Eric exceedingly frank—very likably so. Beyond that, anything but a freak. After dinner Baker excused himself, whereupon Eric, left to the tender mercies of the ladies, soberly stated his case. What it cost his proud young heart they could not know. Yet as a feat of courage it easily outranked the most Spartan tests to which he had ever subjected himself.

"I've seen at close range only a few white women, and spoken to but one or two. They didn't interest me—they weren't young."

Mrs. Baker smiled invisibly.

"But I've met a girl up near home. They're camping. And she worries me. I can't get her out of my head. I think I don't want to. Perhaps I'm in love with her. Do you suppose so?"

Agatha who, though naturally more lively than her mother, had a gift of demureness, trusted herself to reply. "It's quite likely."

"She's a queer creature." And Eric gave a very vivid sketch of the astounding mental and emotional gyrations of Clara Heathering, known in his narrative under the discreet pseudonym of "she."

"She's probably canoeing now with the lawyer, and will, until it's almost dark when

men feel so peculiarly about any one who's with them that way. I'd hate to have her feel that way to him, unless, of course, she cares very, very much. And then I'd want her to have him."

The women stole covert glances at each other.

"What do you think the situation is?" he asked anxiously.

"I'd say," said Agatha, "that your young beauty did not yet know her own mind."

"She's had scores of lovers, I imagine. For she's very, very wealthy, and she tells me that that attracts them."

"It is said to," confirmed Mrs. Baker.

"And did I explain that she is very beautiful?"

"Yes, you made that tolerably clear," Agatha assured him.

"So she ought to know her own mind."

"Not at all—yet," denied Miss Baker, who knew whereof she spoke. "Later she'll know in a flash."

"In a flash?"

"Yes. Court her a while."

"She says it's no use; I'm not in her class."

"You are the son of one of Mr. Baker's oldest friends and clients," spoke up Mrs. Baker sternly. "I wonder what she wants."

"Parental opposition amounts to nothing," said Agatha oracularly.

"Indeed!" commented her mother.

"And the very fact that she tells you all that and explains and asks your pardon—all in the moonlight, too—it shows that you're in her mind tremendously. *I* say 'Atta boy,' and get her!"

"Good!" said Eric. "I wanted to and intended to, unless it could be shown to be an outrageous thing. My inclination is to get her if I can do it without killing anybody."

He said it quite amiably, as was his way. But it hit the womenfolks of Barrister Baker a blow between their eyes—in a manner of speaking. They had thought him very mild, if not a trifle backward. Now they saw with exceeding clearness that Eric was a youth who required light, not leading—emphatically not leading!

"Why does she say one thing and mean another?" he asked curiously.

"Only the Lord knows why a young girl does it," admitted Mrs. Baker.

"Amen!" added Agatha, with demure piety. "It's the female of the species, as that canny wretch put it. We're all right when we get what we want. At least it helps a lot."

"There are complications now. I've just learned that this afternoon. I'll attend to them. I'll not let them interfere as long as I'm sure I have a right to try to get her."

"Why not?" asked the girl.

"Oh, I'm an uncouth fellow, a barbarian. I dress in tanned skins."

"Why, that ought to be an asset. I'd like to see you in them."

"The lawyer is a very attractive man—educated, witty, and very fine looking."

Agatha looked hard at the Apollo in the easy-chair. "Indeed! Well, I wouldn't let *that* discourage *you*."

And her mother closed the conversation by adding with a very keen wisdom: "Follow your instincts. I'm sure they'll not lead you astray."

A pleasant evening followed.

Eric found Douglass at the appointed hour. "I had a quick reply," said the geologist. "This is for yourself alone, Straive. Uncle Sam's War Industries Commission looks with approval upon this competitive enterprise, believing that the result will be more metal to hurl at the Germans."

Eric thanked him warmly, had a last brief interview with Baker, consulted rail and water route time-tables, and left the city—not alone! In thirty-six hours he was in the Lakes country, fifty miles westward of his own domain, headed for the roads and docks, building outfits and prospecting camps that were working—no questions answered—in the Canadian wilderness. He needed a boat, and he hired one—which immediately acquired a second passenger—and embarked in it. But he had already hired another—quietly, with some peculiar instructions. This one did not start at once.

Five hours later, toward dark, he said to one of the two boatmen, "Are you sure you're taking me to Stormy Arm, where the trail starts for the new timber district?"

"Yes, *sir*," said the fellow in a surly way, "we know our business."

"I've been up here several times. It's all right," said the other passenger, who wore gray tweeds, golf stockings, and cap. They were near the shore.

"I beg your pardon, it isn't all right," denied Eric, and he seized him by a leg and flung him overboard.

The surly boatman sprang up, his paddle raised. But Eric caught it, wrenched it

from his hand, struggled with him a few moments and—heaved him over the gunwale. He sank with a splash, rose and tried to regain the boat, but Eric, his eye on the remaining boatman, had seized the paddle and turned the craft on its heel. The passenger in tweeds was treading water.

Eric, clubbing his paddle, addressed the fellow in the stern: "Want to go, too?"

"No," cried the man in terror.

"Off, then, quick. Your friends can swim ashore." The speaker was already plying a vigorous stroke.

"Where to," asked the boatman. He saw that the men who had been flung overboard were striking out for the shore.

"Paddle," answered Eric laconically.

A mile back on their course the badly scared boatman descried a canoe approaching them. When the two boats met Eric stepped nimbly into the boat that he had quietly employed to follow him. He was in city clothes, but it was easily seen he knew something of canoe life.

"What's up, Bill?" asked one of the new arrivals.

"This crazy guy threw my partner and the other passenger into the lake and made me come on back."

Eric stepped into the other canoe again, came close to "Bill," clenched his fist, and held it back, ready for a smashing blow.

"Tell the truth, now, you pirate," he threatened. "How much did the man in gray give you and your partner to take me where he pleased?"

Bill looked defiant—for only a moment.

"Quick," counseled Eric, his gray eye stern, his fist moving like a thing about to spring.

"Five hundred dollars," blurted the man sulkily.

"That's better," the youth remarked, regaining his good nature. He crossed to the other boat, and Bill paddled away in the direction of his shipwrecked mate and the golfing detective.

"Back to the route to Stormy Arm Landing," Eric directed the astonished men. "I'll pay you by the hour, as I told you."

At Stormy Arm Landing he was looked at askance, for he was now in the region not only of "no questions answered," but of "who are you?" The interests feared interlopers, and Eric's city clothes were against him, notwithstanding he had added hiking boots and a flannel shirt.

Interlopers, however, had penetrated, for before he got to the surveyors' camps—which had now advanced southward nearly to his own lands—a traveling companion broached the subject of rights of way. Eric would have sworn no one now knew of his presence there since the episode of the man in tweeds and the subsidized boatmen. Yet his genial companion, after some preliminaries, offered him a thousand dollars to travel back with him to Chicago. In fact, Milwaukee—even St. Paul—would do. And he would be under no obligations to do anything but listen to a proposal that would be made him which might involve a consideration of a great many thousands. Who were his principals? Well, not the principals of these gangs and parties that were working night and day up here. Quite the contrary in fact.

"The Trust?" suggested Eric.

"Very likely, indeed," replied his tempter.

Eric told him he could not go, though it was barely possible he should have occasion to later. Then the man tried to pump him, but Eric had "an excellent gift of silence;" and his seductive companion finally melted away.

The young traveler's objective was reached very soon after this. He followed wagon trails eastward through the timber over a low divide, and came out a mile or more beyond upon a slope extending miles southward. At intervals of a quarter of a mile, this slope had been denuded of timber and excavations had been made. He had proceeded but a short distance along the wagon ruts when he was met by a man in some kind of uniform who stated that this locality was not open to inspection.

"I'm sure it will be all right," replied Eric. "I'm on my way to the Heathering camp."

The guard seemed to have heard of the Heathering camp. At all events, he allowed Eric to proceed, accompanied by himself, to some tents a mile off, where Eric suddenly confronted Hammond. The engineer knew him at once, in spite of the striking change in his appearance.

"Hullo, Mr. Guide," he said. "Aren't you off your beat?"

"Oh, we guides like to get lost, sometimes," countered Eric dryly. "I'm on my way back to the camp."

"Go as far as you like," said Hammond. "Better stop for the night, though. Here,

I'll give you a pass down the line, and you can bunk anywhere darkness hits you."

Eric thanked him and became a free agent once more. His business was quickly transacted. It consisted merely in inspecting the first excavation he came to—one of a number of temporarily deserted "test cuts." Eric picked up a few bits of the rusty, gravellike rock and looked at them.

"Sure," he murmured, and threw them away, and went on to the next camp. Here his "pass" gave him a welcome which included supper, bed, and breakfast; and very early in the morning he went down the river and got a ride with a young surveyor. There were two short portages, the rest easy going, and they reached the Heathering camp before noon.

From the time of his first interview with Douglass until this moment of his return to the place where he served in the duel capacity of guide and guest, Eric Straive had steadily grown more and more indignant.

CHAPTER XVII.

ERIC BEARDS THE LION.

Heathcote himself had most to do with Clara's lightning change from cold to warm. He had avoided the subject during those first two days because Clara seemed listless and unresponsive; and he knew she brooded over her folly and the scolding it had brought her. But after her second talk with her father, she cherked up and spoke of it lightly, whereupon Heathcote decided the moment had come to heal her quite, and, in the process, to reveal to her his deep appreciation of her qualities. He skillfully guided Clara to the subject—or he thought he did—and then he remarked:

"It might have seemed to your father—of course, he wouldn't tell me—that you had antagonized the boy when you confessed you'd been flirting with him. If so, I don't share his fears. It isn't in you to wound any one, Clara."

He had progressed to an unrebuked "Clara." When her mood seemed propitious, he meant to ask her to reciprocate with "Dick."

"Isn't it?" she asked sweetly.

"You're too tender-hearted, and the male hide is thick—as thick as the tanned hide the boy wears. I'd like you to feel quite easy in your mind about the precious lamb."

Clara had formerly—not latterly—used the phrase, and though she was quite beyond it now in her inner attitude to Eric, Heathcote had not perceived this.

"A fellow with so little perception of the obscurity of his position and so much presumption as to grab that way at your friendliness with him has rind enough for complete protection. He probably doesn't believe you were flirting with him, anyhow, or, at least, thinks that you enjoyed it immensely. Straive has plenty of self-assurance. You know he hardly would have called us all liars if he hadn't. Please don't worry about him any more."

"I won't, dear friend," Clara replied.

Somehow the speech angered her, though more on Eric's account than her own. For while Heathcote had been very kind and "sociable" with Eric, she knew that this was largely, if not wholly, motived in the policy that actuated them all. It was a challenge, somehow, this comfortable assurance of his that the male skin is thick, for he must include his own. That, probably, was why he was so sure of Eric's.

Now Heathcote was a good sport. He had a name for fascination, as Clara, though of the "younger set," was quite aware. And it was an excellent opportunity to try her 'prentice hand. It was not exactly a 'prentice hand, for under it youths from fifteen to twenty-five had, in the last few years, been mowed down like standing grain. But Heathcote was harder game. He was less than thirty, but she thought him more. And he was fair game, where poor Eric, whom he derided, was not. So—"Oh, very well, then, Mr. Smart Aleck of the impervious hide," decided Clara, "you with your fascinations and I with my reputed beauty and father's power and millions—let's take a whirl at it!"

Which is what they did, and neither came out scathless. On Clara's side the effects were mild. She admired his physical prowess. He was a well-developed athlete and daringly efficient at all land and water sports. She hunted and fished with him, paddled, rode, and climbed, with the result that she had gained a greater sense of his attractiveness and felt a pleasant stirring, due to his magnetism. She called him "Dick" and allowed him moderate intimacies. That was the sum of it.

Heathcote, on the other hand, was *gone*. So much so that at times he actually—al-

most!—forgot her father's position. But then Clara was undeniably an intoxicating little wench.

Thus matters stood as Clara and Heathcote, after a long climb through tangled wilds, walked slowly campward along the base of the hill back of the lake. It was nearly noon. Breeze-wafted odors from the men's cook tent told them that the rivermen would soon dine. They were presently back of the last of the row of men's tents, which was Eric's, and Clara remembered that it must have been from this spot that she had softly called him the night before he left.

The tents all facing the lake, and the pair being therefore secluded, Clara leaned tiredly against her companion, who plucked a long-stemmed wild flower from a bunch that was pinned to her bosom, and brushed it lightly across her cheek.

It was stuffy in the tent, which had not been aired since Eric left. So, after removing his coat and filling his washbasin, he stood on a stool and drew up the canvas flap over the ventilator high up on the rear wall of the tent. *A very pretty picture met his eye!*

Flushing, he stepped down instantly and stood motionless. But action was native to him, and tucking under the collar of his negligee shirt, he laved his hot face and neck in the cool water. Then he combed his hair, replaced his coat, and flung himself upon his cot to think. In a few minutes the gong would sound from the family camp, and he must meet them: Heathering—who had deceived him—head and front of the great combination that needed him so badly; a gigantic, feline thing that had showed him as yet only a soft paw, but was in instant readiness to tear him with its powerful claws. The man in tweeds had been no more than a whisker of the enormous cat. Heathcote he must meet, whose concealments had first betrayed Eric, who in their friendly talks, must have been laughing at him. And finally Clara herself, whose regret at having played havoc with his untried heart must really have been only contrition for her truancy to the man she loved.

It was to be a difficult confronting, indeed, shadowed with a strife that must be implicit in his first greetings; a strife which everything he had discovered during his journey had made necessary to his self-respect, his memory of his father, his worldly interests, even. And the scene outside the tent? That was the crowning embarrassment, complicating in a dozen ways his relation to the other problems.

He closed his eyes and thought of his father's words. Much of the message he had left him Eric had committed to memory, and it served him now. That father had given his best, his maturest years to the preparing of his son, and now the test had come—the real, the harder test. For wrestling with a brown bear, riding a bull moose or plunging from a precipice into the black and icy depths of a lake—all this was mere child's play compared with striving against James M. Heathering and his goddess of a daughter.

Truth and courage! Courage? Yes. Eric felt the good red blood of it in his head and heart. But truth? Truth, measuring itself against age-developed, craft-inspired, sinisterly subtle falsehood? The contest seemed unequal. But his father, in the end, had worshiped it. And he, Eric? By precept and example the stuff was beaten in him—strung with the fibers of his conscious, moral being. There was a kind of grandeur in standing shoulder to shoulder with Truth in a seemingly unequal contest. And with silence—a truthful silence—as an occasional ally—Eric smote his thigh and sprang from the cot!

He recombed his hair and waited for the gong to sound. At its first stroke, he walked toward the dining tent, and when he saw the family entering it, he came and stood within the doorway. In his new apparel they were a full moment in recognizing him.

The children clamorously greeted him. "Look at the regular clothes," they shrieked. "Don't he look different?"

Mrs. Heathering smiled, and from Heathcote came a genial "Hullo, there!" Clara, who had not yet seated herself, seeing something in Eric's face, went a little pale as she came and shook his hands, saying, "Welcome back, Eric." But Heathering frowned, and his words betrayed the cause.

"Well, well," he said. "Back again, Straive, at this time of day? Must have come southward from the survey camps."

"Where you said the logging operations are to start—yes, sir."

Heathering raised his eyebrows and caught but did not answer Heathcote's meaning glance. "Sit down," he invited.

"No," said Eric. "I shall eat my dinner with the men."

They all looked at him, and there was silence until he spoke again.

"I thought it due you to tell you first. To tell you that I'm back, but that I prefer to be as I was before—an employee, and not seem to be a friend. And permit me, please, to resign as guide. If you still need one, I'll get you another."

"What's all this?" asked Heathering coldly.

"After dinner I'll return and tell you 'what's all this.'" And he turned away.

Naturally, one of the children spoke first.

"What do you s'pose has made Eric huffy?" asked Roswell, with heavy anxiety. He saw his chance for big fish go glimmering.

"Be quiet, children," said Mrs. Heathering irritably. "And let it be a lesson to you to avoid familiarity with laborers."

In an hour Eric returned and found Heathcote and Heathering apparently busy. Really they were waiting for him. The children were banished far. But Clara and her mother, it may be suspected, were considerably nearer. Eric came close to the table and stood.

"The business my solicitor asked to see me about seems to be very much your business, too, Mr. Heathering, so I'll talk to you about it. But first I want to tell you why I prefer to accept no further hospitality. It was very pleasant, but I was perplexed as to your motives."

"Why, Eric?" asked Heathering, blandly on the defensive. Whereupon Eric pithily informed him of that startling necromancy by which the financier's family had changed him at a breath from a banished guide to an honored guest.

"Now I know why," he added. "You wanted me to agree to this paper, this right of way that bears my father's name."

"That he signed," prompted Heathcote. And Heathering glanced at the lawyer for a fraction of a second.

"I suppose so," replied Eric.

"I explained to you before you left," said Heathering, "that we were—interested in it."

"Yes," conceded Eric, "but only then, and just so much. Just enough so that, having gained my good will and gratitude, I should be the more likely to yield to the persuasions that your agents had already brought to bear on my solicitor."

"Was it not natural?" asked Heathering.

"To you? Perhaps so. It seems contemptible to me."

"Eh—by the way, Mr. Straive—you know people don't talk in just that manner—polite, well-bred people." Heathering had no desire to increase Eric's antagonism, but he needed a saved face for the rest of the interview.

"I have no wish to be offensive, Mr. Heathering," replied Eric evenly. "But I intend to speak plainly or not at all." He looked at the lawyer, whose brilliant black eyes were inscrutable. "I should think that Mr. Heathcote here, when he found that your guide chanced to be the man you sought to finish this right-of-way business, would have told me about it, and trusted to my good will and honesty as a man instead of to my gratitude as a friend or guest to do whatever was needed. Instead, he concealed everything that was true and suggested much that was false. He asked me in an offhand way about my land, as to my selling it or giving rights of way. I told him the truth I knew, but he told me none *he* knew. In your explanation, as you call it, the night before I left, you spoke only of friends of yours in the lumber business. The friends are you yourself and your many personal interests. It is you, first and foremost. You are handling it, and handling me. And the lumber that you are to harvest is made of iron. Why, my solicitor does not know yet who the real people are, with the companies acting through others—masquerading under other names. There was to be no solid ground for me to stand upon. It was like a trap the Indians made in the woods, cleverly covered with brush and dirt and pine needles to resemble real ground. No, there was nothing true about it."

"It is very ordinary business, my young friend," said Heathering, with affected nonchalance. "We did not know you or what you might do."

"Why not have asked?"

The financier smiled. "You are very ignorant of the ways of the world."

"I'm learning fast," asserted Eric.

"Might I suggest," asked Heathcote, looking respectfully at his client, "if this matter of customary prudence is now clear to Eric, that we are interested in the decision he reached with his solicitor."

"And there again mystery," Eric angrily reminded them. "Concealment, subterfuge. I don't know now who obtained that right of way, or how. But while I was to know nothing of him or of you, *you* must know everything of me—everything I was doing. I could not go to the public library, or to a moving theater, even, without——"

Heathcote blinkingly interrupted him. "'Know everything you were doing?' Spying on you, you mean?" Eric had been honored by the services of the best detective agency in the United States, which, furthermore, had been instructed to use only the best and most cautious operatives. Eric must have imagined it. "Oh, impossible!" the lawyer assured him.

"Look here, Mr. Heathcote," exclaimed Eric heatedly, "I've done too much tracking myself not to know the game. Years in the woods make close observers, and the habit is a fixed, unconscious thing that doesn't cease though the trails become streets and the forests buildings. You had me dogged as though I were a criminal from the time I left Minsington till——"

"Till when?" the lawyer asked, with less color than usual in his face.

"Till I got good and sick of it, and then I stopped it quite effectively, I think——"

"How?" asked Heathcote with real curiosity.

"Ask them!" Eric came back instantly. "The fact is, I'm a free-born American citizen and I'm damned if I'll be trailed like a slinking wolf."

"It was very unfortunate—Eric," admitted Heathering, more alarmed for the outcome than he was willing to let even Heathcote suspect. "We should have dealt differently with you. I was not aware that so close an attention was paid to your affairs."

"What a dainty way to put it," observed Eric with a touch of sarcasm.

"It was a foolish and futile policy, but customary; dictated by the need of great caution. Now, suppose we begin again, and begin right. So—how about the right of way, Eric?"

"Not all the outrage in the world would make me repudiate it or put the slightest obstacle in your way, if it was my father's wish."

"It seems to have been your father's wish," suggested Heathcote smoothly.

"It seems so, yes," conceded Eric, frowning.

"And did you instruct Mr. Baker accordingly?"

"No," answered Eric promptly. "I must go home first. If you want to know why, you may go with me and learn."

"How far is your place from here?" asked Heathcote.

"The lake on which we live is only three miles through the woods. But even if you could break through there would be no way to cross, for the place is on the opposite shore. But eight miles down it connects with the end of this lake, and there is good water all the way—a little swift at the outlet. We could make it in the launch in half a day. Miss Heathering wished to see the place," added Eric with a touch of pride. "And you could all come, and let me in that way make a return for my visiting you here. I understand that that is customary, and though you wanted me for business reasons it may be that you desired to be kind as well, and I don't want to seem unappreciative."

"You're certainly a most careful young man!" observed Heathering with a cryptic under-meaning intended for Heathcote. "Eh—I'll let you know this afternoon whether we can spare the time."

CHAPTER XVIII.

JUST FRIENDS—DEAR FRIENDS!

"What's he got up his sleeve?" snapped Heathering irritably, when Eric was out of earshot. It had been imperative to take this youngster's berating, because the matter it regarded was momentous. But it had not been easy.

Heathcote, who was exceedingly disturbed, replied: "Oh, it's his Indian woman, perhaps. What else could he mean by wanting to go home first?"

"Well," said Heathering sharply, "she either saw it or she didn't. If she did, why have her sign and acknowledge. You've a notary's commission, I suppose?"

"Yes," replied Heathcote, "I think it's still unexpired. But if I go he'll learn it was I that obtained the signature, and I'll be in for another of his impudent scoldings." Heathcote's eyes snapped viciously. "I don't know whether I could keep my temper as you did."

"I'll answer for your keeping your temper," promised Heathering grimly. Heathcote was not pleased, but he made no further demur.

"By the way," he suddenly remembered, "your secretary told me to tell you that James Otis Ordway, of the Central Trust, and Ralston, president of the C. I. D. Company, are coming down from the iron fields to-morrow in a special boat."

Heathering straightened.

"Which means that a crisis is impending in this infernal business. They dare not go further with the contracts for the furnaces and mills till the ore transport line is cinched. Others will probably be up in a day or two. To-morrow is our last chance, I think."

"Is this to be a business trip to Straive's place?"

"Great Scott, no. It would tip a hand already weak enough to Ralston and Ordway. Put a little camp stuff in the launch and call it an excursion. Not the children, though—might be a nuisance. Tell Mrs. Heathering to be ready early to-morrow morning."

For several moments he seemed to be studying Heathcote. Then he said quietly: "You know we've got to get this thing to-morrow. We've got to, that's all!" He held the lawyer's eye until the latter slowly nodded.

Leaving the tent of the financier, Heathcote busied himself with preparations for the morrow. The trip was not to his liking—a close observer might have detected moisture on his forehead when he emerged from Heathering's office. But there were compensations. Clara, who had found she really loved the outdoors, was already impressed by his knowledge and skill in the open, and a day on the lakes—possibly also a night in the woods—was sure to impress her still more. For, naturally, she and he would play cook and housemaid!

Eric, who had roamed the woods, brooding upon the picture of a girl leaning comfortably against the shoulder of a very handsome man, returned in the late afternoon to learn the decision. He received it from Heathcote, whose words with him were as bland as a May morning. Thereupon, in leaving the camp, he encountered Clara who, either by accident or design, was on his route.

"Do you know," she said blithely, "I hardly recognized you for a moment in those clothes?"

"Clothes?" echoed Eric absently. Looking down he saw them. "Oh, yes."

"Eric"—this was in a lower tone—"if you are back of your tent to-night just at dark, I think I'd like to talk to you a little while. You see I heard everything you said to father and Mr. Heathcote."

"You did?" exclaimed Eric in consternation.

"Yes. Go away now, please." Her mother, she knew, was watching from afar.

When next she saw her mother, Clara learned that they were to take a trip in the launch to-morrow—why, Heaven only knew—to the lair of that atrocious, insulting young ingrate, Eric Straive. Not that Mrs. Heathering disapproved of the trip itself. To an utterly bored person any novelty is a port in a storm. Even Eric's unheard-of impertinence seemed to have languidly entertained her. If he failed to use a civil tongue during the outing, though, Mrs. Heathering expressed the hope that Heathcote would drown him in his own lake.

"Unlikely," was Clara's terse comment.

At the end of a rather dull twilight hour following supper, Clara announced to her mother that she intended in a few minutes to visit Mr. Eric Straive.

"It's quite sweet of you to give notice in advance," said Mrs. Heathering caustically. "Rather in better taste, I should say, than your clandestine evening with the gentleman recently. Better serve a notice in writing upon your father."

"Oh, I'll notify him verbally as I pass his tent," replied Clara flippantly. She found the financier in a brown study.

"Father, have you any objections to my keeping a tryst with your guide—and mentor—under yon balsam tree, over there?"

"The 'mentor' part of your little speech I deeply appreciate," said Heathering with amusement. "Why?"

"I think I can give you a helping hand. Evidently he thinks you and dear Richard are not altogether straight with him, but he *knows I am*."

"You little scamp, you! Be careful."

"I'll keep the Heathering faith, dad." And she meant to. But there are at least fourteen points to articles of faith, and interpretations vary.

Eric's heart pounded when she came up.

Nor did her cordial handshake—or handshake, rather—lessen its beating.

"Now, listen, Eric—though I ought to call you Mr. Straive, you look so strange and dignified in that gray suit of real clothes. Not that I didn't like the others, for they are perfectly adapted to your life up here. Oh!" She withdrew her hands, which had lingered in his.

"You say you heard what I said to your father?" This perturbing fact had been on Eric's mind.

"I did. So did mother. I don't know what she thought, and I don't care—almost. *I* think you were splendid!"

Eric's anxious face showed great relief.

"You were awfully sassy, but what you said was absolutely and perfectly true. To think of *anybody* talking that way to James M. Heathering! And you a mere stripling." Clara laughed gayly—almost too gayly one might have thought.

"A mere stripling," she repeated. "That's right out of Scott and Cooper. Eric," she teased the silent youth, "did you know you were a mere stripling?"

"Well, even a mere stripling doesn't like to be——" He hesitated. He would go no further. It was enough—more than enough—that Clara understood.

"You're on trial with all of us, Eric," she said with sudden gravity. "Father told me it was legitimate, this right-of-way thing. That is the word he used. And father would not lie to me," she added proudly. "Not that it makes any great difference to me personally what you do, for, of course, we're only friends. But we couldn't be such friends, could we, if I thought you hadn't done right with father, who seems to be so—so very anxious that this thing should be done? Of course, you will do what's right."

"I will," said Eric positively. "What seems right to me."

"That *will* be right, I'm sure," declared Clara. "That's one good thing about being friends—good friends—that you trust each other's sense of right and wrong. For we *are* friends, aren't we, Eric, in spite of my—my levity with you before you went away?"

"Friends, yes," averred Eric fervently and he took her offered hands. "Friends," he murmured mournfully. "Of course, as things are with you, we can't be more than that, I suppose."

"Oh, never," sighed Clara. "Mother and father and every one would throw a fit at the very idea! Even if—if I cared for you in that way. So it's friends. And real friends are rare, you know." She wrung his hand again, and gave it a little pat and started quickly away. But she paused. Eric had not moved. She turned and looked at him, and came back.

"But we *can* be friends. That's distinctly understood. Cordial, trusting comradely friends. They'd have no right to object to that."

"I should think not—hope not——" His voice was a little husky. Once more she held his hand.

"Surely not. So we're friends, and very, very dear friends at that," added Clara tremulously, and she slowly disengaged her hands and ran away.

Eric looked at the hands she had held, shaken, relinquished, reheld, reshaken, patted, and—very slowly—re-relinquished. They seemed consecrated. How should he ever again put them to basely common uses!

But, also, he drew his brows and thought hard for a meaning of it. And the words of Agatha Baker recurred to him: "I'd say that your young beauty did not yet know her own mind." Oh, this was worse! For though his thought that she was pledged to another had been an agonizing one, it was tinged with compensation. With Clara lost, it would be easier to be sternly right in his struggle with her father. But if there was yet a chance, if he lingered in her heart as she had lingered in his presence, the way was hard, indeed. With Clara trembling in the balance, could he heap truth and courage in the scales of justice, and winning, lose her? He shivered, and one consecrated hand groped to his clammy brow.

His only friend had been dead so short a time—so short that Eric seemed to forget. "Father!" he whispered. And his shoulders heard that name and straightened like a soldier's.

CHAPTER XIX.

AUNT MARY TESTIFIES.

"Hullo, John," said Eric to the old Indian who stood motionless on the bank. Heathcote had skillfully guided the launch to a gentle stop at the landing. In the Indian tongue he added: "Tell aunt Mary

white people are here. But we have eaten dinner, and I think they will camp to-night across the lake somewhere." He did not want to frighten the faithful old woman at the prospect of providing food and beds for so many strangers.

"This is my home," said Eric. "My father lies buried over there." He had stepped to the landing and assisted Clara and her mother from the launch. Heathcote and Heathering followed them.

"Rather fine old place you have here," said Heathcote, glancing about in counterfelt surprise.

"Fine, yes," replied Eric, brightening. "You should see the sky and the woods in autumn."

Clara looked at him with parted lips. She had been swift to note the wild beauty of the surroundings.

It was very early in the afternoon, and before doing what he had come to do, Eric deemed it fitting to show his visitors about. So he took them to the little field where summer vegetables were grown, and to the rows of berry bushes laden with ripening fruit. There were platforms for canoes, a storehouse, and a kind of barn which, like the house itself, was built of great hewn logs laid upon foundations of solid granite. Everywhere nature had been disturbed as little as possible, nor did a single stump mock the glory of the living trees.

"A place for a king," praised Clara.

"Crowned with a flap-jack," added Heathcote facetiously. Eric was, of course, out of hearing at the moment.

"Horrid simile," she reproved. "It should be a crown of aromatic balsam."

"I believe you're taken with the place. I'll buy it, Clara, if you'll live in it with me."

It was the nearest thing to a declaration Heathcote had made. Her spell was cast upon him to the full, and some instinct told him to make haste. But Clara's mind and heart were woefully at loggerheads and the occasion was not propitious. She answered him with levity, and in a few moments the members of the party drew together.

"The sky is clouding over, Eric," suggested Heathering discreetly. "Perhaps it would be well to do what you wished to do. We can wait for you out here."

"Come with me, if you please," said Eric, jerking up his head alertly. "It's your affair. I brought you here so *you* might know as well as I." They entered the solid old house, the hewn door of which opened upon a large living room and library, and sat down in armchairs of time-stained birch.

Eric walked over to the library shelves, and found the book in which he had placed his father's unfinished letter. He drew out the folded sheet and held it in his hand.

"I placed this here after father died," he said.

"And what is that?" asked Heathcote pleasantly.

"If I find it has anything to do with what we are here for, I'll show it to you." Heathering nodded. Heathcote was stoical.

"Aunt Mary!" called Eric, and there entered and stood within the doorway the squat figure of an Indian woman. Without moving her head, she cast her coal black eyes on each of them. Her face was a mask. Heathcote, noticing this inwardly registered "Safe." Eric went to her, and as his lips moved across her wrinkled forehead she gave a low sound of greeting.

"Friends, aunt Mary," he said to her, and then spoke further in her own tongue.

"I tell her," explained Eric, "that we have all come to learn of something which happened just before father's death. You see, I want you to know just what is said. I have never spoken to her of this. Perhaps she knows nothing."

He spoke again, she replied, and he translated to his "friends:" "I asked her if she saw father with a white man the day before he died. She says, 'Yes.'"

Again they spoke. "I asked her where they were, and she says in father's bedroom. Father was in bed. Follow me," Eric bade them. And he led the way to the room that had been Elliott Straive's.

"Now, aunt Mary——" He spoke to her briefly.

She moved to the bed and made certain gestures, picturing with exact detail a scene that lay deep in her memory. For visitors from the outer world had been rare in that place of her long and faithful service.

"She says," interpreted Eric carefully, "that the white man who sat here, talked long, and my father, who lay there, talked little. But after a while my father wrote on a piece of paper and the white man took it and was gone."

"And where was she while this went on?" asked Heathcote cautiously. Eric put the question to her.

"She says she watched through the crack in this door leading into the room behind," reported Eric. "My father was sick, the white man was a stranger, and she wished to know that all was well."

"Thanks," said Heathcote jauntily. "That's as good as we need. She's a witness and a disinterested one, Mr. Heathering."

"So it would appear. Take her acknowledgment at once. She can't write, I suppose?"

"She can make her mark."

"Wait," said Eric. "Let her describe the white man. It may be important or it may not."

"It is of no importance," decided Heathcote quickly.

Eric glanced at him sharply. "Why not?"

"Later on his signature will appear on the paper as a witness."

"Why hadn't he signed it already?"

"Perhaps we are wasting time," cut in Heathering adroitly.

Eric turned to the Indian woman again, and then to the others: "I asked her if she remembers hearing my father call his name, and she says 'No.'"

Heathcote, glancing at Clara, remarked sympathetically: "She can't remember everything, poor old woman."

"Never fear," said Eric. "I'll ask her to describe him."

For reply the old squaw moved silently across the room, put her hand on Heathcote's shoulder, and spoke to Eric.

"She says you are the man!"

Clara in surprise glanced at Heathcote with anxious eyes. An old clock ticked in the living room. Finally:

"That is perfectly correct," said Heathcote, "I *am* the man."

Clara looked away.

Eric held his eyes. Then he laughed lightly: "You might have saved yourself the trouble of looking so surprised at the place—as though you'd never seen it!" Clara loved this man, Eric thought, and that was why he said no more.

"You must understand," spoke up Heathering, "that Mr. Heathcote acted in a very confidential capacity, then and since. It is customary."

"Thank you, Mr. Heathering," said Heathcote. He valued the explanation for its effect on Clara. For Eric's opinion—now that a witness was found—he cared not a rap.

"Um—take her acknowledgment, Heathcote," directed Heathering. Heathcote produced from his pocket the original right-of-way agreement. "And witness it yourself at the same time. Tell her to come here, Straive."

"Not so fast," said Eric frowning. He looked from Heathcote to Heathering and to Clara, whose luminous eyes were gravely on him. "I have one more question to put to her first—just one!"

His question, of perhaps five words, was incisive. Her reply came instantly—one word.

Gray lightning flashed from young Straive's eyes. "I feared it," he said between his grinding teeth.

"What was your question?" asked Heathering, though he almost knew.

Eric scarcely heard him, for he was filled with a new anguish in which only Richard Heathcote and Clara Heathering were concerned. The one in triumph, the other in breathless alarm, stared back at Eric, and the tension grew.

"I say, what was your question?" said Heathering determinedly. He never shirked.

"That," cried Eric, "you shall learn." Both Clara and Mrs. Heathering were startled by a new and ominous timbre in the lad's voice—instantaneous birth of his heart's first rage and sorrow. "But not here. Not in my own house. Come away—all of you." He walked to the door.

"But the paper!" exclaimed Heathering. "She *must* witness the right of way."

Eric turned in the doorway. "She will *not*." His strong teeth closed on the last word like those of a steel trap. "Come, I say!"

Heathcote, letting the women go first, touched Heathering's sleeve. "We've got him," he whispered coldly. "What's the matter with the lunatic?"

"I think I know," said Heathering more coldly. He looked as if he could have cursed this junior partner of his firm of personal counsel. But he merely murmured: "I hope I'm wrong."

Eric strode to the boat landing where John Skimperimish, reading his face, muttered darkly. Eric gave him a warning look and stepped into the launch. Heathcote and the Heatherings followed him without a word, and the young lawyer shoved off and started the motor.

CHAPTER XX.

THE TRUTH.

"Chug-chug-chug," exploded the motor busily. For many minutes it was the only sound. Then Heathcote drawled:

"I followed you, Mr. Heathering, but I should have preferred to insist on taking her acknowledgment. I feel responsible, in a way, for this purely legal matter."

Eric eyed him from contracted lids.

"It won't do, you know, Straive—rushing us off like this on a pretext of some mysterious necessity. Through you as interpreter—you yourself—she acknowledged she signed it. And in the presence of us all. You can't prevent us from getting this thing; you can only delay and annoy us."

He looked virtuously at Clara who, her brown eyes lowered, played miserably with her fingers.

"And I'll give you notice now——"

"Be quiet!" said Eric.

Heathcote half rose from the stern seat, but Heathering interposed by asking severely:

"Why did you insist on our leaving your house?" He would not have brought it to an issue now, but Heathcote had flung the gauntlet down.

"Because," answered Eric, "I did not want to quarrel with you in my own house. Besides, if I had, John Skimperimish might have killed you both before I could prevent him. But we're well away now, so, as you seem to wish it, we'll just finish this thing. Heathcote, come here! Will you take the rudder, Clara?"

"Sit down," said Eric. "Heathcote, I said."

Heathcote stepped forward and faced him.

"Tell them," said Eric, in a quiet voice of menace, "that that right of way you brought them is a forgery."

Clara killed the motor.

"You cur!" cried Heathcote. "How dare you?"

"Tell them—quick!" Eric stepped close to him.

His black eyes snapping viciously, Heathcote drew a pistol—like a flash. But, like another flash, Eric's hand flew up and struck the lawyer's wrist, and the automatic spun in the air and splashed in the lake. Eric took him by the throat.

"By what right," cried Heathering sternly, "do you accuse——"

"The right of the answered question," said Eric through his teeth, struggling with Heathcote. Twisting, swaying, they went to their knees between the thwarts, Heathcote clutching futilely at Eric's stiffened arms.

"Don't kill him," shouted Heathering. "Let go, or I'll——"

Clara, still grasping the useless tiller, cried: "Let them alone, father, Eric will not kill him." Her eyes were darkly blazing stars.

"Tell them," growled Eric, shaking Heathcote's head, "or I'll throw you overboard." He had him now well in hand.

"Yes," the man gasped, "it's a forgery." Eric flung him panting across the thwart.

After a few moments, none stirring, the woodsman's voice broke the silence. "Go back," he told the lawyer, "and sit where you were." Heathcote obeyed, and Clara went instantly to her mother, who showed signs of fainting.

Then Eric turned to Heathering, whose hands were trembling. "Now I'll tell you by what right I accused him. The question I asked my foster mother was *"How many papers did my father write on?"* And she answered: *'One!'"*

"Ah," murmured Heathering, trying to get command of himself.

"I knew my father signed a letter that day about rights over land, and gave it to the man who came—that Heathcote there. And it did not seem likely that he signed another so much the same." Eric drew from his bosom his father's unfinished message to him and looked at it reverently. "His dead fingers could not tell me. But aunt Mary did. He signed only a letter. Then this right-of-way paper is a forgery!"

Heathcote, balefully eying the youth, thought there was still a chance. By a grinding effort he summoned a kind of composure. "Let me see," he requested, and he held out his hand.

Eric laughed lightly. "From the dead hands of a man to the dirty fingers of a forger and a coward? No! Besides, you want it only to tear it up and throw it overboard."

Instead, he handed it to Clara, with a trust which she acknowledged with grateful eyes. Heathcote, bitten again by hope, lunged forward, his hand outthrust to Clara. But she only gave him a haughty, incredulous stare, and glancing over the paper, re-

turned it to its owner with a quiet, "Thank you."

Replacing it in his bosom, Eric stepped over the seat and stood over Heathcote. "Give me the letter!" he commanded.

Heathcote looked at Heathering, who nodded, but an undowned devil in the vanquished lawyer prompted him to ask surlily: "What letter?"

Eric clenched his fist. "I'd answer you with this, if you weren't sitting!" he told him in a low voice. "You know well enough, you liar! Give it to me."

Heathcote went into his pocket again. "If you mean the——"

"Be still, and hand it over."

And Heathcote obeyed.

Eric took the much creased letter from its envelope, looked it over, and put it in his pocket.

"How is this?" asked Heathering mildly.

"It's addressed to my solicitor, sir," replied Eric, "and I'll deliver it to him. Your lawyer here is not only a forger, or a procurer of forgeries, but a thief as well. For this was a private letter which was given him to convey to another person. He takes it from the hand of a dying man—and keeps it! You jackal!" he sobbed. "My poor, sick father, with his stabbing heart, gasping in his pain. And you come and badger him for hours. And finally he gives you this letter. And then you suppress it and forge the thing you preferred. You deserve the penitentiary—or the gallows! And I'll tell you now—both of you—if you'd simply shown me this letter you could have had your right of way. Would I not have carried out my father's wishes?"

"it said, 'unless you see some objection,'" quoted Heathering. "We feared 'some objection' on the part of your lawyers. For lawyers are not always to be trusted."

"Not even yours!" agreed Eric, looking Heathcote full in the face. "But the intent is clear, and I should have felt bound to carry out that intent."

"The intent is still clear," suggested Heathering, with a quiet pertinacity born of desperation.

Eric regarded the financier with cold disfavor. "But you and your hirelings chose to forge a 'safer' paper, chose to deceive and trick me, and use me as dirt beneath your feet. What now would be my father's intent, what now his wish, do you suppose?"

Clara was weeping softly. "But Eric, Eric! Father did not forge the paper. Father, you didnt know the paper was a forgery?"

Heathering had met his moment.

Heathcote spoke up. He grasped at this straw of promised rehabilitation in the eyes of the father of the girl he wanted—the girl before whom he had been shamed. "He knew nothing of it," he said, "on my word."

Eric still waited for Heathering to speak. And Clara, with hands clasped, waited, too, in the silence.

He was no coward, but the struggle was crucial. Finally:

"Heathcote speaks the truth. I did not know it was a forgery. But—I suspected it."

"Father," cried Clara, "you did not need to say that last. You have courage—like Eric. Thank God for that!"

Heathering's mouth twitched. After a moment he cleared his throat. "While we are on the subject," he said, "and before dismissing it forever, let me say this on behalf of Mr. Heathcote. This route through here became of importance very unexpectedly, and Heathcote, content before with this letter, found himself in a position in which he felt responsible to us for an error in caution. This right-of-way agreement gives us, he probably felt, no more than Baker should have granted under the letter."

"It confers almost unlimited rights of excavation, building, timber cutting—many things."

Heathering winced a little. "It *is* rather broad, it is true. But Heathcote, I am sure, felt that it was justified under the circumstances. But it was technically a forgery and he wisely refrained from communicating this to us, because he knew we would not countenance it. In a dilemma so vital as this, he had to 'deliver the goods' as the saying is, or go under as an associate. But he knew that while we demanded the results, we would prefer to remain in ignorance or any irregularity by which those results might have been accomplished."

"I thank you," murmured Heathcote.

"And I, too," said Eric. "You have enabled me, I think, to understand the system. It is utterly detestable!"

Heathering shrugged. It takes time to become a moral philosopher, and your multimillionaire usually lacks the time! This one had, however, become a patient, unendingly persistent being.

"In view of the explanation I've given you, what," he asked, "do you wish to do with this right-of-way agreement? Let me have it," he said to Heathcote, and Clara passed it to him. Holding it up, he looked Eric calmly in the eye. Evidently he intended then and there to face the decree of fate and have it over with.

"What ought to be done with a forgery?" asked Eric grimly.

"It is your privilege," said the financier, and with an impassive face he slowly tore the document to bits and dropped them overboard.

"So far, then, we understand each other," said Eric, looking anxiously at the darkened, muttering sky. "And now, I think we'd better look to our lives."

"Heavens!" screamed Mrs. Heathering, "is the water dangerous?"

"A sudden squall on these lakes is a serious thing," replied Heathcote, fussing with the engine. Eric looked in the bottom of the boat under the tents and bedding. "Have you no oars to hold her head-on?" he asked.

"Oars in a motor boat are hardly necessary," replied Heathcote cuttingly.

"As long as it motors," Eric shouted back, as a gust of wind brought great drops of rain. His voice was drowned by the sharp staccato of the engine, and he had to shout to make himself heard. "Where are your tarpaulins? The bedding will be soaked."

Heathcote was steering down the lake, scudding to the lash of the storm. He appeared not to hear Eric, who turned to the girl.

"Here, Clara, try to untie the tents and spread them—— What fool tied these up in hard knots?—— Never mind!" he shouted to her. She was on her knees, her white fingers clinched on the knotted strands of the ropes. "They're nearly drenched already. Quick, throw them over yourselves." And with fine chivalry to his loved one's mother he covered her first and then Clara. Heathering had clutched a blanket himself and threw it around him.

"I should have seen to those things myself," Eric whispered hoarsely, but Clara insisted Heathcote should have known—with all the experiences he had told them about. Eric leaped to the side of the boat, as it lurched heavily under the impact of the first of the combers. "Port, port," he cried, "or we'll broach to."

"The tiller rope's broken," shouted Heathcote. "Hullo!" A sea struck the stern and deluged him. Eric sprang for a blanket.

"Here, cover your engine. Grab your end —quick. Now keep it down while I right her." He sprang overboard and folded the flapping rudder in his arms, holding it straight.

Heathcote, cupping his hands, shouted something.

"What's that?" Eric yelled back.

Heathcote leaned over and shouted again: "One cylinder's missing."

Without a word Eric threw a leg over the stern, thus bracing the rudder to starboard. "We'll have to run ashore before we lose all power."

Heathcote could not hear him, but he understood the maneuver. And he knew, too, that set thus broadside to the storm the launch might capsize. He sat on the starboard gunwale and beckoned Heathering to him. "Need your weight," he yelled, and Heathering, perfectly calm, straddled the thwart and clutched the edge of the craft. There was the alternative danger of shipping seas. Nevertheless, it was not ill-judged boatmanship and contributed to their safety.

Eric got air between submergings, as Clara, who had crawled to the stern, assured herself. He saw her watching him, and winked at her when the water streamed from his face. He beached the launch just as the water they had shipped silenced the remaining cylinder, and, floundering ashore, drew the boat in. It was the only beach for a mile, and Eric had seen and steered for it.

He shook the water from him like a Newfoundland dog, whereat Clara laughed, a little hysterically. Heathcote and Eric carried Mrs. Heathering, white, but still conscious, to the edge of the forest, and Heathering brought wet blankets and put them over her. Then the woodsman returned to the boat for an ax.

"Thank goodness, he brought one," Eric muttered, as he ran into the timber.

The squall subsided as suddenly as it had arisen. The sky was still dark, but it was more the darkness of approaching night. The rain had ceased before they landed, but they were all drenched to the skin, and the evening air is chill in the North Woods country.

While Heathcote jettisoned the sopping contents of the launch, Eric brought bark from the lea side of a tree he selected, and

dry forest litter from under its protected base. While he set his kindlings with studied care, Heathcote came up and said: "No use, I guess. Matches are all wet."

The imminent peril that had made speech between them necessary was over, and Eric made him no answer. He wondered that the fellow should speak to him. He took from an inside pocket a small and very pasty muslin bag. Clara, beside him, her teeth chattering, peeped at it.

"Why, it's d-d-dough," she said wonderingly, when Eric had slit it open.

"Outside, yes," admitted this very expert young woodsman. Carefully he divided the mass, which was dry flour inside. In the center was a very powdery block of matches.

"Well, well," she murmured appreciatively, and she looked up at him in a new kind of awe.

CHAPTER XXI.

WET, BUT NOT COLD!

Born to America's purple, arbiter of many fortunes, dictator in mid-Western finance, and superplutocrat, James M. Heathering felt himself at the very nadir of his fortunes, where but lately he had seemed easily at their zenith. The key to the strategy that made possible the greatest competitive effort in all the history of American industry had, by his own hands, been torn to bits and flung to the tossing waters of a Canadian lake. His pledged millions, his reputation, his prestige, even his honor as a man, were torn to bits with the paper, and he himself was drenched to the skin and cold to the bone. Surely, he had touched the absolute zero of his career!

Himself and his wife swathed in blankets like any wretched Indians, he watched Eric with an almost fascinated intentness, and when the fire flared he shook himself free of the blankets and drew his shivering spouse toward the cheerful blaze. It occurred to him that Eric, the destroyer, was also Eric, the preserver.

Ringing ax blows now sounded in the near-by wood, and Eric brought branches and saplings and made a lean-to, and spread blankets thereon.

"Here," he said to Heathcote grimly —"extend this farther, and get another blanket or two on it." He spoke now to Heathering: "We couldn't possibly dry enough to keep more than you and Mrs. Heathering and Clara warm. Heathcote will have to keep up the fire all night—or, at least, till I get back with some of your men and dry clothes and bedding."

"What do you mean? Are you going to leave us?"

"I'm going to strike across this neck of the bush. It's only three miles to Tutowa Lake, just below your camp."

Clara had joined them, glancing first to Eric and then to her father. In her wet clothes she looked like a lithe boy.

"I'm going, too," she cried. "They'll never send the right things unless I'm there. And I'll get warm walking."

Eric's broken heart leaped at this proposal. For there were things to be told her that were burning in his brain.

"Indeed, you'll be dry before you get there," he promised eagerly.

"What will guide you in the pitch-dark woods?" asked Heathering anxiously.

Eric looked upward at the sky, alight, now with stars. "Old Polaris there, and a dozen other friends of night portages."

"Very well," said Clara's father, with something of his habitual decision, and Eric and Clara turned instantly away.

Mrs. Heathering turned dully to her husband. "Can you trust him with her?"

"That fellow?" replied Heathering, his shrewd eye on Eric's retreating back. "Yes —damn him—anywhere!"

Holding her hand, Eric guided Clara this way and that through the thick growth of the forest, sometimes walking slightly in front of her when the lanes were narrow, sometimes by her side. The pace was a steady one, and steam soon rose from their warm young bodies. In the small clearings there was just light enough to see it. Suddenly Clara stopped and laughed a silly laugh.

"I was just wondering," she explained, "whether you carried that tiny flour sack with the matches in it to Winnipeg to light a fire on Queen's Avenue."

He laughed, too. "That's a great life-saver, as dad and I often found out. The outside becomes dough as soon as water strikes it and that dough is waterproof and keeps the rest of the flour and the matches in it sealed up. Water-tight match boxes are all right when they *are* water-tight, and you don't smash them." After a little he asked her gravely: "Are you quite warm, now?"

"Oh, I'm as snug as a bug in a rug," declared Clara. She stood close to him with her hands on his chest. "Say it."

"And still you are not angry with me?"

Her large eyes smiled up in his face, and she slowly shook her head.

"But," he gulped, scarcely believing his eyes and ears, "about Mr. Heathcote. Can you ever forgive me for that? For destroying your confidence and faith in him? It was a cruel thing I did, Clara, but——"

"No, not cruel—*just!* You gave him his chance and he would not take it—would, perhaps, have killed you."

Eric looked earnestly into her eyes. "Cruel to *you,* I mean. I never, never would have done it if I knew him to be only crafty and indirect. I could not see you married to a forger and a coward in ignorance of what he was."

"Married to a——"

"Oh, I know you love him." Eric wrung his hands. "And I couldn't, I couldn't take the chance of your dying of grief and shame as my father thought my mother died. Listen, little Clara. It was his tragedy. It drove him to the wilds, made him become at last a fearless man and try to make me one. He—never spoke of it to any one—he was cowed in the very presence of my mother by a masterful man who threatened him unless he confessed a thing of which he knew nothing. And fear made him say the shameful words. Father says it was not the thought that he had done that thing that bowed her head and killed her, for he did not think she believed it. It was that she loved a craven coward! Poor little mother," sighed Eric. Then he looked up. "You are high-spirited and proud, as she was, and it would have killed me to think of what lay in store for you, married to *that* man!"

Clara dabbed at her wet eyes with a wetter handkerchief, and said, sobbingly: "Oh, you great, splendid, foolish boy, I could just worship you for that!"

After a pause she said, with eyes downcast: "Listen, Eric: I don't love him, and never did."

"But he was the only man that came up here to be with you."

"He came to trap you!"

"And he loves you."

Clara shuddered.

"And I saw you—accidentally—leaning against him so comfortably and affectionately, and he touched your face with a flower."

"I—*see,*" murmured Clara thoughtfully. Her mouth twitched: "I did flirt with him those days you were gone. But it wasn't because I really wanted to—as I did with you. It was really for you I did it. He was so sure, so *very* sure that your heart wasn't broken. The cheek of him! 'Men are thick-skinned,' he said. I just thought I'd show him. It didn't alter things any," she added. "He'd been trying to make me love him for months."

"And you—really—don't—care for him?" The wet world glistened about him—a dewy, sparkling, fairy world of dreams and hopes.

"Loved him? No, I don't and never did. But if I did——" she cried, flaming with anger and disgust, "I'd tear his image from my heart."

Eric's pulse beat fast. He tried to remember all that the Winnipeg love experts had told him. But he remembered nothing.

"*I* love *you,*" said Eric, touching her shoulders lightly. "Ignorant fool that I am, I love you. I seem to have laid the pride and fortune of your family in the dust, but I did it for you and my father and my own honor. I could wait to plead I love you till to-morrow—after I tell your father certain other things. But something tells me to tell it to you now—now that I have wrecked everything for you!"

"You saved our lives," said Clara feelingly. She closed her eyes. "I can see you tossed about in that angry water, up, down, sideways, now submerged, now flung high in the air. And your iron knuckles white in their clutch of the rudder—a living rudder you made of it—and brought us to shore and safety. Oh, I love you, too," she avowed with soft fervor, "take me—take me in your arms, Eric, as you did before."

He strained her to his heart. "And let me close my eyes a moment, just as then—Oh, Eric, Eric, you're crushing me. Ah, that's better." His lips were moving across her forehead in the rubbing, Indian way. She felt the joy of it, her eyes still closed; but when he relaxed the deadly grip of his arms she opened her eyes a moment and said to him:

"That's right, just lightly—well, a little tighter than that! And to make up for it—kiss me!"

"I'd like to," said Eric, "but I've never known——"

"I'll show you, darling boy. Put your lips to mine. And go *this way*—— There, that's —just—as nice as hugging me so very hard, isn't it? And there's less danger of breaking my bones."

Happily they fled through the dark and dripping woods under the lighted guidance of the stars—the meek old stars that had not even resented the fist that Eric shook in their faces three weeks before. In a deep glade, where the sky was hidden he stopped again.

"What ought we to do about it?" he asked anxiously.

She merrily laughed. "Desperate ills need desperate remedies," she reminded him, and stroked his damp hair. "Perhaps, after a while, you'd better take me for your little wife."

"Oh!" exclaimed Eric, almost groaning with the shining glory of the thought. Then: "But you said your parents would never consent. How much less would they consent now!"

"That's the least of my worries," declared Clara. "I'm of age and *very* headstrong. Nothing bothers me except—I don't know how to cook!"

"Perhaps aunt Mary would teach you," suggested Eric.

"Of course she would!"

Their entire future thus settled, the two fared onward.

CHAPTER XXII.

ERIC'S OTHER UNCLE.

At eleven a. m., two very important-looking men walked up and down the shore of the lake opposite the tent where James M. Heathering was sleeping.

Eric, with several of the camp helpers, had returned through the woods the evening before, carrying clothing and food to the disconsolate campers on Straive lake. And Mainhall and two rivermen, whom Eric had dispatched with the mail launch equipped with a powerful searchlight, negotiated the water route in four hours and rescued the Heatherings and their bedraggled lawyer shortly before two in the morning.

Mr. Ordway and Mr. Ralston were gray, bald, stout—and fiercely anxious. The last hour had come. Clara told Eric of their mission. "It's the funeral of the iron-projects interests. Don't you care!"

Eric told her to wait.

Heathering, a little hoarse, gave audience to his conferees shortly before twelve. He told them only condemnation proceedings were left them.

"Months!" they shrugged. "And uncertain at that. We might as well call everything off and take our losses."

The secretary poked his head in the office tent. "Can Mr. Straive speak with you at once?"

"Um—yes," decided Heathering darkly.

"I thought it might be about the right-of-way matter," Eric modestly explained. "There are some things you do not know yet."

"What?"

"That this land of mine—all the west half of it, that is—is iron land. Almost a continuous deposit."

"How do you know that?" asked Heathering sharply, and Ordway and Ralston stared at Eric with compressed lips.

"Geology has been my pastime—or passion, you might say. And I thought the rock was iron. But to be sure, I examined your cuts up in the survey camps."

"*That* was the reason you returned that way!"

"Yes, though Heathcote's spies tried to lure me away. But I threw them overboard and continued on. The deposits are the same. There's much more iron here than in all your reserves up there put together."

Simultaneously the mouths of the three men opened a little.

"An agent of the Trust—I suppose he was —offered me a thousand dollars to go to Milwaukee with him, and many thousands if I'd do what they wanted me to."

"Sell the iron?"

"No, give them a right of way. Nobody knows of the iron!"

The three men exchanged swift glances. Even the slow remedy of condemnation went glimmering if Eric's land was a great iron field. Heathering chose his words carefully.

"And were you thinking of selling to the Trust?"

"Of dealing either with them or with you."

Instantly the three men started forward.

"The highest bidder?" rapped out Heathering.

Eric looked his disdain. "No!" he cried indignantly.

"What then?" asked Ordway nervously.

"Just this. You will need no right of

way, for you can have the land itself—iron, timber, everything, to go ahead quickly—the quicker the better. Provided, however, I am able to come to a little private understanding with Mr. Heathering. Eh, could you come away with me a few moments, sir?"

"Why, yes, of course," assented the bewildered man. The apparent reversal of fortune was too sudden to believe, and he could not guess whether presently he should wish Eric killed or canonized. Outside the tent Eric said:

"Where is Heathcote?"

"My secretary informs me that Mr. Heathcote—eh, saw tracks," answered Heatering sententiously.

"I see—and made some more! Well, then, all that is left of our party is Clara and Mrs. Heathering. Let us go to them."

They found Mrs. Heathering reclining in the sunshine, and Clara softly stroking her temples.

"May we finish the conversation we had in the boat?" asked the youth meekly. Pale, beautiful Mrs. Heathering shuddered. "It will not take long," he added for her benefit. Addressing Heathering: "We all understand why it was necessary to destroy the right of way. It was a fictitious thing!"

"Well put."

"But there is a more important thing than even my father's honor: The United States government needs iron."

"Ah, you appreciate that? If that is your condition, I can, perhaps, convince you that with this project on its feet there *would* be more iron."

"I could not take your judgment about that, nor the judgment of the Trust, could I?" he asked naïvely.

Heathering smiled. "You mean we should be prejudiced? Naturally, I suppose."

"So I got the opinion of the secretary of war about it."

Clara's face held now exactly the same expression as her father's.

"You wonderful, wonderful boy," she breathed.

"What did he say?" gasped Heathering.

"That Uncle Sam's government favors this competition. But," Eric raised his hand. "It's common sense that much will depend on how it's managed—whether the private interest or the public is considered first. Which will it be? For that is my condition."

"It will be the public interest—if you can take my word and pledge?"

"I can," said Eric. "After the things you said—and did—in the boat, I can trust you absolutely. Then the iron lands are all yours."

Clara flew to him. "*That's* why you told me that you loved me first. You wanted to win me *before* you did this generous thing."

Heathering and his wife exchanged glances. Hers showed horror; his, deep approval.

"Not generous," denied Eric. "It had to be just as the War Industries Commission decided, did it not?"

"Right," said James M. Heathering. And he strode to Eric and shook him by the hand. "I beg you to believe, my boy, that I do this not for what this decision means to us, but for the decision itself. I have been satisfied that it means more iron rained on Germany, and I am credited with knowing! I'll relieve the minds of Ordway and the others——"

"Just a moment," said Eric. "This iron now—I like iron. I want to work in it."

"Young man, you'll be too rich to work."

"No, sir, I'll take nothing for the iron. It belongs to the Allies."

"But don't you want money?"

"Not especially." He looked about him ruminatively, at Heathering and Mrs. Heathering and their numerous accouterments of camp grandeur. "It doesn't seem to get one anywhere. Besides, I'm not really poor. I think I'm not, at least. Mr. Baker has kept reinvesting father's funds, and the estate, without the land, was appraised last month at one million six hundred and forty-six thousand dollars and sixteen cents."

"No," agreed Heathering, "we could hardly call you exactly poor. Then what *do* you want to do?"

"When I return from a sharp-shooting trip to France——" He looked tenderly at Clara, whose lips trembled, but whose head was high. "Just Clara here, and—iron!"

"And what do *you* want to do?" asked Clara's father, his shrewd eyes shining on his daughter.

"I want to wash dishes for my husband," she announced.

"Heavens!" ejaculated her mother. "Let her!"

His First Offense

By Clarence L. Cullen

Author of "The Best Laid Plans," "The Intimate Enemy," Etc.

Engaged to nab the flock of shoplifters in the town's leading department store, "Biff" Devine gets on the job with two feet, four wheels, and a few other speedy things, especially conclusions

ACCOMPLISHMENT of the job, not an alibi—that's what we're expecting of you."

J. Atkinson Brough, the thirty-year-old manager of his town's leading department store, spoke with the brittleness which is expected of a man who has become the manager of his town's leading department store at the age of thirty years.

"That's me, chief; barring that I ain't ever been nicknamed the Alibi Kid anywheres that I can remember just at this moment."

"Biff" Devine, private detective, pitched his reply in the slightly resentful tone of a man who considered that his private-detectiving record of twenty years for an important agency had been unjustifiably impugned.

"There is no doubt in my mind," Mr. Brough went on brittling, "that the shoplifters who have been operating in this establishment for the past three months are experts from the larger cities. You are acquainted, the head of your agency informs me, not only with the faces but with the methods of the shoplifters of New York and Chicago."

"If I didn't know 'em better'n the hair on my head the agency would have ditched me long ago," offhandedly replied this seasoned sleuth.

"All the same," rapped the austere young Mr. Brough, "I want to warn you not to underrate the difficultness of your task here. That it will be more difficult than, apparently, you imagine is proven by the fact that Mrs. Brennan, the highly capable woman who has served successfully as our store detective for many years, finds herself unable to cope single-handed with this shifty gang of 'lifters that's been looting us of late."

The agency detective spread a pudgy hand over his mouth to screen a grin. The grin, interpreted, said this: "A woman detective, hey? Permit me, if you please, to indulge in a passing pooh-pooh!" But he said aloud:

"The agency, of course, ain't ever called in till the amachures falls down."

Having figuratively played this on his piano, not without gulping slightly, Mr. Brough resumed in a somewhat modified tone:

"You will coöperate, of course, with Mrs. Brennan, who knows the faces of most of our local store thieves. In a city of our size—a city, already inhabited by half a million people, that is advancing with giant strides toward the million mark—we already have to deal with the large number of inveterate shoplifters who make their home here."

"Now, I wonder why this guy is easing me an earful about his hick hamlet's mob of small-time shop shredders?" was the translation of the agency man's second sardonic grin. But aloud he merely said: "Ye-eh?"

"Not only that," went on the manager of the Empire Emporium, with a certain note of pride in his tone, "but we are called upon to handle—diplomatically, of course—a surprising number of incurable local kleptomaniacs, all of them persons of social prominence, such as are mistakenly supposed to exhibit their weakness only in pretentious cities like New York and Chicago."

"Regular burgs like Chi and little Ol' N'Yawk, chief, gives them birdikins the short up-and-down before hotfooting them to the hoosegow these days," said the agency man. "That diplomatic stuff with the kleps simply ain't done any more on the main line."

"There is no reason that I know of why we should adopt New York or Chicago meth-

ods here," chopped Mr. Brough, thereby clinchingly conveying the impression that, as the manager of the leading department store in his town of half a million population, the adoption of New York and Chicago methods was precisely what he aimed at. "That, however, is neither here nor there," he added, brittler than ever. "The point I seek to make is that, in employing you to round up the band of shoplifters persistently operating here, we're expecting real rounding-up results, with unremitting vigilance, and no remissness whatever."

Mr. Devine's heavy lower jaw dropped noticeably. Unremitting—remissness—vigilance—persistently operating—these phrases obviously had slightly carbonized his cerebral cylinders.

"Meaning, I suppose, that I'm to get 'em," he said huskily. "O. K., chief. Getting 'em's my only excuse for living at all. When does this round-up begin?"

"You're to start at once, of course," was the all-business managerial reply. Mr. Brough touched a button at the side of his desk and a messenger girl appeared. "Ask Mrs. Brennan to come here immediately," he directed the girl. Then, dryly, to the agency man: "I want you to meet, under my eye, our store detective, who, in this work for which you have been engaged, will be your associate and coequal——"

Mr. Devine thrust out the jaw which a moment before had been dragging.

"The agency boss didn't mention anything about my working alongside of a skirt store cop, chief," he bridled. "I ain't saying anything against her, but if I can't get away with this job alone, I——"

Mr. Brough tut-tutted as only a man who, through indefatigability and a complete lack of the sense of humor, has elbowed his way at thirty to the headship of a business establishment employing a thousand people, knows how to tut-tut.

"Nonsense—sheer nonsense," he translated his tut-tutting into words. "Two heads are better than one, to say nothing of four eyes being more effective than two, and you're lucky to be undertaking the job with a competent, experienced woman who knows how to——"

"You sent for me, Mr. Brough."

In the doorway of the manager's office stood a big-framed, wholesome, handsome woman, still comfortably under middle age, with a watchful twinkle in her South-of-Ireland gray-blue eyes, and with the heavy braids of her silver-mixed auburn hair coiled upon the back of her head. She was dressed in neat black, and she had the trick, no easy one for a woman of her bulk and coloring, of looking very much alive without appearing to be aggressive over it.

The manager introduced Mr. Devine to Mrs. Brennan with managerial crispness.

"Mr. Devine, an operative, well recommended to us by his agency, is to coöperate with you in ridding the store of this gang of thieves," he addressed the woman employee. "I have informed Mr. Devine that you are to work together, coequally, but, of course, with credit given where credit is due. I omitted mentioning to you that I was sending for an agency man to assist you because that did not seem to be necessary. The point is that the agency man is here, ready for business, as you, Mrs. Brennan" —the manager permitted himself a mere spook of a smile—"always are, I am pleased to say. Now, show me results!"

Mr. Brough, who had stood to introduce the pair, plumped back into his desk chair and touched a call button to signify that there were other matters awaiting his attention.

Outside the manager's door Biff Devine, agency detective, deliberately halted in front of and faced Kate Brennan, department-store spotter of shoplifters, for a continuation of the frigid survey he had made of her at the introduction. Mrs. Brennan, taken by surprise, nevertheless regarded him twinklingly. But, seeing his fixed hostile expression, the twinkle gradually turned to a stare. Their eyes clashed and fused. The agency man's were soon averted. He was not the first burly individual, nor the first detective, either, to slant his gaze from the impaling focus of Kate Brennan's eyes. Her husband himself, a headquarters detective who had been killed in a strikers' riot years before, had done that frequently at conjugal crises in the Brennan home; and Danny Brennan, a broadfoot who had pounded a beat in a cop's brogans before wearing police plain clothes, was a good deal more of a man than any agency detective ever could be! This thought, among others, shone in the policeman's widow's eyes as she threw back the impolitic sizing-up stare of Biff Devine.

"I told your boss," rumbled the agency man, "that it ain't my custom to work along-

side a woman fly cop, in a store or anywheres else."

Mrs. Brennan folded her capable arms comfortably upon her ample bosom.

"Did you, then?" she inquired, the somber glow of cold appraisal in her steady eyes.

"He's one of these here he-birds that believes in the suffragette stuff, I figure, so I didn't get it across," the lowering Mr. Devine went on rumbling. "But get this, Missus Store Cop: I'm on this job alone, or I ain't on it at all. Meaning, that I ain't aiming to be tagged around or interfered with or rubbered after by anybody while I'm operating in this plant. That's plain talk, I hope?"

Mrs. Brennan, still wearing her arms on her bosom, laughed softly.

"Plain enough, whatever else it is," she replied. "I might have told the boss, as you call him, that it's none of my choosing to work alongside of a comedy-screen sleuth, but I was too busy laughing inside of me at the slapstick movie-lot style of you to think of it at the time."

It was upon these terms, of the agency man's own incautious making, that the two entered upon the task of ridding the Empire Emporium of a skillful gang of shoplifters.

II.

At eleven o'clock on the following morning, an hour when the store aisles were uncomfortably crowded by the first flock of forenoon holiday shoppers, an alarmed-looking man, plainly in an extreme hurry, pounced on his toes, half running, and butting regardlessly into glaring women who blocked his path, all the way from the rear of the ground floor of the Empire Emporium to the main entrance. He had pushed open an inner swinging door on the exit side, and was darting headlong across the storm vestibule for one of the outer swinging doors opening upon the street, before the bellow of a big voice boomed startlingly in the ears of the ground-floor shoppers:

"Stop that 'lifter!"

All over the floor the shopping gabble suddenly ceased. A few shopping women, in scattered spots, screamed shrilly. From behind various counters came the sharp, spasmodic "My Gawd!" of saleswomen already bordering upon hysteria from holiday exhaustion.

Curiously enough, considering the customary immobility or immovability of shopping women when ferociously intent upon their holiday buying, those in the main aisle squeezed aside to make a path for the bellower, a heavy-jowled, purplish-faced man, whose clomping gait compared with that of the man he pursued was as that of a coal truck to a soft-purring sport car.

Across the street from the Empire Emporium was a small and melancholy city park where, on summer evenings, a small and melancholy municipal band regaled the populace with alternate jazz and "classical" music. By the time Biff Devine, still bawling "Stop 'im!" had gained the storm vestibule, the man whom he desired to have stopped, no longer merely pouncing, but running with all his might, was halfway across this dreary little park, the paths of which were now patchily covered with cindery ice and the rest of it with smoke-grimed snow. A bunch of small boys, with hard-packed snowballs held furtively behind them in the grasp of screening mittens, stood watching, and considering whether they would or would not, the approach of the flying man with his overcoat tails spread almost horizontally back of him by the breeze of his flight.

"Soak 'im, you kids! Soak 'im—block 'im—trip 'im!"

Thus buttressed not only by the permission, but by the peremptory command, of a large shouting man hurrying toward them from the department store across the street, the delighted lads let fly a sinister-looking shower of close-packed snowballs at the speeding man just as he ranged alongside them on the slippery path. Most of the missiles thudded against his overcoat, but the last one, more deliberately aimed, knocked off his perfectly good, new-looking soft hat. Far from stopping to regain the hat, the speeder kept on unswervingly, with the frictionless, good-style gait of one who manifestly must have practiced for a purpose the art of running correctly, through the square-block parklet that was bounded on all four sides by business buildings.

"Hey, why didn't you chuckleheaded pups trip 'im, like I hollered at you to?" Biff Devine, panting heavily, raged at the boys when he lumbered alongside of them.

Whereupon, instantly and unanimously resenting this changed tone of the man who had given them the order to bombard the one in flight, they groped on the ground for

their carefully cached reserve stock of teak-hard snowballs and let heave with them at Mr. Devine, getting the agency man in a number of good, soft, hurty spots, including one of the hollows or indentations that lie south and slightly back of the ears. Faltering on the icy path under the impact of the barrage, Mr. Devine carelessly permitted his heels to lose contact; his legs shot forward like twin pistons, and he sat down hard enough to make even a seismograph take notice had such an earthquake-recording instrument been within a hundred yards of him. The agency man scrambled to his feet; what he had to say—and, to judge from the movements of his lips and the "Gr-rr-rr!" set of his mouth, this seemed to be a good deal—was lost upon his bombarders, for as soon as he could steady and point himself he resumed his flat-footed pursuit of the hatless man now bounding in rabbitlike leaps across the street at the far end of the park.

The fugitive, swift in mind as well as in body, promptly showed that his was no mere aimless flight. Across the street from the end of the park which he had left behind him, in front of the First National Bank—a disheartening example of what a marble building can become in a soft-coal town—stood, unoccupied, a squatty, racy-looking roadster, the huge hood of which would have proclaimed to any motorist's eye that an engine of power lay underneath it. The pursued man leaped, without the least slackening of pace, squarely from the pavement into the driver's seat of this car. With both hands working adeptly on the dash he had the spark-and-gas throttles correctly set in something less than five seconds, and, finding the starter button without fumbling, he pushed it, poised his feet over the clutches when the motor throbbed to life, gripped the wheel as familiarly as if that had been the only steering wheel his hands had ever touched, and shot the roadster of power through a clutter of traffic with the careless expertness of a fireman-chauffeur catapulting the battalion chief to the scene of the conflagration. By the time Mr. Devine, bellowing with what breath he had left, had emerged from the park, the slatey-gray car with canary-colored wheels was whizzing around the park's southeast corner, obviously headed for South Boulevard, the town's main residence street and fashionable driveway, from which, at the town's edge, roads ramified to every section on the mainland of North America.

Mr. Devine, his gait, though still an imitation of running, now slowed to the amble of a Percheron, made for a scowling young traffic policeman anchored lordily in the middle of a crossing half a block away. The traffic cop eyed Mr. Devine with bovine disapproval when the agency man swooped upon him with the splutter:

"Hey there, bo, stick up for me the first fast-looking bus that rolls by here, will yuh? I want a wagon that can go some. I'm chasing a thief."

With no trace of agitation whatever, and from an altitude equaling that of the loftiest peak of the Himalayas, the traffic officer spoke:

"Chasin' a thief, are ye? What thief? And who and what are ye, birdie, to be chasin' anybody?"

Mr. Devine, controlling himself by a visible effort, flashed his agency badge and explained in gasped sentences the situation to this uniformed checkerneck. Employed by Empire Emporium to corral shoplifters. Had just sprung one of 'em. Shoplifter had galloped across the park and jumped into and raced away, headed south, in a car that had been standing in front of the First National Bank. Shoplifter, whose fast getaway showed that he must be a crack hand at the thieving game, must be chased and nailed, of course.

The traffic cop, yawning undisguisedly, by this and other symptoms of detachment made it perfectly clear that shoplifters and unofficial detectives and such like meant little or nothing in his blithe young life.

"What's the need for an agency bull at the Emporium, I'd like to know, with Kate Brennan, a sure-enough detective's widow, and a smart woman herself, keepin' an eye out for shoplifters over there?"

Mr. Devine, boiling, succeeded in emitting mere inarticulate sounds.

"This car that you say"—the traffic tyrant strongly accentuated "you say—your thief swiped from in front of the bank—what kind of a lookin' car was it?"

Mr. Devine, by an enormous effort of will, contrived to describe the car to this liveried lowbrow. The crossing policeman instantly came out of his contemptuous torpor.

"Gray roadster with yellow wheels—why, say, that bus belongs to the cashier of the First National Bank!" he croaked.

Mr. Devine, inwardly cheered, looked as if sorry it did not belong to the mayor of the town.

"Say, I'm supposed to keep an eye on that bus from here—that's what the cashier eases me a little old gold piece every Christmas for!" mumbled the traffic policeman, gazing dismayedly at the spot in front of the bank from which the cashier's car was missing.

"He'll double the bet this Christmas, I s'pose, now that his bus is gone," the agency man, grabbing the chance, remarked. But the crossing cop, being otherwise engaged, either did not catch or ignored the dig.

"Hey, Chuck!" he called out.

Chuck, the chauffeur in regular chauffeur's rig, at the wheel of the handsome new high-powered limousine just then slowly bearing down upon the crossing from the north, braked his car.

"'Lo, Tim," he said out of an open window to the traffic man. "What's cookin'?"

"Where you headin'?" the policeman, now downright agitated, asked him.

"Nowheres in particular," replied Chuck. "The doc hiked out o' town this mornin' to help perform an operation, and I'm just rollin' 'er around to give 'er the air."

"Can that big ship get over the ground?" the cop asked him.

Chuck looked almost too disdainful for speech.

"Can a duck swim?" he inquired out of a corner of his mouth. "If I can't twist eighty out of 'er, with things wide open, I can't make 'er waddle."

The policeman worked fast in explaining, the out-of-town physician's air-taking chauffeur listening with a speed bug's kindling eyes.

"The cashier's little old Binj-Whick humdinger, hey?" he cut in on the explanation. "I've wanted to hook up for a let's-settle-it speedfest with that hot little bus ever since the doc got this new one, but I never could get the cashier's eye. His boat'll go some, if he ever learns how to turn 'er loose, but this big doll of the doc's can run rings around 'er at that. Hop in, bo!" to the agency man. "I'll overhaul that Binj-Whick, if we get wind of 'er, or find out why!"

"I'll phone to headquarters," the traffic policeman funneled through his hands, "to have all the boulevards watched on the town's edge so that——"

But the doctor's mighty-engined car, emitting a deep diapasonic hum like the triumphant basso roll of an organ when the folks are leaving church, after darting down the street like something carried on the top crest of a broken dam, already was rounding into South Boulevard on two wheels.

III.

Stepping harder still on the accelerator when once straightened out on the boulevard, Chuck soon achieved a speed that, even in a town notorious for the recklessness of its motorists, made observers gape. The agency man, a little green about the mouth, as from seasickness, commented with bogus cheeriness when Chuck, in hurtling around a car headed in the same direction, missed grazing it by almost an eighth of an inch.

"Nearly nicked that one, hey?" said he. "Ain't afraid of smearing up some of these slow pokes if you keep on this speed up, are yuh?"

"Speed?" Chuck, his speed-zealot's eyes set dead ahead, chopped airily. "This ain't no speed—on'y sixty-five. I'm warmin' 'er up and feelin' 'er out. You'll call this crawlin' when she begins to hop eighty or eighty-five. Maybe, if I gorge 'er with gas after she's good and hot, I can even make the hell-cat shoot ninety!"

"Say, buddy, you do that ninety-shooting stuff when you're riding alone, get me?" Mr. Devine, swaying violently on his slippery leather cushion, broke out. "I ain't aiming to have what's left of me picked up off the pavement of this hick boulevard with a putty knife!"

Chuck, grinning, stepped on her a little harder yet.

"I thought you wanted to snag that shoplifter, bo," said Chuck, slightly contemptuous.

Whatever apposite reply Mr. Devine was framing, it suffered dispersal when, half a block ahead, a motor-cycle policeman, standing beside his machine, gave Chuck the peremptory arm signal to slow to nothing for a little exchange of conversation.

"Tommy Shea, acting fresh, as per usual," was Chuck's comment as to this officer. "Tommy can go chase hisself—or chase me, either one. If he chases me, I'll bet you a good seegar, shipmate, he gets lost so hopeless that they'll have to send out a general alarm for him."

Whereupon Chuck, giving his carburetor the gas drunk of its new and enthusiastic life, ricochetted on his way like a meteor traveling horizontally.

But T. Shea, a motor-cycle cop with the stubborn disposition of his species, already was giving his machine its preliminary run, previous to boarding it, when Chuck, waving blithely, whizzed past him.

T. Shea, crowding gas into a machine that, doing a hundred flat per hour, had won the motor-cycle policemen's annual race only a few days before, flashed alongside Chuck on his tuned-up two-wheeler within a mile from the start of the impromptu speed trial. Chuck, a fanatic who, nevertheless, knew when he was faded, throttled his car to nothing, braked, and grinned sheepishly out of the window at the dismounted motor-cycle cop.

"Hey, where t'ell are all you rum-eaters, swishin' by me to-day, gettin' the stuff?" aggrievedly inquired the officer of Chuck. "I can't locate any juice meself, no matter what I'd willin' to cough for it!"

"Ain't had a ball in a month, Tommy—no such luck," was Chuck's soothefully pitched reply. "Was hittin' a high spot or so on orders from Tim Mulroon the downtown crossing cop. Tim hands this buddy here, an agency sleuthfoot," nodding toward his seatmate, "along to me for a run after a shoplifter who, jumping out of the Emporium, swiped the bus of the First National cashier and made a dashing get-away in 'er down this lane of yours. Didn't happen to lamp 'im as he streaked by, did yuh?"

The motor-cycle cop screwed up his eyes and stared at the physician's chauffeur as if he now was perfectly convinced by his words that Chuck was intoxicated or something, whether he showed it otherwise or not.

"A shoplifter in the First National cashier's car—say, Chuck, if you ain't been hittin' up the old stuff, what are you usin', the needle?" he demanded with the querulousness of one confused.

"Needle me elbow," was Chuck's prompt come-back. "You seen your shoplifter get into the cashier's boat and skate 'er off, headin' this way, didn't you?" to the agency man.

"If I didn't, as plain as I see you, you can whistle for the boob wagon to come get me," was Mr. Devine's out-of-hand reply.

"Gray car—yellow wheels?"

"Sure—same little Binj-Whick speedster the cashier's had for a year," said Chuck.

"Drivin' without a hat?" was the officer's next question.

"That's him—some kids snowballed the 'lifter's Kelly off as he shot through the park," the agency man replied.

The officer's slow grin gradually developed into a chuckle.

"Say, you agency Sherlock," he addressed Mr. Devine, "do you know the cashier of the First National when you see him?"

"No more than I know the leading piano tuner of this burg when I see him," snapped Mr. Devine, resenting the grin and chuckle. "What's that got to do with this store thief that's clinching his get-away while you're sticking us up here chewing the rag?"

"Easy does it, king of detectives," sardonically enjoined the motor-cycle cop. "Say, tell me somethin' else, will you? Did Kate Brennan, that's been the spotter of counter swipers for the Emporium all these years—did Kate get a flash at your shoplifter before you saw him grab the cashier's car?"

"Why don't you get her on the phone and ask her that, seeing you're feeling so chirpy this morning?" barked the outraged Biff.

"Because, ol' sleuth," the wheel policeman went on, "if the guy that drove the cashier's car licketty-split past me a few minutes ago wasn't the First National cashier himself, then I'm going to see my doctor this evenin' and ask him how long it'll be before the nut-hatch gets me."

Mr. Devine's lower jaw, following its habit when its owner found himself in a jam, dragged.

"I won't say," the motor-cycle man went on, "that I ever seen him drivin' so wild before, without a hat and his hair a-flyin', and actin' in general like he might be pickled to the ears, which, of course, he don't drink at all. But if the birdie steerin' the cashier's gray-bodied yellow-wheeled bus past me a quarter of an hour ago wasn't the cashier of the First National himself, then my name is Leon Trotzky and I don't care who t'ell knows it!"

Chuck, looking askance at the agency man, now broke out:

"Look a-here, fly cop, if I'm making a fathead of myself on your say-so, chasin' the cashier of the leadin' bank in town, ridin' in his own boat, up and down the world for a shoplifter——"

"Ye-eh," Mr. Devine, suddenly finding his voice, cut in on this, "you people have got everything dead right. It's just like the cashier of the leading bank in a town to jack-rabbit through the town's leading department store, knocking women right and left, and to hotfoot from there through a park like a bird dog chasing wild turkey, letting his lid lie on the ground after a bunch of kids have knocked it off his bean, and it's just like the cashier of the leading bank in town——"

"Hold up a minute, mate," put in the motor-cycle officer, his grin gone and his expression less confident. "Somebody's wrong, and there's an easy and quick way to find out who it is that's wrong. Wait here till I give a ring-up and get this dope straightened out."

The officer, going into the drug store on the corner, came out within three minutes, looking abashed.

"Danged if you ain't right, scoutie," he addressed the agency man in an apologetic tone. "Must ha' been your store thief drivin' the cashier's car after all. I had the cashier himself on the wire, and he's sore as a butcher over his car bein' swiped, and he——"

"Gid-dap, doll!" said Chuck to his car, throwing open the throttles and stepping on her, and once more the big limousine leaped along the boulevard, the motor-cycle officer, his cockiness vanished, trailing.

"Ye-eh, I'm a boneheaded bum when it comes to savvying anything about my business, and I don't know the difference between a shoplifter and a sand snipe—ye-eh!" Biff Devine gloated in Chuck's ear as the car, gathering momentum, showed seventy and then seventy-five on the speedometer dial.

"Guess I'll have to eat that crack I made about you, bo," said Chuck, grinning deprecatorily. "I wisht that wheel cop hadn't stuck us up so long. I'd have run a figure-of-eight knot around that crook in the cashier's Binj-Whick by this time if Tommy'd laid offa me. Hey, watcha doin'? Don't grab a-hold o' my arm that way when I'm drivin', will yuh?"

"Pull up, quick!" the agency man withdrawing his hand from the involuntary clutch which he had taken on Chuck's sleeve yelled. "There's the cashier's bus, standing in the middle of the road without anybody in it!"

Chuck, throttling and braking swiftly, blinked amazedly at the Binj-Whick, veritably the First National cashier's car, standing deserted on the boulevard. Tommy Shea, the motor-cycle policeman, chugging alongside, helped Chuck out with the amazed blinking number.

"Ye-eh," the agency detective, debarking heavily from the doctor's car, laconically addressed the pair of them, "you razor-edged birdikins had the hull dope dead right. The cashier of the leading bank in town, when he leaves his hat in a park and starts out for a drive, always abandons the bus in the middle of the road when he gets part of the way to the place he's bound for, and pitter-patters on his hoofs the rest of the trip. He——"

"Car's all out of gas," the motor-cycle cop, who had unscrewed the cap of the Binj-Whick's gas tank, cut the agency man's No. 2 gloat short by saying. "Not that I'm claiming, now, that the cashier would have left 'er standing here, unguarded, even if he did run out of gas while driving 'er. Hey, sweepsky," addressing a White Wings who with pavement broom and shovel was working alongside the curb, "did you lamp the driver of this schooner when he left 'er standing here?"

"Yep, Tommy, I seen him," replied the old broom-and-shovel man, straightening himself creakingly. "Crazy-lookin' somebody. Didn't have no hat on. Cussed like blazes and flacked his arms, nuttylike, when he found his bus'd run out o' gas. Then he hopped out and looked back, in the direction he'd come, for somebody to pick him up. Yelled at a boy drivin' a grocery truck to take him along, but the boy didn't make him, I guess, and kep' right on. Then the nut, talkin' to hisself, cut and run like a chased pickpocket down the middle of the boulevard, till he come to the Touraine. He bolted into the Touraine, and that's the last I seen of him."

"The Touraine!" exclaimed the motor-cycle cop, pointing to the big apartment house two blocks down the boulevard. "Why, that's the swellest dump of its kind in town, and——"

"Little touch of high life in this job," put in Mr. Devine, grandiose now. "I knew that fast-running fillilloo was a crack hand. He's probably rented a flat at the nifty apartment-house plant while he's working the shops here during the holidays, and he——"

"Yes," interrupted the officer, "and if that's the case your crack hand is doin' a little yeggin' on the side, for there've been half a dozen apartments in the Touraine busted into and robbed lately by some neat worker, and——"

"And your hick headquarters outfit waits till an agency Sherlock, as you pasted me a while back, nudges along and cops this all-'round handy crook," was Biff Devine's third gloat. "Tag along now, Willie, if you want to," he bantered the motor-cycle officer as he climbed back into the seat beside Chuck the medical chauffeur, "and I'll show you the blow-off of a sure-enough Sherlock round-up of a live one, the way the thing's done on the big time."

Tommy Shea, more abashed than ever now in the presence of this private operative whose figures had a way of proving correct, mounted his motor cycle and trailed the big limousine as Chuck drove it up in front of the Touraine.

The Scandinavian janitor, flicking a long feather duster over the near-onyx panels of the hall, met the three men, when they entered the Touraine, with his customary mooselike stare. Had he seen a hatless man, probably out of breath from running, enter the building during the past quarter of an hour?

"Ay bane in basement, coal-piling furnace," was his reply to the agency man's query, adding the opinion that all of the Touraine's tenants had gone crazy with the heat.

"The need for heat, you mean, Ole," Tommy Shea shut him off, and the three tackled the negro elevator man, just then descended, for information.

"Did a hatless man, panting as if he'd been running, ride up with you lately, Smoke?" the agency man asked him.

"Ah jes' come on two minutes ago, an' this yere's mah fust trip up-an'-down," was the elevator man's reply.

"Where's the boy you relieved?"

"Ah reckon he's downtown by this time, shootin' some mo' craps with mah money," the black answered.

"Never mind—our bird's in the building and we'll get 'im all right," Mr. Devine, now undisguisedly the heavy man in charge of things, remarked at the end of these two unsatisfactory interviews. "Shea," patronizingly to the motor-cycle cop, "you might, if you want to attract a little notice and make kind of a hit for yourself at the main office, phone to headquarters and ask your top cop to send a wagonload of peelers here to keep an eye out, front and back, while I'm springing this yegg and shoplifter upstairs. Get me?"

"Don't sound like such a bum idea, at that," respectfully replied T. Shea. He used the apartment-house hall telephone, and, when he emerged from the booth a moment later: "The Super's hotfooting a hurry-truck-load of 'em over here from the fourth precinct right away," he informed the astute private detective directing these important operations.

While waiting for the policemen to arrive, Mr. Devine questioned, with no lowering of his usual speaking tone or rumble, the janitor as to the personality and characteristics of all the male tenants, heads of families as well as bachelors, of the Touraine. A sharp-eyed little girl, rubbering on all this over the hall banister, caught the word "thief," and ran upstairs stuffed with news. Presently, descending by the stairway as well as by the elevator, women tenants, most of them in a taut state of nerves over the recent robberies and the recenter lack of heat in the steam pipes, flocked through the hall in their wraps, prattling awesomely of the gentleman yegg soon to be handcuffed in his apartment upstairs.

The truckload of policemen, in charge of a saturnine sergeant who silently regarded Mr. Devine as if the agency man were some peculiar kind of manatee or sea cow not previously seen in that neighborhood, soon arrived, and the sergeant, after a word with the motor-cycle cop, divided his men equally and stationed split squads at the back of the apartment house, in the basement, and in the front areaway.

The next move obviously was Mr. Devine's, and he was about to make it, whatever it was going to be, when, from a taxicab that just then drew up at the curb, Kate Brennan, spotter of shoplifters for the Empire Emporium, stepped springily to the pavement, and, smiling vaguely, walked into the hall of the Touraine.

IV.

Mr. Devine, all over the deft detective on the brink of an important achievement, advanced nobly, yet with a certain condescension, to meet her.

"Good morning, maddum," he addressed her detachedly. "Any little thing I can do for you?"

"Yes," replied Kate Brennan, "there is."

The twinkle was almost a spark in her steady gray-blue eyes, but the astute private operative apparently was too much absorbed in his triumph to see it.

"Name it, maddum," he said crisply. "But work fast, please. I'm about to make an important arrest here, and I ain't got much time."

"It's about that arrest," said Mrs. Brennan, "that I want to speak to you. The man you're about to arrest here means well. This is his first offense, and it's only fair, to my thinking, that he should have another chance."

Mr. Devine's small round eyes began to flare like a pair of flickering flivver lights.

"Oh-ho—'zat *so?*" he exclaimed, shining with victory. "Another chance, hey? *'Zat* so?"

"Yes, that's my belief," unfalteringly replied Kate Brennan. "He's a young man who, speaking generally, has done the best he could, and, if he's committed himself now, why, as I'm saying, it's his first offense, as I happen to know, so I don't think he ought to be disgraced for it."

Mr. Devine gazed from a lofty judicial peak at this woman, herself supposed to be enlisted on the side of stern justice, standing before him pleading for a bad un.

"Now look a-here, Mrs. Brennan," he broke out, "there's something smeary about this, and you'd better be explaining yourself for your own good. How do *you* know what man it is I'm about to arrest here?"

"I know," was Kate Brennan's unhesitating reply, "because it was I who told him to run out of the Emporium."

"*What!*" The agency man's bark cracked like a bull whip. "You—told—him—to run——"

The police sergeant, who had rumbled his pleasant good morning to Kate Brennan when she entered the Touraine hall, drew closer to this astonishing confab, as did Tommy Shea, the motor-cycle cop, and Chuck, the medical chauffeur.

"Yes," Mrs. Brennan repeated, "I did that. The foolish man lifted an article from a counter under my very eyes, and I told him to be off, never supposing he would run so madly through the store and streets as he did."

Mr. Devine raised a warning hand, while the police sergeant, T. Shea and Chuck, the chauffeur, all blinked incredulously.

"You're committing yourself, maddum," Mr. Devine supplemented his warning of the hand. "You, a supposed honest store detective, are admitting, before witnesses, that you're hand-in-glove with a shoplifter and yegg who——"

"I must have my say in this young man's behalf, no matter what you may think," Mrs. Brennan interrupted him. "And if what I've already told you has done no good, I'll go further and say that this young man you're about to arrest is well connected. He's the twin brother of the cashier of the First National whose car he seized for his wild ride here. I've just had a talk with the First National cashier, and he says he's willing to forgive his brother this first offense, so——"

"That's compounding a felony, maddum!" haughtily broke in the agency man. "Whether the cashier forgives or doesn't forgive his twin for swiping his bus is no skin off my young elbow. I was hired to pinch shoplifters, whoever they might be, and their being twins of bank cashiers don't get 'em anywheres with me. You might just as well——"

"And there's another thing," Mrs. Brennan, her jaw set, but the twinkle growing in intensity, again interrupted him. "My own younger sister, that I'd hate to see get into trouble, is mixed up in this. She's upstairs at this moment with the man you're talking of arresting, and——"

Mr. Devine, his eyes now ablaze with triumph, stopped her peremptorily.

"That will do, Mrs. Brennan," he commanded her. "I'm going to make this arrest at once. And let me tell you that it's going to be my arrest at that. I tracked the 'lifter to this plant, and that fact ain't going to be changed by your contributing your little bit in going upstairs with me now and pointing the crook out to me. Come on, maddum!" and he led the way to the elevator, while the women tenants huddling in their wraps at the far end of the hall gathered closer and whispered fearsomely.

"You're determined, then, to arrest this first offender, no matter what's said in his behalf?" Kate Brennan, her baffled expression belied by her twinkle, asked the agency man.

"Your first offender can unspool that stuff

on the judge and jury—come on!" ordered Mr. Devine.

Whereupon, without more ado, but with the air of one who had done her best, Mrs. Brennan got into the waiting elevator with the heartless agency man, followed by the police sergeant, the motor-cycle policeman, and the doctor's chauffeur, all three of them in a state of blinking wonder.

"This floor," said Mrs. Brennan to the all-white-eyed negro elevator man when the fourth floor was reached, and, stepping off with the four men, she led the way through the hall to the entrance door of the right-hand front apartment. She hesitated before pressing the push button.

"If," she quietly addressed the agency detective and the three other men, "you'll be good enough to stand back a little, in the hall shadows, till he answers the bell——"

"O. K.—he's got as much chance to get away from me now as I have to butt into the Senate," was Mr. Devine's gracious if exultant reply, and, with his three companions, he took a stand, ready to spring, in a shadowy turn of the hall about ten feet from the door in front of which Mrs. Brennan stood with her finger on the electric button.

Within less than five seconds after she pressed the button, the door was opened by a stout, handsome, auburn-haired woman, in the snowy uniform and cap of a trained nurse, who looked astonishingly like Mrs. Brennan herself, only younger. The trained nurse smiled into her sister's face with that knowing, comprehensive smile which is one of the most charming things about trained nurses who are charming.

"Oh, how do, Kate!" she greeted her sister, Mrs. Brennan. "Everything's fine. Boy."

An extremely excited-looking, but widely grinning, young man with wild-looking hair—hair that had been blown all about his forehead from hatlessly driving a motor car, looked over the trained nurse's shoulder.

"That you, Kate—Mrs. Brennan, I should say?" babbled Mr. J. Atkinson Brough, manager of the Empire Emporium, his flushed grin becoming positively cavernous.

"It's me, Mr. Brough—and how glad I am!" exclaimed Mrs. Brennan.

Mr. Brough went on babbling:

"Oh, your sister's told you, eh? Boy! Rattling big lummox of a nine-pounder! Got his fists doubled up already like a prize fighter! Little wife's doing elegant. Stood it like a major general. Brick, that's what she is. Never saw such pluck. And I guess this sister of yours ain't some nurse, Kate—I mean Mrs. Brennan! Don't know what the dickens we'd have done without her! Funny I just happened to be out of my office when your sister tried to get me on the phone, eh? But wasn't it clever of her to call *you* up, Kate—oh, I mean Mrs. Brennan—when she couldn't get me, and tell *you!* And listen here! I found a baby's milk bottle in my overcoat pocket when I got home—was that the thing I grabbed up from that bargain counter lot of babies' milk bottles when you told me to hurry home? Ha, ha! Must ha' been crazy! The little wife'll nurse the boy, of course—no need for any milk bottle! And see here, Kate—shucks, I mean Mrs. Brennan—how the dooce did I get home, anyhow? Grabbed somebody's car, didn't I? Was it my brother's bus? Well, I'm glad it wasn't a stranger's, anyhow. Lost a hat somewhere in the shuffle, too. Fellow's liable to make all kinds of a monkey of himself, over his first offense, what?"

"Mrs. Brennan," said Biff Devine, agency detective, to the store detective of the Empire Emporium just before closing-up time that evening, "I know when I've got mine. But there are moments—I won't claim there are many, but there are some—when I ain't quite such a boob as you've found me so far. That being the case, and I hope to show you that it is, let's you and me, working together, get right on the job to-morrow morning and clean this store up of shoplifters?"

"Agreed," said Kate Brennan, her twinkle still working.

Cullen is writing some of the best yarns of his life just now. Watch out for his work in future POPULARS.

The Pound of Flesh

By W. R. Hoefer

Author of "Old Kid Opportunity," "Amateur Stuff," Etc.

"What is it?" inquired the sporting editor, eying up the Kid. "Don't tell me you're managing a poet now, or is he an elocutionist? My, what a lovely brow he has; and such wonderful tin ears!"

A BROAD, bland smile graced the good-looking countenance of "Silk" Sprackling as he alighted from the train that entered the hustling, Middle Western city. Dame Fortune had smiled upon Silk lately and Silk was grinning right back at the fickle old lady.

He recalled his last visit to this same city a year ago, which had been quite unprofitable to him. Dame Fortune had glared at him then, and he had been constrained to leave some personal effects in the way of jewelry with the hotel proprietor in lieu of cash to settle his hotel bill before bidding the city a sad, and, he hoped at that time, a permanent farewell.

Now, however, things were different. Sprackling entered the city this time with three thousand dollars in cash, a gold-headed stick under one arm, an attractive little wife on the other, the Kerry Patch Kid in tow, and a definite purpose in mind. Silk deposited the cash in a convenient bank and his wife in the expensive hotel facing the lake front, and the following morning took his gold-headed cane and the red-headed Kid down to the *Evening Chronicle* building to explain his purpose to Rod Kenrick, the *Chronicle's* sporting editor.

"Rod," said Sprackling, when he and the Kid were seated at the sport editor's desk, "I want a favor from you."

"How much?" said Kenrick, extracting a roll of bills from his trousers' pocket.

"Not that kind of favor this time," replied Sprackling grandly. "I want some space."

Kenrick chuckled. "The dramatic editor's out, and if he knows you're here he'll never come back. He still recalls how you kidded him out of a solid column for your dancing act last year and what an awful frost it was. Couldn't you get your young ladies to do the shimmy or something instead of that awful æsthetic dance stuff they pulled, Silk?"

"It isn't for the girls," replied Sprackling with dignity.

"No? Every time I see you you're managing something different. What is it this time?" asked Kenrick.

"This," replied Sprackling, indicating the Kid. The editor glanced at the Kid, and the Kid, noisily attired in a vividly striped suit and busily chewing a huge wad of gum.

"What is it?" inquired Kenrick, slowly surveying the stocky form of the Kid from soles to cap. "Don't tell me you're managing a poet now, or is he an elocutionist? My, what a lovely brow he has; and such wonderful tin ears!"

The Kid stirred uneasily in his chair at these playful remarks and scowled more fiercely than ever at Kenrick while Sprackling leaned forward with an impatient gesture.

"No, he isn't a poet," replied Silk testily. "Can that kidding stuff. He's the famous Kerry Patch Kid, and I'm his manager. I've got a live one this time, and we're going after the best in our division and get the kale. It's space in your sport sheet I want."

Kenrick became interested at this. "So you're a fight manager now," said he with a grin. "Well, I'll say you've got a pretty fair boy at that."

"You uttered something then. He is good," smiled the urbane Silk, as he lit a cigarette. Then he explained his purpose in calling.

"Now, we're after a bout with Piper Fay. If we can beat Piper we can get a match with the champion, and if we can get a match with him we're the next middleweight champions of this universe. And we can beat Kelley, the champ, in a couple of rounds, can't we, Terry?"

"Uh-huh," assented the Kid, with another fierce scowl.

"But," continued the fluent Sprackling, "there's an elephant in the ointment. Ike Bernstein, Piper's manager, won't give us that match. He's after a bout with the champ himself and isn't taking any chances. We want the mighty press, headed by your august and famous self, to force Ike into a match with us, Rod."

The sporting editor absent-mindedly filled his pipe and gazed dreamily at a photograph of a show girl on the wall. Then he turned abruptly to his friend. "I'll give you some space, Silk," he said at last, "because I don't think Fay is entitled to a match with Kelley until he beats your man. And I've no doubt the other papers'll do it, too. But I want to warn you that you're monkeying with a buzz saw in Ike Bernstein, and you're losing your time in trying to force Ike into a match. But if he does consent, watch your step. Ike's the foxiest manager who ever pried a soft living out of the public. If it was any other game I'd say you had a chance in matching your wits with even Ike. But you're a novice at the box-fight game, and he's apt to trim you out of your gold fillings without disturbing your breathing."

Sprackling smiled pleasantly and rose. "Don't lose any beauty sleep over me," said he. "We can take care of ourself, can't we, Kid?"

"Uh-huh," grunted the Kid in his pleasantest manner as he, too, rose to depart. "All you do is get them other boobs for me, Silk, an' I'll knock 'em out."

Rod Kenrick kept his word to Sprackling, and the next day the *Chronicle* printed a story telling how good the Kerry Patch Kid was. It printed his record, which was a quite formidable one, and demanded that Ike Bernstein give a match to the Kid with his boxer, Piper Fay. The other city papers followed suit. Also, Silk Sprackling called upon the wily Ike in person to demand the match, but the latter refused to consider it.

"Go and get a reputation," Ike advised Sprackling with scorn. "When the public wants this bout they can have it. But we ain't fightin' no pork-an'-beaners these days. We're after Kelley an' we're gonna get him."

But, thanks to Sprackling's activity with the sporting press, the public was informed of the true status of the case, and it began to clamor for a bout between the Kid and Piper Fay, now that the former had run the latter to earth in their fair city. The public clamored so hard for this match, in fact, and accused Piper and Ike of cowardice in such uncertain and unflattering terms, that the latter became restive and finally sent for the debonair Silk to talk the matter over.

"I'm gonna give you guys this match with Piper," said the wily Ike, laying a friendly hand upon the other's shoulder as the two sat in the back room of Ike's cafe one evening.

"Good!" said Sprackling, smiling. "I always knew you'd do the right thing by us. And we'll pack the Whirlwind Club to the rafters. We'll both clean up on it. We'll even take a percentage instead of a guarantee, Ike."

"Not so fast," breathed Bernstein softly. "I'm gonna give you this match after you go out an' get a rep, like I said. But that won't be hard to do. This town ain't never seen the Kid box. They gotta be shown. So all you hafta do is beat a new boy I brung on from the coast. He's been in them four-round things out there in Frisco."

"Who is this boy?" asked Sprackling with suspicion.

"Otto Flack is his name," replied Bernstein, with an innocent look.

"Never heard of him," said Sprackling.

"That only shows what soft pickin' he'll be for you. The only reason I'm makin' you beat him first is to give these local fans a chance to see your boy an' work up some interest in our bout. But before you do anything about it, I wanna be fair. No one ever can say I wasn't all open an' above the boards with you, Silk. So I'll tell you about this Otto. He ain't very classy but he's kinda tough. The kid can beat him easy on points. But that ain't enough. He's gotta knock this Otto out inside of eight rounds."

"Well," said Silk, shooting a smoke ring at the ceiling, "any boy that's so good we haven't even heard of him, don't trouble us. We'll agree to take him on and knock him out inside of eight rounds."

"Or quit pesterin' the life outa me for a fight with Piper," supplemented Bernstein.

"Or quit pestering you."

"Now, just one thing more," said Bernstein, as the other rose to go. "This Otto guy is got a brother. I wanna be fair to you. No one's ever gonna say I didn't give you a square break in this game."

"He's got a brother? What's that got to do with Otto?" queried Sprackling.

"Nothin'. Nothin' a-tall," assured Bernstein. "Only after the fight I don't want you to go around tellin' folks I never let on to you that Otto's got a brother."

When Rod Kenrick heard the news of the promise of a match with the reluctant Ike's star in the event of the Kid's first defeating another boxer, he whistled softly in surprise.

"So you worked old Ike after all," said he. "I didn't think even you could do it, Silk."

"It was easy," grinned Sprackling. "First I kidded him through the press and then I joshed him and persuaded him personally. And you know this Ike chap isn't such a bad fellow as you boys make out at all."

"It's just as I feared," smiled Kenrick. "I'm afraid you don't know Bernstein. When he undertakes to be nice and pleasant to anybody he's got something up his sleeve beside his funny bone. But at that I can't see what his game is. The Kid ought to put Flack away inside of six rounds. He's a tough boy, but he don't class very high."

"That's just what I thought," returned Sprackling.

The Whirlwind Athletic Club, which was staging the boxing show, held a good-sized crowd the evening of the bout. While the affair was in no sense a championship event, the sporting elite of the town were interested in it because of the amount of newspaper publicity given the wrangle between Bernstein and Sprackling and, moreover, they were anxious to see the Kerry Patch Kid's famous knock-out wallop in gory action. That his opponent was merely a rugged, mediocre battler, with small pretension to class mattered not at all in this instance. They wanted action and a knock-out. And in view of the character of one of the principals and also the conditions of the match, they were likely to get it.

It was a sweltering, humid August night, but the close-packed, uncomfortable audience of fans possessed themselves in patience through the three rather tame preliminaries and endured their physical discomfort with surprising good nature. They knew the hitting reputation of the Kid. They knew the intent of the Kid. And they confidently waited with the fond expectation of seeing him make good.

Flack, a stocky, rugged-looking youth, entered the ring first when the arena was cleared for the final bout. He was a heavily muscled, thick-necked young man who looked capable of absorbing a lot of severe punishment. But the comments of the crowd, in which they offered to pay his funeral expenses and recommended certain well-known undertakers, added no whit to his apparently already low stock of confidence. His manager, the wily Ike, seemed, however, to have whatever he lacked in confidence and serenity. He even backed his apparent confidence with several large bets at the ringside that his man would stay the limit.

This looked suspicious to the discerning Kenrick, who was closely watching Bernstein from a ring-side press seat, and he remarked as much to the urbane Sprackling who hovered near.

"It looks funny to me," quoth Kenrick. "That bird Ike has something under cover besides his underclothing. He's the foxiest manager in the game, and he's up to something. I'd give a lot to know what it is. You'd better watch out, Silk. See that he doesn't slip this Otto a bomb between rounds."

Sprackling laughed. "This Otto person'll need an ax or something to hurt Terry," said he. "Ike Bernstein seems pleased and confident because he's a good bluffer. He's just bluffing it out. He knows I've kidded him into a promise of a match with Fay by out-managing him and he's trying to make the best of it."

Further comment just then was interrupted by the roar of the audience as the Kerry Patch Kid entered the ring. Attired in a flashy red bath robe, he glared at the waiting Otto for a moment, his heavy dark eyebrows working busily up and down the while, as he chewed his gum, had his gloves adjusted to his huge hands by two noisily industrious seconds, and then advanced to the center of the ring with his opponent while the fat, pudgy little referee gave them their instructions.

"Hey," bellowed one fan from the gallery, "instruct the Kid he can't use a gun."

"No biting in the clinches!" yelled another.

"Slip Otto a soft pillow to lay on!" came another voice.

"Hey, ref, tell the Kid he dassent knock Otto no farther 'n the gallery accordin' to the rules!" bellowed still another.

And then the bell rang and the fight was on. The Kid stepped briskly from his cor-

ner, his left hand working back and forth like a piston rod, a scowl on his heavy brow and his right hand dangerously waiting down at his side. Flack immediately backed away, blocked a left jab and clinched. Again the Kid advanced, again the other blocked and clinched. The crowd howled to the hesitating Flack to fight. He merely grinned and backed away again, but this time into the ropes near his corner. In a flash the Kid jabbed his left to the face, Flack's guard went up, and the scowling Kid crashed his famous right in the other's body. There was a short, furious exchange of swift blows before Flack was able to clinch, and when the referee broke them the wary Otto was bleeding from the nose and the crowd was rocking the house with its yells.

There was more action in the second round, still more in the third, and in the fourth the Kid scored a clean knockdown when he landed a solid left jab followed immediately by a heavy right cross. In the fifth round it looked to be all over. The rugged Kid went fiercely after his opponent, and after three more knockdowns the round ended with Flack staggering and weak. Sprackling was jubilant as the crowd called in a frenzied roar for the Kid to finish his man in the sixth.

"It's all over but collecting the purse," said Sprackling to Kenrick.

"Maybe," replied the latter. "But just look at Ike. He don't think so. He's actually grinning." Sprackling looked over at the near-by corner where Flack's manager sat. The shrewd Bernstein was gayly smiling. Then they saw him wave his hand toward the back of the house—and the lights went out just as the bell rang for the end of the round.

The mob was in an uproar immediately, and catcalls were hurled back and forth across the darkened house. There was darkness, confusion, excitement, and intermingled cries for a full two minutes, and then the lights blazed forth as suddenly as they had gone out.

"Well," said Sprackling "it gives this Otto person an extra minute's rest, but it won't do him any good. Terry'll get him this round." Then he glanced over at Flack's corner and gave a start of surprise.

"Well, I'll be dog-goned," said Sprackling.

"What's up?" asked Kenrick.

"It's Otto. Just take a look at him," gasped Silk. "Why that guy's as fresh as when he started."

Kenrick looked, then stared, then swore softly. "Something wrong there," he stated. "They couldn't pep that guy up like that in two minutes. Here he was almost out, and now he's as clean and fresh as when he started."

It was true. Flack started the sixth round as fresh and strong as he had started the bout. It was unbelievable almost. He had been groggy, tired, weak, two minutes before. And here he was leaving his corner for the sixth session as fresh as could be. Ike Bernstein was grinning with a diabolical satisfaction, and Flack was going into action with an energy that was uncanny in view of his previous battered-up condition.

Flack, pursuing the former clinching tactics lasted out the sixth round in fairly good shape. Came the seventh. A whirlwind rush by the Kid caught his opponent near the center of the ring. A swift, savage series of short jolts, a vicious uppercut and a solid right swing sent Flack down for a seven count near the end of the round, but when the eighth and last round started the Kid's opponent, considerably battered and weak and tired, came from his corner wearily, it is true, but with an amount of energy and strength all out of proportion to the severe beating he had absorbed throughout the previous rounds.

By this time the fickle fight crowd was with the fast-tiring Flack and against the scowling, rushing, desperately swinging Kerry Patch Kid.

"Stick it out, Otto," howled the crowd. "Cover up. Clinch. That red-headed ham couldn't stick you away in a week, bo."

And the red-headed Terry, the savage, rushing, vicious Kerry Patch Kid didn't, although he tried mightily. When the final bell rang Flack was tottering and sagging. He was able to just weakly clinch and stall. He had scarcely strength enough left to raise his gloves to block. Another half minute and the Kid would most certainly have sent him down for the ten count. But there wasn't another half minute more. The bell clanged with the tired Flack still on his feet, and at the conclusion of the bout the wily Ike leaped into the ring and bore his tired boy away.

"And I guess now you won't keep pestering me for a match with Piper Fay," said the grinning Ike to Sprackling, as he met the

latter and Kenrick downtown that evening. "You sure got a fine champ in the Kid. Any guy that can't knock a bird like Otto out after havin' him in as bad shape as the Kid had him in the fourth round is some ham."

Sprackling merely concealed his disappointment at the bout in a pleasant, suave smile. "Mr. Bernstein," said he softly, "you've put one over on me. I don't know how you did it. But just kindly remember this. Your day is coming. I had too much confidence in you. I'll not make the same mistake again."

It wasn't until a week later that the debonair Silk learned the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth about the famous Flack-Kerry Patch Kid fight. And when he learned it he chuckled softly in admiration.

"Roddy was right," said he. "This Ike person *is* a wily wight. But I'll get him yet."

That evening Mr. Theodore "Silk" Sprackling explained the piece of clever strategy that the astute Ike Bernstein had put over on him to Mrs. Silk Sprackling. He felt he had to. Little Mrs. Ted wasn't in the least interested in prize fighters. She knew more about the subtle beauty of involved classical music and the technical excellence of the old masters of the brush than she did about the masters of the squared circle. The art of Franz Hals and Brahms meant more to her cultivated mind than that of Frankie Burns and Dempsey, and she wished that Teddy would leave the crude atmosphere of the squared circle and enter the more dignified profession of the law for which he had been educated.

But the debonair Silk felt that in very justice to his little spouse he owed her an explanation, inasmuch as their joint capital was now depleted by some two thousand dollars as a result of ill-placed wagers on the unfortunate efforts of the Kerry Patch Kid.

"We've only a thousand dollars left, dear," said Silk to Mrs. Silk as she nestled her pretty little head against his chest while the two discussed the event in their room at the hotel. "But don't you worry, honey. I'll get it all back from friend Ike with usurious interest. I've the germ of an idea in mind right now."

"But, Teddy, how did it all happen?" asked his wife, puckering her dainty brows in puzzlement. "You and Mr. Kenrick and everybody were all so certain that Mr. Meagan would—how do you express it—make Mr. Otto go to sleep before that awful fight was over. Something must have happened."

"Something did," said Teddy gently.

"What?" asked his wife.

"Ike," answered Silk. "Davey Shaw, who was double-crossed by friend Ike once, came and apprised me of all the horrid facts. You see, Alice, our mutual friend Ike has an interest in the Whirlwind Athletic Club and can thus effect the lighting arrangements when he wishes, a fact I only recently learned. Also, Otto has a twin brother."

"But didn't Mr. Bernstein tell you about his having a brother Ted? And, anyway, what difference would that make?"

"Yes. Berny did tell me that Otto had a brother, honey. He made a point of telling me in all fairness, as he expressed it. But he didn't tell me that Otto had a twin brother who was also a boxer. And he didn't tell me that there is a little door that opens into a little room under the ring. Nor did he tell me that the lights would go out at the end of the fifth stanza."

"Oh," said Mrs. Sprackling.

"And," continued Mr. Sprackling, "exactly what happened is this: When it looked as though Otto was surely going to take a nap in the ring, in the fifth session, Ike caused the lights to go out. This allowed Otto to leave the arena surreptitiously and it allowed his brother Elmer to enter the ring, bright and fresh, from the little door below, unnoticed by the referee, myself, or the attendant throng. And with Elmer there in the sixth round, bright and fresh, and only three rounds to go, the result resolved itself into a mathematical proposition which figured in favor of Ike. For, obviously, if it takes the Kid six rounds to dispose of one Flack it's bound to take twelve rounds to dispose of two Flacks, especially when they're twins and fight and look the same. And we had only eight rounds instead of twelve to do it in."

"That was quite unfair, wasn't it, Teddy?" sighed little Mrs. Silk.

"Quite," assented Silk, patting her affectionately. "In fact, it's the first time I've ever seen a relay boxing match. But I've bored you with all this, dear, just to let you know why we're two thousand dollars poorer than we were. But I'll get it back, Alice. Don't you worry."

"Of course you will, Ted," cooed his wife snuggling up against him more closely.

"I'll have to be; to get ahead of Ike," declared Silk with a wry smile.

II.

Otto and Elmer, the relay team, as Roddy Kenrick called the Flack twins, left town hurriedly after their duet against the Kerry Patch Kid. It seemed safer, for the Kid threatened to commit mayhem, assault and battery, murder in all the degrees, and other dire things upon them at sight.

The Kid's pride was hurt. The town was laughing at him, and his black scowl became blacker than ever as he worked his massive jaws tirelessly upon his inevitable wad of chewing gum. But not so his manager, the urbane Silk.

Brawn and black anger were all right in their place, but against mental cleverness such as that of Ike Bernstein they availed naught. In such cases brain must fight brain. And Silk continued to smile pleasantly and to work his brain instead of his temper.

A match between Bernstein's Piper Fay and Sprackling's Kid was out of the question for the present. The former had promised to sanction the bout in the event of the latter's disposing of Flack inside the time limit and the Kid had failed to do so. Accordingly, Bernstein was safe from challenges and taunts of the Sprackling forces and could feel free to go after the big match with Kelley, the champion, while Sprackling bent his energies toward securing other matches for the Kid and regaining both prestige and money.

The first of these bouts was with one Joe Larkin, a middleweight of fair class and reputation. The Kid won in the fourth round, but lost any prestige he might ordinarily have gained through the victory when it was announced in the sport sheets that he had weighed in at one hundred and sixty-eight pounds, ten pounds over the middleweight limit on the afternoon of the bout. He won his next bout against "Spider" Cox, a fast, shifty boxer, a month later, but this time he had weighed in at one hundred and seventy.

Word went round the sporting circles that the Kerry Patch Kid was getting too big for the class.

"How about it?" asked Roddy Kenrick. "Is that straight about the Kid's weighing in for Cox at one-seventy?"

"It's only too true," sighed Sprackling. "Looks like Terry's packing on weight."

"Tough luck," commented the sport editor. "I guess your chance to get even with Ike Bernstein in a bout with Piper Fay is gone, Silk. Ike isn't such a sucker that he'd let you birds come in that heavy."

"I guess that's so," agreed Sprackling dolefully. And that evening the sporting page of the *Chronicle* carried a story stating that it was learned, upon good authority, that the Kerry Patch Kid now weighed close to a hundred and seventy pounds and was in all probability out of the middleweight class.

Ike Bernstein read this story and grinned widely. Then a plan trickled through his nimble brain. But first he wanted to make sure about that weight.

"Silk," said Ike, as the two met in Lorimer's billiard rooms that evening, "I hear you got a heavyweight on your hands now."

"No such thing," protested Sprackling testily. Apparently this weight subject was getting on his nerves. Everybody seemed to know of it, and it would mean that the Kid would have to weigh in for all his bouts instead of coming in at catch weights as he had been doing in several no-decision, limited-round affairs. This would mean more rigorous training for the Kid with a chance of weakening him.

"Well, the paper said he weighed in for Cox at a hundred-seventy. The Kid's been outa trainin' a week now. He must be still heavier. I'll bet you he weighs a hundred-seventy-five right this minute."

"The Kid don't weigh a pound over one-sixty-nine, right now," snapped Sprackling, with an exhibition of temper that was unusual in him.

Bernstein noted the display of temper. It could mean but one thing, reasoned the foxy Ike. The Kid was getting heavy and Silk was sore about it and hated to admit it. Well, he'd see, for himself, exactly how heavy the Kid really was.

"I'll bet you fifty, right now, that the kid weighs over a hundred an' seventy pounds in his fight togs," offered Bernstein.

"I'll take you," said Sprackling angrily.

"But you hafta weigh him on scales that're *right*," said Bernstein, with unnecessarily sarcastic emphasis.

"We'll weigh him at Paddy Donnell's place. Is that good enough for you?"

"It is," grinned Bernstein. "Paddy's scales're always right."

Sprackling got the Kid on the phone, the two met him an hour later at Donnell's café and the weighing took place, witnessed by an interested collection of sporting celebrities. The Kid stripped, donned his canvas shoes and trunks and stepped on the scales. The beam didn't budge at one-seventy-five. It barely moved at five pounds less, and at a hundred and sixty-nine pounds it balanced exactly.

"Well," snapped the usually suave Silk, "I hope you're satisfied."

"You said a mouthful. I am," grinned Bernstein. "Here's your fifty washers," and he peeled some bills from a fat bank roll and handed them to the other. It was clear that Ike was willing and glad to part with fifty dollars in the circumstances.

"It was worth fifty beans to see with my own pair o' eyes just what that red-headed mick does scale," confided Bernstein to Piper Fay that evening. "Now I gotta scheme where we can pick up a flock of easy coin an' slip Silk an' the Kid a stylish little trimming at the same time. I'm gonna give them birds a match with us, Piper."

"Say," roared Fay, "where d'ya get that noise? I'm not fightin' no heavyweights when they're as good as the Kid is."

"Sure you ain't," agreed Ike. "But the Kid won't be no heavyweight when he climbs in the ring against you. He'll weigh one-fifty-eight, the present middleweight limit. An' he'll be so weak at that weight he won't be able to lift his fin high enough to take his end of the purse. He might be able to get down to weight within a coupla months, but he won't never have that chance. I'm gonna give him a match *two weeks* from today, at the *existin'* middleweight limit, weigh in ringside."

"They'll never take the match," said Piper.

"Oh, yes, he will. Silk thinks that boy of his can trim anybody anywhere at any weight. He'll sweat the weight off the Kid an' cut an arm off if he hasta. He's made the crack he'd do anything to get us in the ring since I made a sucker outa him in the Flack fight. But that ain't my whole scheme. Now get this: Silk thinks the middleweight limit is one-fifty-eight ringside in this town. An' it is, right now. But he don't know that the commission can change that weight an' make it legal by publishin' it in some newspaper. An' he don't know that I can pull a few wires with them birds on the boxing commission. So I'm gonna have the good old commish declare the middleweight limit in this here State to be one-fifty-six ringside, an' the place they're gonna publish this little announcement is gonna be in a little three-line item on the *ladies' page* of the paper insteada the sport sheet, where none of them guys'll see it."

"Well, what about it?" queried Fay.

"Well, just this about it," grinned Ike. "There's gonna be a weight forfeit of one thousand bucks for every pound over the middleweight limit. I'm gonna stick that in the articles. You can do one-fifty-six soakin' wet. But the Kid'll have to almost kill himself to make the weight. An' when he does make it, both he an' Silk'll think the weight limit is one-fifty-eight, they'll weigh in at that weight, an' then I'll show 'em where the weight's been changed to one-fifty-six an' we collect two thousand scads offen them boobs before we go in the ring an' then we slip 'em a fine young pasting when we get 'em in the ring. An' I guess Mr. Silk won't ever trouble us again."

The following evening there was a little business session in the back room of Ike Bernstein's café. Sprackling, Bernstein, the Kerry Patch Kid, and Piper Fay comprised the members. The two former smiled agreeably at each other as they mentally prepared to outwit and double cross the other, while Fay and the Kid, scornfully disdaining the use of any such transparent politeness, scowled openly at each other.

Bernstein made his proposition to Sprackling with an ill-concealed grin of satisfaction.

"We'll give you this match, two weeks from to-night, seventy per cent of the purse to the winner, at the middleweight limit, ringside," he informed the troubled-looking Silk. "And for every pound over the weight limit they's a thousand dollars forfeit."

The other plainly fidgeted at the terms. "Give us a month to get the Kid down to weight," he begged.

"Can't do it. We got another fight after that. But, of course, if you're afraid Piper'll kill the Kid, don't take the match," rasped Bernstein. "You don't hafta, ya know. They's nothin' in the League of Nation's articles to make ya."

"Oh, we'll take the match. We'll do anything for a crack at Piper," snapped Sprackling pettishly. "But, at least, for the love of Lulu, be a little reasonable. Make

the weight higher or leave out the forfeit if we're a couple of pounds over a hundred-fifty-eight."

"Nothin' doing," grinned Ike. "We're middleweights, not heavies parading around as middles. I guess you know dog-gone well the Kid can't get down to weight. If he can't you can just bet they won't be any fight. Grab them terms or they's nothin' doing."

"Oh, we'll take 'em," said Sprackling with a clearly audible sigh.

Roddy Kenrick, when Sprackling told him of the terms, was plainly worried for his friend.

"You must have been crazy," he said. "No boxer can take off that much weight in two weeks and be in shape. Fay'll kill the Kid. Silk, I always thought you were about the smoothest young man of my acquaintance, but you sure lose my vote on it now."

"Well, what could I do? It's the only way Ike would let us have a crack at Fay, and, unless we beat Fay, we don't get a chance at the championship," said Sprackling."

The news of the coming bout roused the local sport denizens to a high pitch of excitement, and sporting fans the country over, in view of the near-championship flavor of the bout, were anxiously awaiting its coming. When the terms were known the betting odds greatly favored the Bernstein contingent. "Wise" opinion dolefully shook its sporting head and declared that the Kid was beaten before he ever started, and that his manager, Silk Sprackling, was the prize citron of the sporting universe for allowing the unfair arrangement to be made. That he was plainly outmatched by the shrewdest manager of boxers in the country was the prevailing opinion of the talent from coast to coast.

Sprackling, accompanied by a trio of sparring partners and old Barry Kent, the famous little conditioner of boxers, took the Kid off to the mountains, away from curious eyes and excited mobs, to get the flame-haired Terry in shape for the fight. Not so Ike Bernstein.

He had Piper Fay train right in town. Fay was admittedly in good condition when the match was made and would need little more hard work to be put right on edge. For a week he did early morning road work, and the last week of preparation consisted mainly of boxing, shadow boxing, and other training stunts performed before huge, admiring crowds of boxing fans at his open-air gymnasium near the outskirts of town.

Piper Fay was a fast, flashy boxer, taller and rangier that the chunky Kid, with an accurate, educated, long left hand and a damaging, cruel punch. He lacked the knock-out reputation of the scowling Kid but was, withal, a crafty, savage, capable exponent of the manly art. Moreover, the apparently unfair conditions of the coming match were so well known to the average fight fan, and Fay's superb condition impressed them so greatly that as the time for the bout drew near the odds on Ike Bernstein's boy gradually lengthened until on the day of the fight he was the overwhelming favorite in both sentiment and the betting.

The Sprackling camp broke up the day before the fight and returned to town. The usually urbane manager seemed a trifle worried to close observers when he appeared in public, and, although he manfully bore himself with a smiling aplomb, there were countless observers who insisted that his seeming good nature was forced and put on for public effect.

As for the Kerry Patch Kid, he really looked remarkably fit. There was no gainsaying that. He was bronzed and healthily complexioned, and his scowl indicated nothing inasmuch as it was his usual expression. In response to all inquiries the Kid made confident replies.

"Sure," he brusquely informed Rod Kenrick, after a visit to that person's sanctum down at the *Chronicle* office, "I'll beat that guy. Put any loose change you got down on us. I ain't quite decided how I'll cop him yet. Sometimes I think it'll be my old one-two punch that'll grab off the bacon an' then again I might knock 'im dead with a coupla short jolts when we're in close. I'm kinda funny that way. I never know just how I'll lick a bird till I do it."

And to his manager his attitude was just as self-confident.

"Well, how do we feel now, Terry?" asked Sprackling, the morning of the bout, which was scheduled for about ten o'clock that night. Silk always used the managerial "we" nowadays.

"Oh, swell," replied the Kid, scowling up at the sun as they stood in front of Sprackling's hotel.

"Think you'll put him away?"

"Say, Silk, if I couldn't bump that rummy off insida six rounds I'd get a job and go to work. Honest I would, Silk. I'd akchully work." Which remark was enough for the smiling Silk. Any boxer who was willing to really perform work in the event of failure to accomplish a task must, in all reason, be supremely confident.

To Ike and his close friends and followers, however, any symptoms of confidence in the opposing camp were regarded as pure, unadulterated bluff and openly laughed at.

"Why, say," laughed Ike, as he sat enthroned among a score of his admirers in his café, one pudgy leg crossed over the other, a fat cigar sticking out at an aggressive angle from his thick lips and his beady little eyes twinkling in amusement as he busily wiped the perspiration from the round bald spot on the top of his head, "why, say, I think so much of the Kid's chances to-night that I'll go out and getta real job if he trims Piper."

His friends cheered lustily thereat, for here was confidence indeed. It required real confidence for a boxer to agree to go to work in the event of failure, but for a manager of a boxer to agree to toil unless he made good! Here was not only confidence but a truly wonderful sublime faith!

And that afternoon Ike cheerfully informed Silk Sprackling of the real terms of the articles he had signed.

"I s'pose you got your man all fixed an' ready to scale in at the middleweight limit?" he asked.

"We're all ready, Ike," smiled Silk.

"An' I guess you know what the middleweight limit is?"

"Certainly. A hundred and fifty-eight pounds, ringside," replied Silk.

"That *was* the limit," grinned Ike. "It's two pounds lower now."

"Oh, no, it isn't," easily assured Sprackling. "Only the boxing commission can fix the weight in this State, and, when they change it, it has to be published in a representative newspaper."

"It does," agreed the grinning Ike. "And it *was*."

"Where?" demanded Sprackling, frowning.

"Right in the *Chronicle*, your own friend's paper. Just getta eyeful of this." And Bernstein produced a copy of the *Chronicle*, turned to the woman's page, and, sandwiched in among several cooking receipts, was the announcement that the State boxing commission, at a recent meeting, had voted to place the middleweight limit for championship events in that State at one hundred and fifty-six pounds ringside and herewith publicly announced the same.

Sprackling read the item and groaned audibly. "But this—it's on the *women's* page," he roared. "Where do they get that stuff, a sport notice chucked among a lot of cooking receipts?"

"It's all regular and legal," grinned Ike. "It's your own fault if you birds didn't see it. Piper an' me saw it an' we're trained right down below that limit."

"Holy catfish!" roared Sprackling. "You can't get away with that stuff. Why, this is a joke!"

"It is," assented Ike, "an' the joke's on you. An' it'll cost you guys just a thousand bucks for every pound you're overweight. You might stick the Kid in a Turkish bath for a coupla hours before we go on or I know a swell butcher who could chop off one of his arms to make the weight."

"Turkish bath," roared Sprackling. "Why, dog-gone your blasted fat old carcass, I got the Kid in one right now to get him down to one-fifty-eight. And he'll be weak as a cat when he comes out. I might get him down another pound, but, holy smoke, Ike, I can't take two whole pounds off. For the love of Lulu, be reasonable. Allow us just one more pound."

"Not a bloomin' ounce," chuckled Bernstein. "You pay me a thousand bucks forfeit for every pound of flesh the Kid scales over the weight. And not only that, we'll take a good slant at the Kid when he weighs in an' if he's over and don't look as if he's quite dead, we don't fight. We just grab our forfeit money an' beat it. Of course, if the Kid looks like he couldn't walk across the ring we might let the fight go on just to hand him a merry little pasting on general principles."

"Oh, you Shylock!" roared Sprackling. "You low-down, tricky, unscrupulous descendant of old Bill Shakespeare's immortal villain!"

"Shylock me all you want to. You gotta pay them forfeits," chuckled old Ike. "Remember, Silk, *one thousand bucks for every pound of flesh* above the weight limit." And he walked off, his chubby form shaking with unholy mirth.

But back in the hotel, with little Mrs.

Silk, the debonair Silk's hot anger and blazing wrath vanished like the fading stars with the rising sun. He chuckled softly to himself. He suppressed his chuckles, aimed cigarette-smoke rings at the chandelier and chuckled again. His wife looked alarmed.

"Why, honey," she exclaimed in wonderment. "All this trouble that the papers say you're having in this box-fight affair hasn't unbalanced you, has it? Let's not worry about this old thing, dear. I shan't mind if we lose our money to-night. We'll get along somehow," she said in a brave, reassuring little voice.

"Now, don't you worry your pretty little self about me or this affair this evening, Alice," said the smiling Silk gently. "I was never more myself in my life. With your limited knowledge of ring affairs, you won't fully appreciate what a beautiful thing this is going to be, but I'll try to explain it to-night anyway. However, I do fear for poor old Ike."

"Why, what's wrong with him?"

"Nothing," replied Silk, "just now. But I greatly fear me he'll be the star boarder in the insane asylum ere nightfall."

And it was almost as Sprackling predicted. That evening at the Derby Sporting Club—Sprackling was taking no further chance of the lights going out and had refused the Whirlwind Club's offer—after the preliminary bouts were finished, before a jammed, tensely waiting audience of fight fans the two star performers, the Kerry Patch Kid and Piper Fay entered the ring. Weighing scales had been placed therein for the public scaling of the boxers, and the buzzing crowd was staring with throbbing interest at the referee, the seconds, the two managers, but most of all at the two boxers, as they discarded their bath robes and prepared to step on the scales for the public weighing.

With the scales set at one hundred and fifty-six pounds, the well-conditioned, confident-looking Piper Fay stepped lightly on the platform. The beam scarcely moved. He was just under the weight, trained to the minute. Then the Kerry Patch Kid stepped on the platform. The beam didn't move. He was easily under weight.

The referee stared, the crowd gasped at the announcement, the Kid grinned broadly, Silk Sprackling chuckled, and Piper Fay wrinkled his low forehead in a dazed and worried look. Ike Bernstein gasped, his eyes stared in horror, his face turned white.

"Why—why——" gasped Ike, "the Kid's under the weight—easy."

"He is," said Silk Sprackling softly, "and he was never stronger and in better shape in his life. We could do three pounds less if we had to. Ike, you recall that after the Flack relay match I said your day would come?"

Ike gulped and then groaned.

"Well, that day is here right now," cooed Sprackling. "But I don't want to be too hard-hearted. I've a friend who'll give both you and Piper jobs in about twenty minutes. You'll need 'em. For in that time Piper's going to be reclining on the canvas here, with his fighting reputation away off where the woodbine twineth and you're going to pay in all your bets and be just about broke. They're clearing the ring now, Ike, old kid. Let's go."

And they went and the bout started. It was a really good, fast, sparkling, thrilling fight—while it lasted. Piper Fay, who had real reason for being considered the runner-up to the champion, put up a flashy, sizzling exhibition of the manly art for two rounds. He was a game, determined boy, a clever blocker, a shifty ring man, and a snappy, savage puncher. For two whirlwind rounds he looked to have an even chance. But that was before the Kerry Patch Kid had been stung and was spurred into his real best action. It was in the third round that the Kid, having been popped upon his nose some two dozen times by Piper's snappy, stinging left jab in the previous canto, became really irritated. And when his temper started the fight began to stop. For from the third round hence there was no stopping the Kid. He rushed from his corner, swung accurately with both hands, and sent the fast-tiring Piper back upon his weary heels. Disregarding the jabs and brushing aside the guard of Piper, the flame-haired Kid swung, jolted, and jarred his opponent until in the middle of the fifth round, with the huge crowd alternately imploring Fay to stick and the Kid to stop it, the Kid feinted with his left, Fay dropped his guard, and a lightning-like right-hand chop that landed flush upon the weary Piper's jaw dropped him in the middle of the ring. Ike begged, howled, implored, and demanded that Fay arise and resume hostilities and save both their money and their reputations. But poor Piper heard him not.

The crowd near the ringside rushed the arena, picked up the alternately grinning and scowling Kid, and bore him aloft upon its shoulders, the winner of the much-discussed fight.

It took some time for little Mrs. Sprackling to properly grasp the real beauty of the details of her tall, good-looking husband's victory over Ike Bernstein in their famous match of managerial wits when the story was told her that evening.

"You see, honey, our Terry really had no trouble at all in getting down to the weight named. We purposely allowed Ike and the general public to think we were overweight. It was only in that way that friend Ike would give us a match. We had to make him think we were getting so heavy that we'd be weakened in getting down to the weight before he'd take a chance with us. So I got the news circulated that Terry was more than ten pounds above the limit and old Ike bit just as I thought he would. I didn't even have to propose the bout to him. He walked right into the trap and offered it to us." And Silk completed counting the pile of bank notes on the hotel table, placed a rubber band about them, and carefully locked them in a drawer.

"About ten thousand dollars," he announced easily. "A little over six thousand for our share of the purse, a flat two thousand contributed by poor old Ike in a wager when the match was first made—that evens up for the coin he pried out of me on a bet in the bout with the relay Flack brothers—and the balance in little bets at soft ringside odds."

"But, Silk, dear," said his wife, taking one of his hands in her two little ones, and raising her pretty eyebrows in puzzled wonder, "I don't see how you made them think Mr. Meagan *was* so heavy. He had to be put on the scales in those other contests. And the scales *had* to be correct. You said Mr. Berny saw to that."

"The scales *were* right, honey," said Silk, smiling at her tenderly. "But Terry's weight wasn't. I had a special belt made for Terry to be worn just when he weighed in at those bouts with Larkin and Cox and later in Paddy Donnell's. He wore it around his trunks and took it off when he got through weighing and no one was looking."

"But," persisted Mrs. Silk, "just one little tiny belt doesn't weigh much."

"*This* one did," smiled Silk. "There was eleven pounds of buckshot inside of it."

Roddy Kenrick also heard the story and mentally handed back the victory wreath of smoothness he had previously taken from Sprackling when he believed Ike Bernstein had outmatched his rival. But even Rod was a bit puzzled at one detail of the affair.

"I see how you faked the Kid's overweight," he told Sprackling, "but I'm darned if I see how you ever happened to get the Kid down to a hundred and fifty-six pounds instead of a hundred and fifty-eight. How did you know the boxing commission had secretly changed the weight limit? Ike purposely had that inserted where you wouldn't see it in the paper. His wife put it over with the editor of the woman's page, swearing her to secrecy. Mrs. Bernstein had done her a favor in giving her a tip on big society news once."

"I know," replied Silk. "And but for a piece of luck I never would have seen it and would have reduced the Kid to one-fifty-eight instead of one-fifty-six pounds and have been obliged to pay old Shylock Bernstein for the pound of flesh. But, you see, my wife put me wise."

"Your wife? I didn't know she was interested in sports," said Rod.

"She isn't," replied Silk. "But she spotted the item when she was reading Imogene Fairbanks' column on the woman's page."

ANOTHER COLONEL HOUSE

THE old blacksmith had spent the savings of a lifetime sending his son to college.

"What's your boy going to make of himself?" inquired a neighbor.

"A second Colonel House," replied the blacksmith with visible pride. "And he's doing it mighty well—mighty well. He's exactly like the colonel right now. If he knows anything, he keeps it to himself."

The Seeds of Enchantment

By Gilbert Frankau

We are so enthusiastic about this novel, personally, that we hardly dare tell you how we feel. A thing can be damned with faint praise, and it can be doubly damned by overpraise. So we will curb our impulse to shout from the housetops that this is a really great story, and confine ourselves to saying that it is the record of three adventurers in a land almost unknown to civilization called Harenesia. And what a land—a terrible, beautiful land! The three men are characters worthy of Dumas: De Gys, the dramatic Frenchman, Beamish, the obsessed physician, and Dicky, the big, lovable, carefree Englishman.

(*A Five-Part Novel—Part I.*)

CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH THE READER MAKES ACQUAINTANCE OF THREE WHITE MEN AND A MYSTERY GIRL.

"SOCIALISM——" began Doctor Cyprian Beamish.

His companion dipped a spoon to a plateful of that mulligatawny soup which invariably commences Sunday's tiffin throughout the Federated Malay States, and drawled in the unmistakable accents of Oxford University:

"Too hot for socialism, old man. Give it a rest."

It was hot, stiflingly so. Outside, Singapore city steamed under an equatorial rain drizzle: moisture—clammy, blood-thinning moisture—permeated the gloomy stucco-pillared tiffin room of the Hotel Europe. Even See-Sim, the Cantonese "boy" whom the Honorable Dicky had managed to pick up at Penang, felt uncomfortably warm as he stood, yellow-faced and impassive, behind his master's chair.

"*Ayer batou*," commanded Dicky. The boy grinned, and slipped away—his embroidered felt shoes making no noise on the graystone floor.

"What's *ayer batou?*" asked Beamish.

"Ice. Literally, water-stone. Solid water. Rather a neat way of putting it," drawled Dicky.

"You've got an extraordinary knack of acquiring languages, Long'un."

"Think so?"

"Globe-trotters," judged the men at the other tables—men dressed for the most part in high, silver-buttoned tunics of white linen; and continued their endless discussions about tin prices and rubber prices and the Siamese rice crop.

The two "globe-trotters" subsided into silence over their mulligatawny. See-Sim, returning with the ice, slipped deft lumps into their glasses; poured out the whisky *stengahs,* or half glasses, fizzed aërated water brim-high; and resumed his impassive pose, hands tucked away in the sleeves of his blue silk jacket.

"Of these *Fan-qui-lo* [foreign devils]," thought See-Sim, "the fair-haired one is undoubtedly great in riches, wisdom, and strength. That other seems to me a person of lesser consideration."

So China; but to American minds and eyes the pair require a more detailed, more sympathetic picture.

The Honorable Richard Assheton Smith, only son of the Lord Furlmere who married Miss Sylvia Gates of Danville, Virginia, in 1888, was almost lankily tall, long-handed, fair to freckling point. His tropical clothes, though tailored in Bombay of Foochow silk, yet managed to hint of Bond Street, London. He wore his hair—yellow hair with a touch of gold in it—close-cropped: the mustache above the red lips and fine teeth curled back flat below clean-cut nostrils: dark lashes veiled languid eyes

of intense blue. At twenty-four, Dicky had only just escaped being "pretty;" now, in his thirtieth year, he looked merely aristocratic. And this aristocratic appearance of Dicky's was all the more curious, because the Furlmere peerage did not date back to the Norman Conquest, or even to the Restoration: the Honorable Richard's great-grandfather having been a Lancashire cotton weaver who succeeded, by hard work and hard saving, in founding one of those business dynasties which emerged from the Victorian prosperity of the British Empire.

In the language of Beamish, therefore, the heir of Castle Furlmere represented a product of the detested "plutocracy," of "individualism," of "competition" in its most commercial, least humanized shape. For Doctor Cyprian Beamish was an undistinguished member of the Fabian Socialist Society!

Thirty-six years old, an ascetic-looking, clean-shaven, grayish-haired man of medium height, Beamish might well appear of "lesser consideration" to the wise, tired eyes of China—as represented by the motionless See-Sim. He wore his silk clothes carelessly; seemed lacking in repose; inclined, thought the Cantonese, to familiarity. Yet Beamish, apart from his opinions, was a very pleasant fellow.

The Beamishes had never attained commercial prosperity. As a family, they counted among their remote ancestors an eighteenth-century beadle and a Bow Street runner: the modern representatives drifting into minor positions on parish councils, the inland revenue, and various government offices. Cyprian, youngest of a large brood, had taken a Scotch degree in medicine; and been appointed officer of health to a south coast watering place some two years before the 1914 outbreak of war in Europe.

See-Sim removed empty soup plates, brought sweet curry of Singapore custom. The damp heat, which grew more intense every moment, stilled all conversation between the two Europeans.

A curious intimacy, theirs, begun in a dressing station near Neuve Chapelle, continued intermittently through four years of battle, and culminating in this leisurely post-war journey through the East.

The original suggestion of the trip had been Dicky's. Lord Furlmere, despite his seat in the House of Lords, still drove the complicated business organization founded by his plebeian grandfather; and his son, before resuming a commercial career interrupted by military service, was anxious to make personal acquaintance of the markets from which the bulk of his riches would derive. Also, after forty-two months of almost continuous fighting on the western front, during which he had risen from second lieutenant to command of an infantry battalion—a progress punctuated by two bullet wounds and a brace of fairly earned decorations—Dicky felt himself in need of a holiday. Beamish, newly demobilized from the Royal Army Medical Corps, fell in with the suggestion as "he wanted to study the social progress of the East at first hand."

So far—they had been away from home six months—the journey had been pleasant; and uneventful except for a swadeshi riot at Amritsar, which had brought the old fighting fire into Dicky's languid eyes, and sightly shaken his friend's belief in the universal brotherhood of man.

And here—despite the fact that this is a mere tale of exploration and adventure—it is necessary, for reasons which will appear in the course of the narrative, that readers should have some understanding of the opinions held by Dicky and Beamish about those world problems which are best summed-up in the catch phrase, "Reconstruction."

To Dicky, then, the war had taught one simple lesson, old as the stone age, the lesson of preparedness. Dicky hoped that the world had finished with war; but, seeing nothing tangible to justify that hope, did not want the English-speaking races—Dicky, possibly owing to his mixed parentage, always considered the British Empire and the United States of America as "allies without alliances"—to be again caught napping. Peace, said Dicky, can only be kept by benevolent force, and to maintain that benevolent force is the duty of the English-speaking races. As for home affairs, social problems and the like, the heir to the Furlmere business felt tolerably certain that co-operation between the sane elements of labor federations and intelligent manufacturers would ultimately prevail over the crazier doctrines of bolshevism, communism, syndicalism, Marxism, et cetera.

Not so Beamish! In Beamish's eyes—dreamy visionary eyes, small-pupiled, dull-irised—his friend's domestic ideas were "reactionary," his international standpoint "militaristic." Beamish saw, emerging from

the welter of Armageddon, a new world, warless, full of strangely changed people, old enmities put aside, old ambitions abandoned, lying down lamblike with the lion and the eagle. The millenium, according to Beamish, had arrived; the "battle flags were furled," and the "Parliament of Man" duly and expensively in session—at Geneva. Beamish, therefore—mind free from the paltry cares of "nationalism"—could afford exclusive devotion to the Cause: The Cause, as already stated, being socialism.

And it was not Beamish's fault, but that of his manifold and contradictory advisers—some of whose books ran into nearly three editions—if their pupil found it rather difficult to explain the exact meaning of the religion to which he had sworn allegiance.

"Socialism," Beamish used to say, "is not so much a system as a principle. The capitalist must go. Capitalism is the prime source of all evils, war included, in the world. Abolish it, organize production for the benefit of all, eliminate the sordid motive of private gain, and we shall return to the Merrie England of the Middle Ages."

Exact economic details of this miraculous transformation escaped the Fabian's ken; nor, in gloomier moments, was he quite certain about the merriness of England in those joyous early days. As a medical man he could not help looking back on the Middle Ages as a rather insanitary, untherapeutic period. In the Merrie England of 1931 there would have to be plumbers, and even Beamish found the merry plumber a difficult conception. Still—socialism could work miracles.

"By state control, by a modified system of collectivism," said Beamish, "we shall bring back the youth of the world. England will become a fit dwelling place for heroes;" and then, finance forgotten, the doctor would sketch the country of his dreams. In that dream country, the "state"—a nebulous entity compound of Christian love and Jewish sagacity—would so systematize production that nobody need labor more than four hours per day: a working week, of course, to consist of five days. The remainder of the peoples' time could then be devoted to "the arts," to "social intercourse"—compulsory!—to "joyous physical self-expression"—including universal morris dancing—crocus-planting, and the "rearing of beautiful children." Moreover, since "private gain" would be taboo, and "saving" punishable by the "force of public opinion," all costs of feeding, clothing, education, *and doctoring* the "beautiful children" would be borne by said beneficent state, parents being endowed with sufficient pensions—commencing at the age of forty—to live out their declining years in "jolly little houses"—rent free—surrounded by all those luxuries which a less-enlightened period reserved for the "comfortable classes" who had earned them!

"And it's coming, Long'un," Beamish would finish. "Once eliminate parasitic capitalists like yourself, there'll be nothing to prevent every one having more than enough for their needs." But the Honorable Dicky, "Long'un" to his friends, hearing at every port of lower Japanese prices in the export market, and by every mail of higher wages bills at home, remained smilingly unconverted. Hence the drawled: "Too hot for solialism."

They had finished their curry, and were cloying palates with *Goola Malacca*—tapioca—pudding before Cyprian ventured his next remark.

"You don't really think," he said, "that the present system can endure?"

"With modifications," began the Honorable Dicky, but the sentence died, unfinished, at his lips. And in that moment not alone the Honorable Dicky, but every single man throughout the big windowless tiffin room, ceased talking abruptly, as though stricken with aphasia. They sat, forty or fifty Europeans, motionless and staring, manners forgotten. Only the imperturbable Orientals still moved, silent on embroidered slippers, among the hushed tables. For suddenly, unexpectedly, each man saw the inmost vision of his heart, the dream girl of swamp and jungle cabin, visibly materialized before his astounded eyes.

She came among them, moving quietly, rhythmically: a tall, stately presence, golden-haired, rose-complexioned as the women of the West, violet-eyed, white-handed, smooth-breasted, long of limb: a dream—and a temptation.

The magical moment passed; men breathed again, words returned to their lips. After all, it was only a woman, an ordinary European woman: a devilish good-looking one, though. They left it at that, and resumed interrupted conversations: all of them except the Honorable Dicky, and he could only watch, fascinated.

The girl, she could hardly be more than nineteen, seemed wholly unconscious of the impression she had created. She walked very slowly up the room, eyes inspecting each table, hands quiet at her sides. She was dressed with extreme simplicity: lace blouse open at throat, short skirt of Chefoo silk matching the beige of silk stockings, suéde shoes on slender feet. Her hair—she wore no hat—seemed to Dicky's eyes like a great casque of molten gold, under which the face showed flawless and luring.

The girl had almost reached their table before Dicky realized that she was not alone. Behind her came a man, a red-haired, red-bearded giant of a man, with fierce red-brown eyes, dressed un-Englishly in wide alpaca trousers, scarlet cummerbund atop; light-green tropical shooting jacket, red-lined, hanging loosely on his vast shoulders. One enormous hand swung a pith-helmet, the other carried, with exaggerated care, a basket of mangosteens.

The pair made their way to a near-by table, at which—as if materialized abruptly out of nothing—appeared a little brown Oriental, clad in black silk coatee, narrow black sarong about his loins, who relieved his master submissively of his burdens and drew back chair for the girl to sit down.

"Good Lord," thought Dicky, "it's De Gys!"

Recognition was mutual. The giant, chair back gripped in one leg-of-mutton fist, looked up; dropped the chair with a clatter, and strode across the floor bellowing in a voice loud as the scream of a bull elephant:

"By the seven *soles Boches* I slew at Douamont, *c'est mon ami le Colonel Smith!*"

Renée de Gys of the French Annamite army, Chevalier of the legion of honor, médaille militaire, croix de guerre with palms, stood six foot two in his rope-soled canvas shoes; yet the Long'un, as he rose, insularly abashed by this boisterous greeting, overtopped him by a good three inches. They stood there, hands gripped, cynosure of every man in the tiffin room: and Mélie la blonde's violet eyes kindled to watch their meeting.

"To-morrow night will be moon change," mused Mélie la blonde. "To-morrow night!" For the soul of Mélie, as the body of the Mélie, was neither of East nor of West, but of her own folk, of the Flower-Folk beyond Quivering Stone.

"Ah! But it is good to hold you by the hand again, my long friend," Renée spoke the voluble French of his native South, not the tropic-tired drawl of the colonial. "How long since we last met? A year, is it not? No, two years. But you have not forgotten the old *popotte* behind Mount Kemmel, and the Rainbow cocktails we drank together. My friend, there were worse days. I told you then that we should meet again, that we should regret. But now, meeting you, I regret nothing."

"You were always the enthusiast, *mon cher,*" began Dicky, and his French was the Parisian of the boulevards. "As for me, I am very glad to be out of it—and alive. What brings you to Singapore?"

"Pleasure," said Renée laconically. "Won't you introduce me to your friend?"

Beamish got up; stammered clumsy acknowledgment to the introduction.

"And now you must know madame." Renée, linking an arm through Dicky's, led —Beamish following—to his own table. "*Ma chère,* allow me to present to you my very good comrade, the Colonel Smith, and the Doctor Beamish."

Dicky, bending to take the girl's proffered hand, was conscious only of thrill—a strange, warm thrill that sent blood throbbing to his temples. Hitherto, women had played but a small part in Dicky's life; had been, at best, only the pals of an idle week; but now, for the first time, looking down on that mass of hair blond as his own, feeling the cling of those soft, white fingers, he knew the power which is woman's, and knowing it, knew fear. There could be no palship between man and a creature such as this—— Suddenly, shame for his thought took Dicky by the throat. He dropped the girl's hand. She began to speak in a quaint, stilted French which he found impossible to place.

Back at their own table, the two Englishmen ordered coffee and Manilas; dismissed See-Sim; lit up in silence. Both felt the need for speech, yet neither uttered a word. The proximity of De Gys and Mélie rendered the one subject they wished to discuss impossible. They could only satisfy curiosity with occasional glances at the strange couple, at the strange submissive man who served them. Beamish noticed that the girl only flirted with her food—a spoonful of soup, the tiniest helping of curry.

Slowly, the tiffin room emptied. One by one, boys cleared and relaid the untidy tables, vanished noiselessly toward the kitchens.

"Come and share our mangosteens," called De Gys. He gave some incomprehensible order to the servant, who arranged chairs so that Dicky, facing his host, sat next to the girl and Beamish opposite to her; plunged large hands into the basket, and drew out four of the fruits.

"*Mangoustan!*" he announced. "Apple of the farthest East, of the Golden Land, of that Chrysé which Ptolemy dreamed and Marco Polo, the Venetian, made real." Then he sliced the hard, dark-red rinds; extracted white savorous cores and laid them before his guests.

Asked Beamish, sedulous as always for information: "Where is Chrysé?"

"You may well ask," answered De Gys. "Some say that Chrysé is your English Burma; but to me, Chrysé, the Land of Gold, is our Indo Chin; Suvarna Uhumi of the ancients; last unexplored territory of this dull old earth."

"But earth is not dull," protested Mélie. "Even I, who know as yet so little of it, have realized——" And she began to talk in that strange French which so puzzled Dicky. Listening to her, it seemed to him as though he heard some far-away voice out of the old time, sprightly and speculative. So might Marie Antoinette have gossiped, playing aristocratic milkmaid in the Laiterie of Versailles: so, too, might Marie Antoinette have fascinated. For again, the spell of this woman was on Dicky: behind all her talk, talk of men and women, sex lurked, gallant and glamourous. But now, De Gys took up the challenge, a torrent of words pouring from his red lips:

"Dull! Yes, dull. What would you? The sword is broken, we live in the age of the pen. At least, so they tell us, these politicians masquerading as priests, these lawyers in pope's clothing. Pah!"—he struck the table with his clenched fist till the plates rattled—"the world plays at Sunday school; and for such as you and me, old friend, there is no more to do. We are mere 'soldiers.' Useless. On the scrap heap."

"Speak for yourself," interrupted Dicky. "I'm only a civilian, a merchant of cotton."

The red man laughed. "Tell that to the lawyers and politicians at home; but tell it not to me, De Gys, who remember you, haggard in your torn khaki, cursing as only you English can curse, a smoking rifle in your hand. Lawyers, politicians, diplomats, socialists, and internationalists: damn them all, say I. They lie to us, and we believe them. 'War is dead,' they say. I, Renée de Gys, tell you that war is not dead, that war will never die; for war is the spirit of man."

"*Prussien!*" chaffed Dicky.

De Gys fell silent for a moment: then he began to speak very deliberately in cold-blooded reasoned sentences.

"No. I am no Prussian. War for war's sake, I hate. But more than war, I hate weakness and indiscipline and smug hypocrisy and lies. Out of these, and not out of strength, war is bred. That old Roman was no fool when he said 'If thou desirest peace, see that thou art prepared for war.'"

"He was a barbarian, of a barbarous age," put in Beamish.

"And we, I suppose, are civilized," laughed the Frenchman; "therefore, we must offer the other cheek to the smiter, even if he be a yellow man."

"Nobody's trying to smite you, old firebrand," soothed Dicky.

But De Gys rumbled in his beard: "Weakness is danger. The world forgets its lesson;" and he went on to tell them of old fights, in the swamp and the jungle, fights of white men against yellow, of brown men against white.

And lastly he spoke of Indo-Chinese exploration, of De Lagrée and Garnier, of their journey up the Mékong into Yunnan; of how De Lagrée died at Tong-chuan, and Garnier—a few years later—in the rice fields of Son-tay.

"Heroes, my friends," boomed the deep voice. "Patriots, barbarians"—he glanced maliciously at Beamish—"who flung away their lives for a scrap of knowledge on a map no one looks at, for a little strip of painted cloth on which your internationalists would fain wipe their dirty noses—barbarians!" He paused, ineffably contemptuous. "Pah! Such talk makes the blood boil. Were they all 'barbarians,' all those white men whose corpses litter the East?"

"They served their day," put in Beamish. "Now, East and West must work together for the regeneration of the world."

"A fine sermon!" De Gys laughed. "And one that sounds well in the drawing-rooms

of the West. But do not preach it here, my friend; nor to me, Renée de Gys. Because I, monsieur, am also a barbarian.

"And you?" he turned to Dicky. "Are you, too, of this milk-and-coffee creed? Would you embrace the yellow man, take him into your country, let him steal the white loaves from your workers' stomachs, the white women from your workers' beds? I think not, my friend. *You* are of the old faith.

"The old faith!"—suddenly the Frenchman burst into gasconade. "The faith in the white above the black and the yellow! Such is my creed. As Garnier was, as Doudart de Lagrée, so am I. Fools, soldiers, barbarians—call them what you will—at least, they knew how to die for their beliefs, for the little scrap of knowledge, for the little strip of painted cloth. All up and down the land of gold they lie, men of your stamp and mine, *cher ami*. Yet the land of gold still keeps one secret from us. Eastward of the Mékong that secret hides; westward of the Red River——"

Interrupted a voice, a voice the three hardly recognized, the voice of Mélie, hoarse and crazy with terror. *'Non! Non! Non! Je vous défends,"* screamed Mélie. Then the voice snapped in her throat, and her head crashed forward, lay motionless on the table. Red rinds of the mangosteens showed like enormous clots of blood among the loosened gold of her hair.

CHAPTER II.

THREE PURPLE SEEDS.

De Gys sprang to his feet with one quick movement that sent the flimsy chair clattering behind him. His right arm caught up the fainting woman as a harvester catches up the wheat sheaf, lifted her breast-high; his left gathered her ankles.

"You, doctor, come!" he called over his shoulder; and strode off, threading quick way between the empty tables, up the three steps from the tiffin room to the hall, out of sight. Beamish and Dicky, pursuing, caught a glimpse of him as he rounded the corner of the stairs; heard the scrape of his shoes on the matting; broke into a run.

Phu-nan, the little brown servant, stood for a moment irresolute. Then, taking the half-empty basket and De Gys' toupee, he, too, followed.

By the time Phu-nan reached his master's apartments, Mélie was lying flat on the great bare bedstead. Over her, carelessly drawn mosquito curtains brushing his shoulders, bent the doctor. De Gys, fists clenched, stood motionless in the center of the room. A pile of papers and a bamboo table lay, overturned, between the mats on the red-brick floor. Beyond, through the chik curtains, Phu-nan saw the third white man—a tall silhouette against the balcony window.

Silently, the boy set the table on its legs; commenced to rearrange the papers.

"I should like the fan started. Full speed, please," called Beamish's voice, coldly professional. De Gys stepped to the switch by the door, clicked it on. The wooden ceiling fan began to revolve; gathered speed. A breath of cooling air circulated down through the heat of the room, quivering the papers on the table, the muslin curtains round the bed.

"You!" ordered De Gys to his servant, "wait outside the door."

Phu-nan salaamed; withdrew. Beamish finished his examination; closed the curtains, and turned to De Gys.

"She is dead," he whispered.

"Dead!" For a moment, the Frenchman's eyes gazed blank incredulity. Then, rage blazed in their red-brown depths. "Liar!" the voice, keyed down to frenzy, seemed torn from the huge frame. "Liar! she cannot be dead. It is impossible."

Beamish repeated his words, and felt himself tossed aside so that he staggered against a long rattan chair, only just recovered balance to see De Gys' hands, suddenly grown gentle as a girl's, pulling apart the flimsy muslin round the bed.

"Yes, she is gone. Poor, poor little unknown woman," thought De Gys. All the quick rage in him was extinct. He knew only infinite pity, infinite sorrow, and deep down in his wanderer's heart, pain. For though he had known many women, this one he had loved.

She lay there so quietly; alabaster-white in death. Death had smoothed all terror from her face: it showed like a waxen magnolia bloom against the spread gold of her hair. Death had smoothed all movement from her long limbs, from her impulsive hands: her hands rested on her bosom like two fallen petals of some great white flower.

"But this is not Melie," he thought, "this

is only the husk of Mélie, the beautiful husk of a soul I hardly knew."

Very reverently, he bent and kissed the gold hair, the white forehead, the two hands lying petallike on the rounded breasts. Very quietly, he drew the mosquito curtains; turned to Beamish.

"Your pardon, doctor."

Beaming took the outstretched hand; murmured awkwardly: *"C'est triste. Sympathie."* And the Frenchman understood. Dicky, too, his long friend, the Colonel Smith of old days, was beside him; he could feel Dicky's hand on his shoulder. "Courage, my old friend, we have seen death before, you and I."

De Gys came to himself. "Yes," he said —a hint of the old gasconade in his tone— "we are old friends, you and I and death. Only——" The voice quivered. A sob shook the great shoulders. "Doctor, of what did she die?"

Without a word Beamish walked over to the outer door; locked it. Then, "Where do these lead?" he asked, pointing to a flight of wooden steps in the far corner of the room.

"Only to the bathroom."

"And the sitting room? Is it safe? Can we talk there without being overheard?"

"Yes."

De Gys led way through the chik curtain; closed the folding doors which divided the apartment. The sitting room, bare-walled, matting-floored, looked out through long windows over rain-drizzled greenery to a torpid sea.

De Gys closed the shutters; clicked on light and fan; arranged cane chairs round the cheap European table. The three sat down.

"Of what did she die?" repeated De Gys.

For answer, Beamish fumbled in his coat pocket; drew out and laid on the table a flat case set with white stones that glinted like diamonds in the shadeless glare of the pendant electric.

"If he will tell me what is in that box." Beamish spoke in English to Dicky, and his voice was a pregnant suspicion, "I may be able to tell him the cause of his wife's death. "She *was* his wife, I suppose," the doctor went on.

"Your pardon, doctor," interrupted the Frenchman, "but I am not quite ignorant of your language. Nor do I like mysteries. Be frank, please."

Beamish hesitated; blushed; began. "I found the box when I undid her blouse. She was clutching it to her breast as she died. Afterward, I looked in the box." He hesitated again. "Your wife died of heart failure, Monsieur de Gys, but before I can certify her death as due to natural causes you must answer one question. Did your wife take drugs?"

"Not drugs," answered the Frenchman. "A drug. And only sometimes."

"Was this drug prescribed by a proper medical man?"

"I do not know. I do not even know the name of the drug. But it is quite harmless. Of that, I can assure you; because I have partaken of it myself."

Beamish reached out a hand for the glittering bauble on the table; and Dicky— faculties still benumbed with the shock of Mélie's passing—saw it to be an enameled snuffbox, of obvious eighteenth-century work, the lid flower-decorated in conventional design and garlanded with a true-lover's knot of paste stones. "French," thought Dicky, "Louis the Sixteenth——" but already the doctor's spatulate fingers had found the catch, pressed the case open, revealing two small compartments each lined with a curious fiber, wall-flower-brown in color and silky to the touch. One of the compartments was empty; in the other, almost filling it, lay some twenty or thirty tiny purple beans. Bending down to inspect these, Dicky's nostrils were aware of a faint sweet perfume, a perfume as of tuberoses— only rarer, less cloying. De Gys, too, smelled that perfume: his memory leaped to it. "Mélie is not dead," said memory. "Only Mélie's body is dead. This is the soul of Mélie; take and crush the soul of Mélie between your teeth—so that you may remember the body of Mélie."

"The coroner will want these," cut in Beamish's voice. "There'll have to be an inquest, of course. I couldn't certify——"

"Doctor," interrupted the Frenchman, "if I pledge you my word, that the contents of this box are perfectly harmless—a sweetmeat—a mere Oriental sweetmeat?"

"No," said Beamish stubbornly, all the officialdom in him at bay. "No. I couldn't do it. Besides, you admitted just now that she took some drug."

There was a moment's silence, broken only by the creak and whir of the fan as it swung on its long shafting. Then De

Gys shrugged huge shoulders, a gesture Dicky remembered from old days as sign of reluctant decision; and said: "Very well. Since you do not accept my pledge, we will eat of this sweetmeat, doctor: we three, so that you may know it to be harmless."

He drew the box across the table, picked out one of the purple beans. "Do not swallow them. Chew with your teeth, thus." The two Englishmen watched him take the bean in his mouth, saw the sorrow-drawn lines of his face vanish as wrinkles vanish from washed linen at stroke of the iron.

"Eat," said De Gys, and fell silent, a quiet happiness dawning in his red-brown eyes.

Dicky hesitated for a second: he had all the Anglo-Saxon fear of "dope," all the peasant's distrust of strange foods.

"Because you could not help loving her, because you coveted her, because even despite our friendship, your heart plotted to take her from me, eat!"

De Gys spoke without anger, without haste, as men speak of Fate. His friend's lips tightened under the flat mustache; almost, a blush suffused the white of his temples.

"You accuse me," began Dicky.

De Gys smiled. "I accuse you of nothing, dear friend. I only ask you to eat one of these little seeds." He pushed over the snuffbox. Dicky extracted a bean, crushed it between his teeth——

De Gys spoke truth. He, Dicky, *had* coveted Mélie; sitting at table with her, passion had enmeshed him suddenly with a thousand tentacles of desire, set every nerve in his body aching for her possession. And when he realized her dead, it had been as though desire's self perished with her. What a long time ago that must have been—— The thing in his mouth tasted so cool—like summer moonlight, or snow-chilled mulberries. He looked across the table at his friend's red-bearded face.

"You were quite right, De Gys, I did covet the woman," said the Honorable Dicky. And De Gys answered: "If she had lived, I would have given her to you."

They began to converse, and the doctor listened to them, amazed. Whatever the drug they had taken might be—"and drug it is," decided Beamish—the physical effect seemed nil. He watched their eyes. The pupils remained normal—no contraction, no dilation. He looked for signs of slowed or accelerated blood pressures, found none. He even put a questing finger on Dicky's pulse—it beat steadily at twenty to the quarter minute. Speech, sight, nerves, muscles—all appeared to function regularly. Of hypnotic, as of excitatory influence, there was no trace: both men seemed fully conscious, in possession of all their faculties.

Yet subtly, indefinably, both men had altered. A happiness, scarcely of earth, radiated from their placid features, from their untroubled eyes. They took no notice of Beamish; spoke in a rapid French which he found difficult to understand; but the drift of it he could follow. And, following, he passed gradually from amazement to a deep sense of shock, of outrage.

It was as though these two had abandoned all restraints, relapsed into the utterest hedonism; as if they embraced some cult of pleasure beyond every conventional, every unconventional morality.

"Not immoral," thought Beamish, "but unmoral. The drug has destroyed, put to sleep, somehow or other abrogated, that faculty we call personal conscience."

Apparently, they felt no sorrow for Mélie's death, no jealousy of each other's passion. Indeed, mutual desire—now frankly admitted—seemed to bind them closer in comradeship. But, listen as he might, Beamish could hear no scabrous word; the talk was all of beauty, of flowers, of sweet music, of poetry, and of love: only, in the mouths of these two, beauty and flowers and music and poetry and love—Love especially—became mere instruments of pleasure, selfish toys for body and mind.

Suddenly, Beamish began to envy. How happy these two must be! How wonderful to feel free, as they seemed free, from all the constraining stupidities; to live solely for pleasure. Besides, as a medical man, it was surely his duty to test this new drug. The drug might be of enormous value, of curative value. In mental cases, for instance—hysteria, neurasthenia. Drugs, properly prescribed, were not harmful. On the contrary. Look at opium, codeine, heroin, *cannabis indica*, cocaine. Benefits to the human race. Pity that weak people abused them!

Cyprian Beamish, M. D., Glasgow, dipped finger and thumb into the snuffbox, extracted a bean, paused with it halfway to his mouth—and ate.

For about thirty seconds, the doctor's

scientific mind took accurate notes. "Dissolves in the mouth on mastication," "cool in taste," "slightly sucrose." Then, he forgot science. Science, after all, was rather a bore: science contributed nothing to the Art of Life: the world would be much happier without science. But what a happy place the world was!

Outside, rain ceased abruptly. A low sun streaked through the shutter lattices, dimming electric light, barring sitting room with shadows; hung for a moment above sea rim; vanished. Twilight came; and on twilight's heels, night.

"To love," said De Gys, "passionately but not overpossessively; to love as the flowers love; to love without grudging; to be free of all superstitions——"

"Yes"—Dicky's voice took up the tale—"to be free! To feel the magic of moonlight in one's veins! To feel the youth of the world pulsing and throbbing through one's heart! To know that all constraint is vile, an outrage to the gods and goddesses, to Dionysus and Aphrodite and Pan, who is greater than all. Old friend, we have eaten of the Tree of Life, you and I; of all men on earth to-day, we alone know the truth."

"And truth," Beamish spoke raptly, "truth is the beauty of woman."

Silence fell on them. They sat a-dream, quiet as the pale girl beyond the door: the girl whom they had momentarily forgotten. They were fully conscious of each other, of the light above their heads, and the whirling fan, and the open snuffbox on the table. Only, in their minds, visions shimmered: unto each his desire.

"*Ça passe*," announced the Frenchman suddenly; and he looked at Dicky, a little flash as of jealousy in his eyes.

"*Oui. Ça passe*." The Long'un rose from his chair, stared down puzzled into Cyprian's face. "De Gys, what happened? Were we drugged? Look at old Beamish—he's fast asleep."

But the Frenchman had relapsed into vision land, and Cyprian's voice answered:

"I'm not asleep, Long'un, only rather happy. I'm sorry I made such a fuss about that death certificate. One mustn't be suspicious of people, must one? You understand that."

"Yes," said Dicky, "I understand."

He did not understand, not in the least. He only realized that for the space of a whole hour life had become utterly exquisite, a glory. And now life was itself again—drab.

"Somebody will have to see about the funeral," thought Dicky.

Meanwhile, Beamish dreamed. In that dream, subconscious hopes assumed visible shape, became realities. He saw, for the first time, the country of his desire, no longer nebulous but actually in being—a vision accomplished. Such a country it was: sunshine glowing on its flower-studded lawns, on its great trees heavy with bloom, on its glassy watercourses: a country of infinite peace, of infinite leisure. For all among the lawns and the trees, all adown the banks of the glassy watercourses, Beamish could see young men and maidens dancing to soft music, dancing and singing and making love in the sunshine.

"It is real," he said aloud. "Real! I shall never doubt again."

"What is real?" asked Dicky's voice.

"The land of heart's desire."

"Yes"—De Gys rose abruptly from his chair—"one sees that when one eats of Mélie's little purple seeds." He took the snuffbox from the table; snapped-to the catch; slipped it into his pocket. The old lines of sorrow were back in his face; he eyed the closed doors wistfully, hungrily. "You do not suspect the drug, doctor? You will sign these papers?"

Cyprian Beamish nodded assent.

CHAPTER III.

HOW THE QUEST BEGAN.

The Mother of all Churches is very wise: to her, East and West, saint and sinner, are one: always, her ministers wait, loins girded, for the call. Two nuns watched out the night with Mélie; and when sunrise dimmed the tall candles about her curtained bed, Phu-nan crept in on noiseless feet to announce that Mother Church was prepared. Brown men, converts of Mother Church, carried away the husk of Mélie; and the Jesuits said masses for her soul in their cool chapel among the odorous Malayan trees. Red frangipane and redder hibiscus decked the white headstone, whereon brown fingers carved the legend: "Mélie. Wife of Commandant Renée de Gys. Pray for her." Verily, the Mother of all Churches, who forgave that white untruth, is very wise.

Three days De Gys mourned; and the two Englishmen respected his grief. Of the woman, he spoke seldom; of the mysterious drug, never. He was distrait, self-concentrated. But he begged them not to leave him; and they waited on at Singapore, canceling their berths of Hongkong, puzzled and curious. For neither Dicky nor Beamish could forget the dead girl and the jeweled snuffbox, and the purple seeds, and the strange happiness which had been theirs for an hour.

The drug left no craving, only bizarre memories which grew more tantalizing as they receded. Comparing notes, both agreed on its taste, the sweetness and perfume of it; but they differed radically about its effect.

To Dicky, looking back, the thing was a stimulant, alcohol refined to its most ecstatic. While under its influence—details of how that influence began, escaped him—he remembered himself talking foolishly and at random: "classical nonsense" was the phrase; rather in the manner of a certain decadent poetic set which had forgathered occasionally in his rooms at Oxford.

"Dangerous stuff," he said to Beamish, "makes a fellow talk too much. Still, I wish we could find out——"

"We *must* find out. It's not dangerous; it's—it's"—Beamish fumbled for his word—"it's miraculous. I shall never be satisfied until I can bring those seeds within reach of everybody. Think of it, Long'un: a drug which might give back happiness to the whole human race. And no after effects! No unhealthy cravings! Only the knowledge that one has seen the ideal life come true." He enlarged the theme. "Perhaps, if people lived solely on the products of this wonderful plant"—Beamish, especially after a heavy meal, leaned toward vegetarianism—"they wouldn't be so difficult to convince, so materialistic."

"Socialism again," smiled the Honorable Richard.

"Well, and what is socialism except the old fight of ideals against materialism. Ideals must triumph in the end, Long'un."

"Even if you have to dope the whole human race first."

"And why not?" said Beamish. For, to Beamish, the drug had become an obsession. Nightly, as he lay on his sheetless bedstead—fan whirring above the mosquito curtains, one leg cocked up for coolness on the long bolster which is called a 'Dutch wife' in the jargon of the Federated Malay States—his mind would relieve ecstasy: he would see again the land of his heart's desire, its soft sunshine, and its maidens dancing on flower-studded lawns in the shade of great trees heavy with bloom. Of his shocked feelings when he first listened to the Frenchman's conversation with Dicky, the doctor—quaintly enough—remembered nothing.

On the fourth day after Mélie's burial, De Gys was almost himself again. His voice, hitherto subdued, rose to the old pitch; his red-brown eyes glinted strength if not merriment; even his beard seemed to share in the general metamorphosis, curled arrogantly under a vast caressing hand.

"These women!" he rumbled over a tea-time cocktail. "They make women of us all. Except of you Anglo-Saxons." His look toward Dicky was sheer friendship. "And you do not love women, you only sentimentalize over them. For you, they are all madonnas—even the worst. Perhaps that is the essence of your greatness."

"I do not understand," Beamish spoke.

"Naturally: because you are an Anglo-Saxon, a woman worshiper—therefore, in the battle of life, you fight alone. The She, the white and wonderful She—they are all white and wonderful, your Shes—waits till the battle is won before you kiss her finger tips. Pah," his voice lifted abruptly, "who wants to kiss finger tips?"

Dicky, who disliked sex talk, switched the subject, but that evening after dinner—they had dined well, drunk better—De Gys reverted to it again.

"My friends," said De Gys, "you have been very good to me these days. In return for your goodness, let me tell you a story—the story of a beautiful woman. That much I owe you."

Said Dicky, blowing fanward a smoke ring from his Manila: "Is it of your wife you wish to tell us?"

They were in De Gys' sitting room, and the Frenchman glanced reminiscently at the open doorway before replying: "Yes. Of her."

"And the drug?" Beamish's dull eyes lit. "Will you tell us about that, too, monsieur?"

"It is part of the tale," said De Gys: and began.

"*Eh bien*, you must understand first that she was not my wife. When you met us, we

had been together less than a month. But in that time, I had learned to love her—passionately, devotedly: so much so that, if she had not died, I would have married her, my Mélie whom I stole——"

"Stole?" interrupted Dicky.

"Yes—stole. Does that upset you, my virtuous friend? All the same, it is true. You have never been to Saigon, I suppose. No, I thought not. Therefore, you do not know La Mère Mathurin, who keeps the little café on the Cholon road. When one has been long up-country, when one is a stranger, when one has drunk too many 'rainbows,' when one is tired of opium and the congäis of Cholon—one drifts to the little café of the Mother Mathurin, and, perhaps, one dances a little, or buys sweet champagne at two piastres the half bottle for the little daughters of the mother. They are not *exigeantes*, those little daughters; their charms would hardly justify them in being *exigeantes*. And yet, it was there, late one night, that I found Mélie. The little daughters wearied me; the old woman—she grows very old these days—slept on her long chair in the veranda; so, from sheer ennui, I wandered out through the house into the garden. There is a summerhouse in the garden—a big affair of bamboo, roofed with straw. I tried to get into the summerhouse, but the door was locked. That irritated me: one does not like locked doors in the East. I hammered with my stick. I called out: 'Is any one there?' At last, a woman's voice answered me: 'Yes. I am here. Who is it?' I said: 'A friend. Open!' The door unclosed very cautiously, and I looked on Mélie for the first time."

De Gys paused. Dicky saw one hand clench convulsively as memory stabbed at the brain.

"By my first faith!" De Gys rose from his chair, began to stride, very slowly, up and down the sitting room. "My friends, I am no sentimentalist about women. They are of the earth, earthy—even as we are. But whenever I think of that moment, I seem to understand your Anglo-Saxon idealism, your cult that would make angels of these earthly creatures. She stood there, my little Mélie, white in the gloom of the doorway, hands fluttering at her breasts, gold hair shimmering about her shoulders. 'Who are you that knock so late?' she asked. She did not speak like one of the little daughters: her voice was low and tense—and afraid, very much afraid. I told her my name, and she repeated it, twice. 'De Gys, De Gys. It is a good name, a name such as one finds in the old books.' 'And you,' I asked, 'how are you called? Why are you here and not in the house? Why did you lock the door?' She cut me short with a gesture. 'I cannot tell you that. I dare not tell you. You must go away. You must go away at once.' I did not move: I was too *intrigué*. She fascinated me; her voice, her gesture, the shimmer of her hair in the starlight—all became riddles, riddles I longed to solve. 'Go,' she began again. And then, suddenly, her mood altered; the terror went out of her voice, her eyes lifted to mine, one white hand pointed over my shoulder, up, toward the stars. 'Look, De Gys,' she whispered, 'look! It is moon change.'

"I turned, and, following her pointed finger, saw the moon—a tiny sickle of silver just rising behind the hibiscus branches of the garden.

"'Yes,' I said carelessly, 'it is new moon to-night.'

"'Moon change,' she whispered again. 'Oh, De Gys, De Gys!'

"My friends, there are tones in a woman's voice which give away all the soul. It did not need her outstretched hands, her pleading eyes, to tell me the meaning of that whisper. Her voice sufficed. She loved me! How or why she loved me, I did not know then: I do not know now. I only knew desire—desire as much of the soul as of the body. I craved for her, and she came to my arms. Her lips met mine. She clung to me. She did not speak. We neither of us spoke. We were just man and woman, alone under the moon and the stars.

"'Take me, De Gys,' she said at last 'Make me yours.'

"'Tell me, little one,' I asked, 'of what were you so afraid?' At that, she began to tremble. 'You must not ask me questions. I forbid you to ask me questions.' But I was not so easily put off. 'You were afraid of *la mère?*' I suggested. For you must know that the little daughters are not free women: they belong to the mother. If they disobey her, if they try to run away —— But they do not try to run away. To where should they run?"

The Frenchman laughed. The laugh died

in his mouth; he resumed the tale: "She did not answer. I said again: 'Are you afraid of the mother, little one?' 'No. Not of her,' she whispered, 'but of him.' 'And who is *he*—a lover, perhaps?' I could feel her shudder in my arms. 'He. My lover? Oh, no, no, no! You are my lover, my only lover, De Gys. He does not love women, that one. He only loves money. That is why.' She broke the speech at her lips. 'Tell me more,' I begged her, 'tell me his name.' She put a hand over my mouth. 'Don't,' she stammered. 'Don't ask me any questions. I dare not tell you. If he thought you knew, he would kill you, as he killed Lucien.' I could not help laughing. 'I should take some killing, little one.' But she did not laugh, she only trembled.

"And I could get nothing more out of her. Neither then nor thereafter could I find out the man's name, nor the hold he had on her. Great as her love was, it could not cast out fear. Always, she was afraid. I wonder—I wonder."

De Gys paused in his long strides, took a cigar from the drying bottle, bit off the end, lighted it.

"I stayed with her till the moon set. I was bewitched, I think. For when she implored me to come to her again, I gave her my word, my word of honor—not the sort of promise one makes to the little daughters.

"And the next night I stole her. All day, I could think of nothing. I was a man of one idea. At déjeuner, after déjeuner, strolling along the Rue Catinat, dining at the club, every hour and every minute I wanted Mélie. After dinner we played poker, and I lost heavily—my mind not being on the cards. It must have been nearly midnight when I took a carriage, one of those two-ponied covered *voitures* which we use in Saigon, and told the Annamite Säis to drive me to Mother Mathurin's. But I did not drive to the front door; I made him halt on the road, by the bamboo fence. For I did not want any interference from La Mère Mathurin.

"I made my way very quietly through a gap in the bamboo fence into the garden. A light burned in the summerhouse; I could see it winking among the hibiscus branches. Mélie must have heard my *voiture* drive up. She did not wait for me, but came running out. She put a hand on my arm, and there was terror in her voice. 'Go,' she said. 'Go, for the love of God. *He* has come back; he is with the old hag now.' And then, then my friends, I knew that she was my woman! 'Go,' she said again, 'go!' For answer, I picked her up in these two arms of mine.

"She did not scream—she was too astonished to scream—and I carried her back, the way I had come, through the gap in the bamboo fence to the *voiture*. 'Drive, you brown devil, drive like a furnace!' I called to the Säis. He grunted back, 'Where to, *capitaine?*' 'Boulevard Bonnard.' He whipped up his ponies."

The Frenchman's cigar had gone out. As he paused to relight it, agitation passed from him. Sitting down on the edge of the long chair, he resumed his story in a quiet deliberate voice.

"And that, my friends, is how Mélie came to live with me in my little *appartement* on the Boulevard Bonnard. I was due for leave to Europe; my duties were very light, and we spent most of our time together in the flat. Phu-nan cooked us our simple meals—Mélie did not understand much about cooking. In the evenings we would take a closed carriage and drive to the Gardens. She loved me faithfully. She was always *très douce, très femme*. But always she was frightened; sometimes, she would wake in the night, screaming out strange phrases, imagining me to be that other. Then I would comfort her, as one comforts a scared child, question her. 'Tell me,' I used to ask, 'who is this man? Who was Lucien? Why did he kill him? Why were you at Mother Mathurin's?' For by then I had discovered that she was not one of the little daughters.

"But to all my questions, she refused reply: I could learn nothing about her past, about how she came to the Colonies, about the nameless man she feared. She told me once, when I had been very pressing, that she came from Paris. I could not believe her. She did not speak like a Parisian. You noticed, perhaps, how curiously she spoke?"

Once more De Gys broke off his narrative. "I wonder," he muttered, "I wonder." Then he went on:

"I inquired about her, very cautiously—at the club—at the shop of the Jewess who knows everything—from the head porter of the Hotel Continental. I could find out

nothing. Twice, I made up my mind to go to the little café on the Cholon road; to demand the truth from Mother Mathurin.

"I never went back to the little café. Perhaps, I was too happy with Mélie to worry very much about her past. You see, I loved her—and so, I respected her reticences."

All this time Beamish had listened silently, but now, as the story seemed to near its ending, impatience mastered him. "But the drug," he burst out, "but the drug! When did she first give it to you?"

"Patience," said De Gys, "I am coming to that. When she had been with me ten days, I began to be worried. My steamer for Europe was almost in port, but I could not bear to part from Mélie. To take her with me seemed difficult. And yet, to leave her alone in Saigon. She saw that I was worried—she was clever at reading a man, too clever; and one night when I could not sleep but kept walking up and down the room, she called to me from the bed: '*Mon ami,* you are not happy. Come, let me give you happiness.' I turned and saw her, sitting upright in the bed, this little box in her hand."

With a quick movement, De Gys drew the snuffbox from his pocket; held it up. Beamish's dull eyes glistened. Dicky, fingers at mustache, appeared to take no interest, but he, too, felt his palate give a little warning twitch, as though of secret desire—and in that moment he seemed to see Mélie, sitting bolt upright on a vast, bedstead, gold hair cascading over white shoulders, a tiny purple seed between her red lips.

"My friends," went on De Gys, "you have both tasted of this drug; you know if it brings happiness or not. But you do not know what happiness it brings when one shares it with the woman one loves. For that night, we forgot the world—she her fears, I my curiosity. And the next day I decided to take her with me. We planned a trip, not to Europe, but to India. How that trip ended you both saw."

There was a tense silence as De Gys finished. Then he said, for the third time, 'I wonder—I wonder."

"*Mon ami,*" Dicky spoke, "you did not tell us this story for no purpose. What do you wonder? What is at the back of your mind?"

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders. "At the back of my mind, *mon vieux,* there are various questions. The first, I put to Monsieur Beamish four days ago. Now, I put it to him again. Of what did Mélie die, Monsieur Beamish?"

"Of heart failure, as I told you before."

"And the cause of that heart failure?"

"It was not the drug."

"No. It was not the drug. Could it have been fear, think you? A great and sudden fear?"

"Such things have been known," said Beamish.

"Eh, alors!" The ejaculation was fraught with meaning. "It is possible!"

"And the other questions?" put in Dick.

"Of the other questions, one can only be answered by Mother Mathurin—the rest, if I am right in my suspicions, by the man of whom Mélie was so afraid." De Gys' eyes lit to quick wrath. "If I am right, he is twice a murderer, that one: twice a murderer, I tell you. Also"—the voice slowed to emphasis—"he must know the secret."

"What secret? The secret of the drug?" Beamish had come back to his obsession.

"Pah! The drug!" Scorn laced the Frenchman's tone. "You think of nothing but the drug, doctor. No! The secret of which mere mention stopped the beating of a woman's heart. The secret of the golden land, of Suvarna Uhumi! The secret which baffled Macleod and Dupuis and the Dutchman Duyshart and Mouhot and Francis Garnier, and the Englishman Colquhoun; the secret which even Pavie has not unraveled, the secret which has set men like myself dreaming for sixty years."

"What secret?" repeated Dicky.

"What secret!" burst out De Gys. "What secret! God, the ignorance of you globe-trotters. Have you never heard that tale, the tale which runs from Pak-nan to Hai-Dzuong, from Luang-Prabang to Binh-thuan, the tale the Red Karins tell to the Laos girls of Chieng-Mai and Tibetan muleteers to the flower-foot maidens in the tea gardens of I-Bang? The tale of the white woman beyond the mountains!"

Said Dicky, in his most irritating drawl: "What *are* you driving at, De Gys?"

But the Frenchman had forgotten his audience, his grief, everything, in the excitement of revelation.

"Oh, but I have been a fool, a blind fool. She told me she came from Paris. From Paris, indeed; she, who did not even recognize a photograph of the Rue de la Paix; she, who spoke the French of Jean Jacques Rousseau, the French of Louis Sixteenth.

Tiens! Tiens! Tiens! Do I begin to know the secret; I, René de Gys? Did they bring their mistresses with them, as we bring our mistresses now, *from Paris,* those adventurers of whom the Monk de Béhaine made use to put back Gia Long on the throne of Annam? Did they, fleeing from the wrath of Gia Long's son Minh Mang, take refuge in the mountains? Do their descendants still survive—westward of the Red River, eastward of the River Mékong! Was Mélie, perhaps, the great-granddaughter of some aristocratic filibuster who sailed with Prince Canh Dzue in 'ninety-eight? Did the unknown man of whom she was so terrified leave her with La Mère Mathurin under pledge of secrecy, while he——"

"De Gys," interrupted Dicky, "you speak in riddles."

For a moment, the Frenchman grew silent, then he said:

"Your pardon, friend. I spoke in riddles. Now, I will speak plainly. After I have spoken, it will be for you to decide what we must do. Listen!"

And he told them, in harsh-clipped sentences, how the arms of France first conquered that long fever-haunted coast which stretches northward from the mouth of the Mékong into China: how, in 1786, Gia Long, the king of Lower Annam, and his son Canh Dzue, driven from their throne by usurpers, fled to the court of Bangkok, and there, vainly imploring help of the Siamese, met the Jesuit bishop, Pigneaux de Béhaine; of how the bishop, seeing in Gia Long's misfortune a way to plant the standard of his own country in Cochin-China, sailed with Canh Dzue for Europe, and of how Canh Dzue signed the treaty of Versailles with that tottering monarch, Louis Sixteenth of France.

"How Louis Sixteenth perished, and the empire with him, you both know. Nevertheless—revolution or no revolution—my country kept her word. In 1789 the bishop and Canh Dzue returned—nor did they return alone. With them came a handful of adventurers, of patriots, of aristocrats.

"Yes, aristocrats! Now, as then, it is the fashion to despise such people. Now, as then, we worship the proletariat. Pah, the proletariat! I am a Royalist, I——" With a great effort, De Gys controlled himself. "Anyway, they took Annam, that handful; they put Gia Long back on the throne of his fathers; they planted our flag, our church, our civilization, in Cochin-China. And when Gia Long died, they fought for our church and for Gia Long's son Canh Dzue against the usurper Minh Mang. But Canh Dzue was a weakling; he lost his kingdom. Minh Mang took it, and after Minh Mang, Thien Thri and after Thien Thri, Tu Duc——

"What those three kings did to us Frenchmen and our church—the tale of the self-determination of the peoples of Cochin-China—you will find in the history books. A pretty story, my friends—a story of oppressions, of burnings and tortures, of strangulations and impalements. Read it for yourselves one day, and pray a little—as I pray sometimes—for the souls of the martyrs: of Father Gagelm whom they garroted, and Father Odorico whom they beheaded, and Father Marchand who was torn to pieces with red-hot irons. The poor priests! The poor, brave priests!"

De Gys paused; went on:

"But it is not of the priests I wanted to tell you. It is of the aristocrats, of that handful who came with Pigneaux de Béhaine. Listen! Of them, no trace remains. Not one single tiny trace! In the history books—nothing! In the archives of France—nothing! In the memory of living men—nothing!—They are lost in the mists of the dark years; the years of Minh Mang and of Thien Thri."

"And you think——" began Beamish.

"I think nothing. I wonder—and I reason. Hear the end of the tale. For more than half a century, the land relapsed to barbarism. In all Cochin-China—throughout Cambodia and Annam and Tonkin—only a few priests still carried on the work of France. Then, in 1859, the dream of that old patriot, Pigneaux de Béhaine, began to come true: Rigault de Genouilly took Saigon. By 1862, Charnier had beaten Tu Duc to his knees; the martyrs were avenged. Once more, our tricolor floated in the East. Followed Garnier's journey. Followed, at home, the war of 1870—but even that defeat could not stop us. Dupuis came; and Francis Garnier came back fresh from the defense of Paris. 'There is a secret to penetrate,' wrote Francis Garnier.

"But even he, though he took Hanoi with a boatload of marines, could not penetrate that secret."

"Which you have still not told us," interrupted Dicky; but De Gys took no notice

—and Beamish sat very silent, excitement mounting in his eyes.

"That secret? Perhaps it is only a blind trail I follow. Only a blind trail, a rumor of the East; the East is full of such rumors; they bud with the rains and wither at the dry season. But this rumor has not withered; it grows always, spreads like mangroves spread in the swamps. De Genouilly's men heard it; Charnier's men heard it; Doudart de Lagrée and Garnier heard it; and after them, Pavie, Harmand, Malglaive, Riviere—every white man who has sacrificed his life or his health in this fever-haunted land of Indo-China."

Suddenly, emotion mastered the Frenchman; he sprang to his feet. "I, too, have heard that rumor, not once but fifty times. The Khmers of Pnom-Penh told it to me in the ruins of Angkor Wat. I have heard it on the lips of Moi girls in Tin-shuong, from the toothless gums of fisher-folk in the Bay of Halong. At Pak-hoi have I heard it, and at Kemerat; in Vien Chan and Phit-salok, from the pilots of Cat-ba and the convicts of Pulau Condore. 'White women, captain! White women in the mountains!'"

Now, the last strand of self-control seemed to part in the giant's brain; frenzy as of prophecy seethed and bubbled at his lips. "In the mountains," he chanted in the high-pitched patois of the Annamites, "in the mountains, captain, white women, captain——"

The words echoed and reëchoed through the silent room; beat like tomtom music on his listeners' ears.

"And I laughed at them. I, Renée de Gys. In Angkor Wat. I laughed at them, and in Tin-shuong; at Cat-ba and at Pulau Condore. Fool: poor European fool! This is no blind trail I follow; no foolish rumor. They live still, the descendants of those aristocrats—Frenchmen and Frenchwomen. Somewhere in the mountains; somewhere between the Mékong River and the Song-ka, their stock survives. Of that stock was Mélie; and Lucien whom the unknown slew. In the mountains, captain, white women"—his voice sank to a whisper; rose again, shrill with certainty—"*Mais non! Mais non! Mais non!* It is no foolish rumor. It is the truth! And he holds the secret, that unknown one, that murderer."

Again Dicky's voice interrupted: "Calm yourself, my friend, calm yourself."

But Beamish still sat silent; and De Gys ranted on.

"Calm! Calm! To the devil with your English calmness. Yes! Yes! Yes! They are there still, my countrymen, my countrywomen. And I, I, I, Renée de Gys, I go to find them. By the seven boches I slew at Douamont, I go to find them. To Saigon, my friends—to Saigon! Let us take the Mother Mathurin by the throat, and after her, that murderer. Let us wring the secret from his dirty lips. To Saigon, my friends! I go to find the secret. Who comes with me? You, colonel? You, doctor?"

De Gys paused; looked at Beamish. Beamish sprang to his feet. "Oui," he stammered. "Oui. I go with you, I go with you."

"And you, colonel. You are with us?"

"I"—the Honorable Richard had not moved—"I think you are both quite mad. Especially you, De Gys. Let us try to be reasonable."

"Reasonable!" fumed the Frenchman.

"Yes. Reasonable. What does your story amount to? I will give it you in few words. You find in a house of ill-fame—a girl who is—excuse the phrase—addicted to drugs. She tells you she is frightened of an unknown man. She refuses to tell you about her past. You fall in love with her; you bring her to Singapore, where she dies of heart failure."

"After I had mentioned the secret——"

"Admitted. And what is your secret? A century-old story from your own country; confirmed, you say, by a native rumor. From this, if I follow you, you would have us believe that Mélie was one of these mysterious 'white women beyond the mountains,' that the unknown man—who may or may not be a murderer—not only killed Lucien—whoever 'Lucien' may be—but so impressed Mélie that at the mere mention of your so-called 'secret' she died of fright. Therefore—you say—the rumor is true; the unknown man knows the whereabouts of these mysterious women; let us find him; let us find them: To Saigon! To God knows where; *vive la France,* et cetera, et cetera."

"Then you refuse to come with us."

"Of course I refuse. Your evidence isn't worth the journey. It may be good enough for Beamish, with his crazy socialistic ideas, to go chasing up into the back of beyond

after a drug he thinks will dope the whole human race into happiness; it may be good enough for you—you were always keen on these exploration stunts. But it isn't good enough for me. I've had all the roughing it I want in the last four years. I'd rather be in a comfortable stateroom than stewing in your Indo-Chinese jungles. And, besides, I am not a free man—I am a merchant of cotton."

De Gys began to laugh. "Ho, ho, ho!" laughed De Gys. "A merchant of cotton! That is funny. Oh, yes, that is very, very funny. And the poor father who will lose his little capital of a billion francs if the little son neglects his duties as a drummer for a few months.

"Ho! but it is good to be a bourgeois. The bourgeois have all the virtues; they do not turn aside from their money-making; neither for strange drugs nor strange adventures do they turn aside. Very well, friend Smith. The doctor and I will go together, while you sell your pocket handkerchiefs to the merchants of Canton. Perhaps they, too, use the Furlmere pocket handkerchiefs —the white women beyond the mountains."

And the Frenchman chanted at the top of his voice: "In the mountains, captain, white women, captain, with the handkerchiefs of Colonel Smith, captain."

"De Gys, you are an idiot!" The Oxford drawl had lost a little of its sang-froid.

"It is possible, but, at any rate, I have not the soul of a shopkeeper."

At that, the Long'un began to fidget in his chair: the ancient race antagonism, the spirit which has sent Gaul and Anglo-Saxon into a thousand mad rivalries, stirred in his veins; and with it, there swept over them a longing for the old life, the life of a man, which he had known in the great years when Anglo-Saxon and Gaul fought side by side against the gray foes.

"You go on a fool's errand."

"And you, you stay behind to look after father's shop. Pah! I thought you were a man, my colonel; and you are only a draper after all. *Eh bien,* to each his choice. For me, *vive la France;* for the doctor, *vive la science;* for you"—insult hissed in the voice —*"vive le calico!"*

"Damn you, De Gys!" Now the Long'un was on his feet, glint of blued steel in his eyes. "Do you think I'm afraid to go?"

"Oh, no. Not afraid. Only a little tired of discomfort, of danger. A little tired; but not afraid. Oh, no, not in the least afraid."

The two giants faced each other across the flimsy table, and for a moment Beamish sensed conflict in their working features, their taut, wordless lips. Then, all of a sudden, the Long'un chuckled. The chuckle grew to a laugh, to a broad grin under the flat mustache. Both De Gys' leg-of-mutton hands shot forward; Dicky's long fingers met and gripped them.

"You will come then, my old comrade?"

"Yes, playboy, I come."

"Then let us drink, old friend. None of your potato spirit, but a bottle of the Widow's best—two bottles—three——"

Early next morning, when a sleepless Phu-nan brought ice for the last time, he found the three white men poring over a map of his country. "What new demon seizes upon these restless ones," thought Phu-nan, "that they plan yet another journey?"

But even if Phu-nan had formulated that thought into words, neither Dicky, taunted into leaving his business, nor De Gys, planning new discoveries for France, nor Beamish with his dreams of tabloid happiness for miserable humanity, could have answered the question aright. For the "demon" which had seized upon these three was the most powerful, the most secret, of all the white man's demons—the demon which nevers leaves the white man's elbow—the demon which is called "woman!"

CHAPTER IV.

AT THE LITTLE CAFE ON THE CHOLON ROAD.

It is a forty-eight hour steam from Singapore Island, southernmost tip of the Malay Peninsula, to the delta of the Mekong River and city Saigon; but though the equator lay almost dead astern, no northern breeze fanned the sweltering planks of the *Polynésien,* no hint of freshness penetrated to her curtained bunks. By day, the three travelers—almost the only ones aboard—drowsed in their chairs; by night, Phu-nan, See-Sim, and Lo-pin—a second Cantonese whom Beamish had engaged in Singapore—spread the travelers' valises on the port promenade deck, forward of the funnels.

And there, at ease in loose cinglet, silk *sarong* tucked round his enormous loins, Manila glowing crimson against the red of

his beard, De Gys would tell his companions story after strange story—tales of Cambodia and Annam, of Ava and Ayuthia—till even Dicky's skepticism began to believe in the possibility of their quest.

For the Frenchman knew Indo-China as a Londoner knows Bond Street or a New Yorker Fifth Avenue. Of his forty-five years a full twenty had been spent in the "golden land;" he seemed to carry its maps in his head, as he carried its dialects at the tip of his fantastic tongue.

Gradually, listening to him, the land took shape before the Englishmen's eyes. They saw it, not map-wise, but as a whole; northward the vast bulk of Chinese territory, southward the endless island-studded tropic sea; and between these two, Chrysé, a great land of water and hill country, pointing one forest-hairy finger to the equator. From west to east, they saw names written on the hand: "Burma," "Siam," "Cambodia," "Annam," "Tonkin," and the name of the forest-hairy finger was "Malaya." North and south, lines upon the hand, ran huge rivers: the Irawadi and the Salwin, waterways of Burma; the Ménam, waterway of Siam; the Mékong, highroad of Annamites and Cambodians; and the Song-Ka, or Red River, which is the traffic artery of the Tonkinese.

All up and down those rivers, and all through the hill and forest lands between them, De Gys had traveled, in steam launch and poling canoe, afoot or on elephant back: with all the brown and yellow peoples of the rivers and the hills and the forests, he had talked as man to man. But best he knew and loved the Mékong, which is the mother of rivers; and most he had talked with the peoples of her banks. He spoke Cambodian and Annamite and wailing musical Siamese; he knew the simple language of the Shan people, the dialect of the black-bellied Laos folk who tattoo from knee to navel, and the guttural jargon of the Khaskhouen; to Phunan, he gave his orders in a Moi patois which only three Europeans understand; with Lo-pin and See-Sim he conversed in their own Cantonese.

"The Indo-Chinese Dictionary," Dicky nicknamed him on their last night aboard; and then De Gys, a little vain of his knowledge, plunged into history: told them the legend of Rothisen, prince of Angkor in the days when a Khmer emperor ruled at Pnom-Penh, of his love for Neang-Kangrey, daughter of the King of Luang-Prabang; and of the ruin which fell, none knows how, upon Angkor city.

"Legend and history," finished De Gys, "history and legend. Who shall say, in Suvarna Uhumi, where fiction ends, where truth begins. It may be a false trail, this rumor we follow—a jungle path that ends only in jungle. I have trod many such. But what if it be a true trail; what if those lost countrymen of mine, those lost countrywomen, do indeed survive, penned in among the wild tribes who make their homes between the Mékong River and the River Song-Ka. Then surely, my friends, this were a trail that men such as we might follow to the death."

"If we can only find the man who killed Lucien," said Dicky drowsily and fell asleep, lulled by the snoring engines and the swirl of oily waters overside, to dream queer adventures in which he and De Gys and Beamish wandered through endless purple-flowering jungles toward a hidden city peopled by a thousand women, each one more beautiful than Mélie.

But morning, with its first sight of land, dispelled illusions, brought back the old skepticism. "A wild-goose chase," thought the Honorable Richard Assheton Smith, as he watched the white lighthouse of Cap St. Jacques grow plain to starboard, saw the first trees of the mainland peer up from the sea rim to port. "A wild-goose chase," he thought again, as, entering the river, they were met by two submarines, crawling conning towers awash toward the bar.

And Saigon, seen in the glare of a March afternoon, seemed final confirmation of that unromantic judgment. They made it after forty miles of zigzag steering between flat banks whose mangroves dipped to water's edge; docked prosaically at a long wharf, gave orders for their servants to rejoin them as soon as the kits had been passed through the customhouse; and taxied down the Rue Catinat to the Hotel Continental.

Beamish, since his first and only test of the strange drug, had never doubted the outcome of their adventure, yet even Beamish's scientific enthusism sank a little at sight of that hostelry. It was so entirely European, so utterly Gallic, with its affable porter, its clean cretonned bedrooms, its glass-roofed "winter garden," and café restaurant railinged-off under white awning from the sidewalk.

"Vermuth?" suggested De Gys, as they sat down at one of the marble-topped tables, and added, with a glance up the tree-lined boulevard toward the Café Pancrazi: "A little like Paris, is it not?"

"Too much so," said Dicky. "You seem to have Frenchified the East."

"Only here and there." The Frenchman smiled. "But it is not bad work to have contrived all this in sixty years—cathedral, opera house, law courts, docks, power stations, two thousand miles of railroad."

"And the secret," chaffed Dicky; but De Gys cut him short, saying with a gesture of annoyance: "Will soon be a general joke, my friend, if you cannot exercise a little more reticence. This, remember, is only a very small town." He stopped to acknowledge the bow of a well-dressed middle-aged woman whose victoria swept by at full trot, disappeared round the corner of the Boulevard Bonnard.

"Our colonel's wife," explained De Gys, "and the greatest tittle-tattle in Cochin-China. I'd better report my rearrival at once. If you two will wait for me here." He signaled a waiting ricksha—one of those elegant cushion-tired affairs which are only found in Saigon, climbed aboard, and was whirled away.

Beamish demanded tea from a white-tunicked Cambodian waiter; See-Sim appeared with the hand baggage; followed Lo-pin, Phu-nan, and the heavy boxes; the street cooled perceptibly, began to fill with strollers, here an alert European, there a weary Chinese; but still de Gys tarried. It was nearly sundown before he returned, tooling a pair of Shan ponies, silver-harnessed to a four-wheeled buggy.

"*En voiture,*" he called, whip raised in greeting, "it is the hour of the inspection." And for an hour he drove them—up the Rue Ratinat, past the post office, out of the town into the Jardin des Plantes, to the porcupine cages and the tiger cages, through red-sanded alleys, over little bridges, now walking his ponies between the many cars and carriages most of whose occupants bowed and smiled surprise, now trotting out among empty avenues of tamarisk and flamboyant trees, till the quick twilight faded to utter darkness and they were alone in the perfumed silence of the park.

"One shows oneself," explained De Gys. "You are my old friends; we met my chance in Singapore; you wished to see Saigon; I offered to return with you; afterward, I go to Europe. It is understood?"

"Perfectly," said Dicky, and began to hum, "Conspirators three are we."

This time the doctor cut him short with: "I do wish you wouldn't make a joke of the whole thing, Long'un."

"Well, it is a joke, isn't it?" retorted Dicky. "I'm laying ten to one against our getting any farther than this extremely civilized city."

They returned, uncomfortably silent, under the swinging lights of the Rue Catinat, to their hotel; found Phu-nan waiting. De Gys gave him the reins and the usual incomprehensible order; watched him walk away the ponies.

"Now," said De Gys, "we will dine. Change your clothes if you like, but oblige me by not putting on smokings. As for me, I will wash in your room, friend Smith."

The Frenchman followed Dicky upstairs, sat very silent while See-Sim prepared the bath, laid out a fresh silk suit, poured warm water into the tooth glass, studded silk shirt, and fastened garters to clean socks.

"Tell him to go now." De Gys spoke in French. Dicky obeyed, undressed himself for his tub, squatted down, sponge in hand. Except for the scars of his bullet wounds—one high up on the right thigh, the other through the left shoulder—the Englishman's body was white and smooth as a young girl's.

"They have healed well," said De Gys, eying the scars. "Better than mine." He stripped off his high tunic, the cinglet below, revealing a great hairy torso wealed and scarred as though by hot irons.

"Rifle bullets, shrapnel, explosives, bayonets, and poisoned arrows," he called over one torn shoulder, "I have been their target ever since I can remember. And still, I cannot give up adventuring."

Dicky, bath finished, drew on a thin silk dressing gown, subsiding onto the sofa, lit a cigarette, and drawled languidly:

"Talking of adventures, when do we visit Mother Mathurin?"

"To-night." The Frenchman finished his wash.

"All three of us?"

"No. The doctor must be persuaded to stop at home."

"He won't like that."

"He *must* like it," said De Gys brusquely. "And now for my plan: At ten o'clock, a

hired motor will be waiting for us. We drive straight to the café. The chances are that we shall find it almost empty—in which case, we tackle the old woman at once. Otherwise, if there are people—people who know me—you, as a stranger to Saigon, furnish the excuse for my presence. Then, we wait; we buy some sweet champagne for the little daughter. Afterward, when the place is quiet——"

"My friend," interrupted Dicky, "what exactly do you mean by 'tackling the old woman?'"

Thoughtfully, the Frenchman caressed his beard. "As an Englishman," he said at last, "you would, I am afraid, regard the carriage whip as somewhat crude."

"Certainly, De Gys!" Annoyance crisped the Oxford drawl.

"Ah, I thought as much. And this?" He drew a flat thirty-eight automatic from his hip pocket;; noticed the Long'un's cynical disapproval; thrust back the weapon. "Very well, then—to conform with your Anglo-Saxon prejudices, we will try diplomacy. If that fails"—again the vast hand took counsel with the beard—"we must rely upon mere threats."

"Or money?" thought Dicky; but neither then nor during dinner did he voice the thought.

To the Englishman's mind, De Gys' conspiratorial attitude furnished the last touch of unreality to their situation, and he decided—halfway through the best meal he had eaten in the East, a meal served on faultless napery at a red-lamped table—that both his friends were suffering from delusions, possibly after-causes of the drug they had taken. So that when Beamish—who was a theoretical teetotaller—lifted a full glass of 1914 Pommery to "the success of our first step," and the Frenchman acknowledged the toast in a melodramatic whisper, Dicky could hardly refrain from a loud guffaw. Still, he bore with them both; even helped persuade Beamish to an early night.

Dinner over, liqueurs on the cleared table, the three sat watching Saigon's evening promenade. The opera season was finished, the night too hot for the cinema; it seemed as though the whole population had forgathered of one accord under the lamplit trees of the boulevard. Up and down they strolled; dapper little bureaucrats in soft shirts and "smokings;" sun-withered colonial officers in white mufti; prosperous merchants, gold watch chains a-swing on cummerbunded paunch, arm in arm with wives of transparent bourgeoisie; grisette and others of a crowd so obviously Parisian that the cotton-clad Annamites, the lace-bloused half-caste girls, the Chinese and the Cambodians and the occasional Malays who mingled with it might have been strangers in their own hemisphere.

Nearly all the Europeans greeted De Gys; one or two stopped to shake hands across the rail which separated the restaurant from the street, were introduced to *"mon ami, le Colonel Smith de l'Armée Anglaise et Monsiour le Doctor Beamish."*

Suddenly De Gys pulled out his watch, called for and insisted on paying the bill, got up from the table, shook hands with the doctor, and, motioning Dicky to follow, passed through the back of the restaurant into the hotel.

"First and last act of that thrilling melodrama 'The Unknown Man.' So long, Beamish; if you can't be good, be careful," chaffed the Long'un. But Cyprian Beamish, M. D. Glasgow—veins warmed with the unaccustomed wine—retorted angrily: "He ought to have left you at home and taken *me* with him."

The same idea crossed De Gys' mind as their car threaded its way down the crowded street toward the river. He knew himself, though outwardly controlled, prey to the most violent excitement; felt himself on the verge of great events; saw himself already acclaimed savior of his lost compatriots, explorer of explorers, ranking with Garnier, with Stanley, with all the heroes of his boyhood. He dreamed, in those few minutes, a thousand rapid dreams; visions of untrod jungles, of unclimbed mountains, of strange beasts and birds and peoples; such fantasies as have sent the white man into the unknown since the dawn of time, and will send him while time endures.

"But the Englishman!" thought the dreamer. "He has no faith. He has no vision. He does not care. To him it is all a jest." For Dicky's languid blue eyes, the joking mouth under the flat mustache, gave no hint of the imagination which was beginning to take command of his brain.

"It may be all spoof," said imagination, "but supposing it isn't; supposing the old woman *can* tell us something; supposing that——"

So the car threaded its way out of the Rue Catinat; swung right-handed through an empty street of high stone buildings, gathered speed, twisted off again down a long road whose white wooden villas showed and vanished suddenly between moon-flecked palm trees and hibiscus bushes, made shadowy country for five breathless minutes, and pulled up with grind of brakes at a low wicket gate set between high, untrimmed hedges of feathery bamboo.

"Wait!" commanded De Gys.

"*Oui, capitaine.*" The Annamite chauffeur cut off his engine, leaned forward against the steering wheel, and was asleep almost before his two passengers had clicked open the wicket gate.

They found themselves, De Gys leading, in a small, unkempt avenue of hibiscus. At the avenue's end, vaguely illuminated, Dicky saw the outlines of a long palmetto-thatched bungalow, built six foot above ground level on four-square wooden piles. From the front of the house came raucous notes of a gramophone and girls' voices.

They climbed the short flight of wooden stairs to a broad veranda, rose lit by two pendant electrics. On a rickety bamboo table stood the gramophone whose tune they had heard in the garden; over it, watching for the end of the record, bent a girl, who looked up at the sound of their entrance, stopped the machine, and came forward over the worn matting with mincing, provocative steps. She was dressed in a short, loose-fitting frock of soiled green satin, sequin-trimmed at hem and low-cut breast; red Milanese silk stockings, darned at the knee, displayed spindle-shanked limbs ending in a pair of greasy suède dancing shoes. Her dark hair fell, unbound, over thin shoulders; from her wizened overpowdered face, black eyes surveyed the newcomers incuriously.

"Beer, captains?"

"Thanks, little one." De Gys threw himself into a long rattan chair, pulled a packet of cigarettes from his pocket. The girl disappeared through the chik curtains into an inner room, came back almost immediately carrying glasses and bottles on a metal tray. A second girl, identically dressed, but blond and of an incredible fatness, accompanied her.

"I am Lizette," said the blond girl to the Honorable Dicky.

"Charmed to make your acquaintance, mademoiselle." The Long'un proferred a seat, into which Mademoiselle Lizette sank heavily.

"Thanks. It is hot this evening, monsieur."

"Yes, mademoiselle, I am very warm."

Meanwhile the dark girl, busy serving the beer, eyed De Gys with awakened interest. "This is not your first visit to Mother Mathurin's," she said at last, flopping down glass in hand on the leg rest of his chair, "you were here about six weeks ago, just before——" The sentence broke off unfinished.

"Just before what?" questioned De Gys, sipping the lukewarm beer.

"Oh, nothing—that is to say, the mother—I mean——"

"But you talk so," interrupted Lizette. "That girl has a loose tongue," she explained to Dicky. "Always gossiping! Now I, I never gossip. I am discreet—oh, but of an enormous discretion."

Conversation languished. The dark girl suggested the gramophone, champagne, a little dance.

"No," said De Gys. "We have not come here to dance, little ones. My friend who is a globe-trotter has heard so much about the mother that he is anxious to make her acquaintance. He would like"—the voice dropped meaningly—"to have a little smoke with the mother, to buy perhaps a little of that excellent *tobacco* for which she is so famous."

"I will see if she is awake." Lizette hauled herself up from her chair, bustled out through the chik curtains.

Said the dark girl turning to Dicky: "I am sorry that you smoke the mother's tobacco. It is surely bad for the health—is it not so?"

Dicky, a little out of his depth, made no answer; and the girl rattled on. "As for me, I do not like the opium, it makes me sick. A little cocaine now and then in the hot weather, that is good; it cools the blood, but the black smoke—it cools the blood too much."

De Gys, half hidden behind the girl's back, held up a warning finger lest his friend should protest.

"Do many of the English—you are English, are you not?—smoke the opium? I thought it was forbidden. Here, it is only forbidden for the French officers, that is why the mother——" But Lizette's return interrupted confidences.

"The mother will see you," she announced, "if you like."

They followed her statuesque back through the chik curtains; traversed an untidy eating room, a matting-floored passage. Lizette knocked on a paneled door. "*Entrez,*" called a querulous voice. De Gys opened the door, and the two men passed into the presence of La Mère Mathurin.

She was lying full-length on a divan of cane and black lacquer piled with frowsy silk cushions; a stertorous creature, shapeless in wadded kimono, yellow feet bare, gray curls straggling over receding forehead. Flat nose and slitty eyes betrayed her a *métisse,* or half-caste woman. The hands with which she motioned the visitors to sit down were clawlike though not uncleanly; the chin pointed; the throat swollen almost to goitre; the lips rouged above black and rotted teeth. Over her head, grotesquely illuminating the sparsely furnished, brown-walled, mother-of-pearl-paneled room hung a Chinese lamp of painted glass; at the side of her divan, stood a low table of chipped red lacquer still laid with the remnants of a meal.

The heat of the room—it had no fan, and thick stuff curtains were pulled close before its only window—was asphyxiating. Nevertheless, De Gys shut the door before taking one of the chairs Mother Mathurin indicated. As he did so, Dicky heard the faintest click—the click of a key simultaneously turned and withdrawn.

"Confound the man!" thought Dicky. "Is that his idea of diplomacy? I wish I'd never come with him. I wish——"

"And what do you want of me, De Gys?" asked the hag on the divan. "*De l'opium?* You know very well that I keep no opium for officers! A little daughter? You saw two of my little daughters outside—are they not handsome enough for you?"

Dicky, seated and already sweating through his clean silk coat, felt hostility in the querulous voice; felt himself—in spite of his better judgment—growing at once angry and interested. But the Frenchman answered with a laugh:

"*Ma mère,* you and I have known each other these twenty years. I remember you when you were young and beautiful."

"No compliments," growled the hag, "and if you please, no insults! I was an old woman when you first came to Cochin-China, and I was never beautiful—only clever. I am still clever, De Gys. What do you want?"

"Information, mother: only a little information."

At that, Mother Mathurin hauled herself half upright on the cushions: "Information?" The yellow feet slipped from the divan, inserted themselves into a pair of dilapidated sandals. "Information! Have you then been appointed commissaire of police, commandant?"

"The information I require," went on De Gys blandly, "has nothing to do with the police—yet."

The hag laughed in his face. "If you are trying to frighten me, De Gys, you must use some other method. The police, as you should know, are my very good friends. The police much appreciate the excellent tobacco of Mother Mathurin."

"No one knows that better than I. Nor am I trying to frighten you. Nevertheless, there are certain rules which even Mother Mathurin dares not break; and one of those rules, if I remember the *code pénal,* compels the registration of the little daughters. Is that not so, mother?" He paused, and, getting no answer, continued: "Now, supposing—mark you I am only supposing—that there had been—shall we say six weeks ago—an unregistered woman in this house of yours—— Supposing that this fact had come to the governor's ears?" Dicky, watching the hag's face, saw it pale under the powder. "And supposing that I, your old friend, had been sent to investigate? Would you deny——"

"Yes," interrupted the hag, "I should most certainly deny——" Suddenly, intelligence gleamed from the slitty eyes, pallor vanished. "If you were sent by the governor, I should most certainly deny. But you are not sent by the governor—you come on your own initiation, even as you came"—the voice dropped significantly—"some six weeks ago."

"Then we begin to understand one another." De Gys crossed his legs, took the crumpled packet of cigarettes from his pocket, offered one to the old woman.

"Thanks, but I do not smoke that rubbish." Dicky, listening carefully, caught a new note in the querulous voice, saw that De Gys was beginning to lose his temper. "And now that we begin to understand one another, it is I and not you who require information." A skinny claw shot out,

pointed accusingly. "It was you who took away the girl, De Gys. What have you done with her?"

The Frenchman scowled. "Your proof, mother?"

"Proof! Proof! Is not your presence here to-night proof enough?" Rage mastered cautiousness, the voice rose almost to a scream. "What have you done with her, De Gys? Where is she? I must have her back—do you understand—I must have her back."

"Hold your tongue, woman."

"I will not hold my tongue. You are a thief, a robber. Tell me where she is, or I will call the servants; I will have you thrown out of the house."

De Gys, red-brown eyes glinting dangerously, rose to his feet; laid a hand on the woman's arm. "Old cow, for nothing I would kill both you and your servants."

"Old cow, am I?"—she threw the hand from her. "Old cow, indeed! Get out of my house."

For answer, De Gys whipped the door-key from his pocket, waved it in her face. "Neither I nor my friend leave this room until you tell us what we want to know."

"Bah, I am not afraid of you, big elephant, nor of you——" she turned suddenly on the Long'un. "Why have you come with him, with this white-slave trafficker, this blackmailer?"

"White-slave trafficker! Blackmailer! *You* dare to call me that. *You!*". De Gys seized the woman by both shoulders, and for a moment Dicky thought he was going to shake the life out of her. "Enough of this nonsense. Enough of it, do you understand?" He flung her backward onto the divan, and she lay there panting.

"Gently my friend," suggested the Long'un, still seated.

"Gently, gently. You do not know this old sow. But I—I know her." One huge fist lifted menacingly above the huddled figure. "And she knows me; do you not, woman? Now, then, a straight answer to a straight question. Who brought the girl Mélie here?"

"A Chinaman," stammered Mother Mathurin.

"That is a lie."

"It is the only answer I will give you."

"His name?"

"I refuse." She slipped suddenly from the divan, rushed for the door. De Gys grabbed her by the kimono; dragged her back; held her to him, breathless and writhing.

"You *will* tell."

"Never." The hag wriggled herself free. "Never! Never! Never!" She waddled back to the divan, sat down heavily. The fight was out of her body, but not out of her brain. "Never!" she repeated.

"The whip!" said De Gys furiously. "I told you we should have brought the whip."

"I think not." The Long'un, quite unruffled, rose from his chair. Obviously, the Frenchman's "diplomacy" had failed. Probably, there was no "secret" to unravel, only some vulgar intrigue. Still, just in case——

"Madame," said the Long'un courteously, "you told us just now that you were a clever woman. I accept your own estimate of yourself, madame; and presume that you do not underrate the value of money——"

"You would pay her?" began De Gys.

Dicky laid a hand on his friend's arm: "Be quiet," he whispered; and aloud: "Madame, what price do you set upon this information?"

"I do not sell my friends."

"He is a friend of yours, then, this—Chinaman?"

"Possibly." The slitty eyes scrutinized their opponent, as he drew a flat note case from the breast of his coat.

"A very dear friend, shall we say? About how dear, madame?"

The figure on the divan stiffened to attention. "Dearer than you can afford, captain."

"That also is possible, madame." The Long'un, inwardly cursing himself for a fool, extracted a five-hundred piastre note from his case; held it languidly between finger and thumb. "Five hundred louis!"

Silence from the divan. "Damn it," thought the Long'un, "there must be more in this than I expected."

"Another hundred louis!" A second note joined the first. Still, the hag said no word. "Madame, I congratulate you on your loyalty." The two notes were restored to the case, the case to its pocket. "And good night, madame!" The Long'un turned on his heel.

"Captain," pleaded the voice from the divan, "I am only a poor woman, a very poor woman. And I owe money, captain, much money—nearly fifteen hundred piastres."

"She lies," whispered De Gys. "She is very rich."

"Be quiet," repeated Dicky; and drawing a chair close to the divan, sat down, re-extracted the note case from his pocket, and laid it on his knee. By now, he was almost convinced that the woman held the clew they sought.

"Madame, my friend and I are very much in earnest. It will not be profitable for you to deceive us. But if you are willing to tell us the truth"—he tapped the note case significantly—"then, perhaps, I will settle those—er—debts of yours."

"For fifteen hundred piastres, captain"—the fat throat seemed to swell with excitement—"I will tell you the man's name. For two thousand piastres, I will tell you where to find him."

"Got her," thought Dicky, and counted four notes from his case. The slitty eyes glistened.

"And what guarantee have we," interrupted De Gys, "that she does not lie to us?"

"I do not think that Mother Mathurin will lie to us. If she does, there is always the carriage whip." The blue eyes had grown very stern. "Now, madame, the name —and the address."

"Give the money," pleaded the hag.

But Dicky shook his head. "The information first, madame."

For a moment Mother Mathurin hesitated. Then, as the notes crackled provocatively between her interlocutor's long fingers, greed conquered reticence; and she turned to De Gys with a leer.

"It was Negrini—Tomasso Negrini."

"You are fooling us"—rage hardened the Frenchman's voice—"Negrini died at Bassak in 'ninety-six. I knew him well—the dirty Italian. He was your lover, once. Tell us another tale, old sow."

"Negrini did not die at Bassak"—to Dicky, there was no mistaking the truth in those certain words—"Negrini still lives. But he no longer calls himself Negrini. His name is N'ging; and you will find him at the house of Pu-Yi the Yunnanese in the Street of the Duck at Cholon. Now give me my money and leave me in peace."

"Wait," De Gys' hand closed over the notes. "I must have evidence of this."

"Evidence!" said the hag scornfully. "What evidence had you of his death? A Siamese report! To whose interest was it that Negrini should die? Remember, there were a hundred thousand ticals—more than a hundred and fifty thousand francs—missing from the treasury at Bangkok."

"And Negrini was head of the public-works department." De Gys chuckled. "So he makes away with himself—and the hundred thousand ticals. He dies—and becomes N'ging the Chinaman. I wonder how much of their own money he paid the Siamese officials to spread the rumor of his death?"

"One can do a great deal with a hundred thousand ticals." Mother Mathurin stretched clawlike hands to the bank notes.

They left her gloating under the rays of the lamp; made their way swiftly out of the bungalow, down the steps into the garden. At the gate, their chauffeur still slumbered over his wheel. They climbed in and De Gys tapped the sleeper lightly on the shoulder.

"Where to, captain?"

"To Cholon. And drive like a furnace!"

The Annamite switched on his engine, and the car plunged forward through the moonlit night.

CHAPTER V.

A MAN WHO WENT YELLOW.

"Promises to be a nice cheap evening," remarked the Long'un as their car bounded from shadows into moonlight. "What on earth made the old hag stick out for such a stiff price?"

De Gys laid a thankful paw on his friend's arm, and said in a low voice: "Our government will pay more than that to send Negrini to Pulau Condore, my friend. If Mother Mathurin has told us the truth, we are about to visit one of the biggest criminals in Indo-China. My only wonder is that she gave him away for so little."

"Then you think we are on the right track?"

"When you have been in the East as long as I have," whispered De Gys, "you will not presume that the natives are ignorant of your language." He indicated the Annamite's back, and subsided into silence, leaving the Long'un completely mystified.

So they came, out of perfume and silence and silvery moonbeams, into the flaring hubbub of Cholon. Here, speed was impossible; yellow faces, thousands upon thou-

sands of yellow faces, men's faces and women's faces and the grave-eyed faces of little children, teemed in the glare of their headlamps, swarmed past their wheels, vanished and were repeated in endless kaleidoscope. It seemed to Dicky as though all China must be astir in that long street, under those black-and-gilt signs, at those lamplit balconies, in the bescrolled and lacquer-fronted houses. The pur of their engine was drowned in noise; their horn tittled vainly against a tumult of sound—beating of gongs, plunk of sanhsiens, jangling of a bell, men's voices shouting, women's voices singing, tink of swaying glass, rattle of ricksha wheels.

"To the left!" called De Gys abruptly. The car wormed its way somehow out of the seethe; jolted left wheels against stone pavement; gave glimpse of a lantern-lit interior where four Japanese girls, flowers in their hair, sat motionless round a flower-decked table; purred a hundred yards past silent buildings whose gables bulked low against starlit sky, and, at a stick tap on the Annamite's shoulder, pulled up with a jerk that flung both Europeans nearly out of their seats.

They descended into the gloom cast by a long pillared portico; jumped a gutter; climbed three steps; peered forward through an open doorway. In front of them stretched a high shadowy hall. From a bronze lantern at far end, violet rays shimmered fantastically on black marble floor, on vague gildings, on the soapstone face of a huge seated image.

Gingerly, they passed from the safety of open air into this hall of silence. A vague scent, a fragrance as of sweet nuts burning, permeated its violet stillness.

"Opium," whispered De Gys, as they waited, silent in that strange place, eyes growing gradually aware of lacquered doors, of slim pillars, of silken hangings and fretted screens, all tinged to the same indeterminate purple by the dark lamp rays.

Suddenly—so suddenly that Dicky almost dropped the light stick he was carrying—there appeared from behind the image, a dwarflike creature, pig-tailed, clad as the yellow man in long coatee and loose trousers; a creature who sidled across the floor toward them on noiseless silk-slippered feet, and clutching De Gys by the tunic, looked up at him with unsmiling, lack-luster eyes.

De Gys bent his bearded face, and spoke slowly, using the 'mandarin' language of all China.

"Does his excellency, the splendid N'ging, inhabit this most hospitable of mansions?"

"Oh, great stranger, this is the humble home of Pu-Yi the Yunnanese whose servant am I."

"Upon Pu-Yi and his mansion, upon his wife and the wife of his eldest son, be there increase and the blessings of two worthless strangers. But we"—Dicky, watching, saw a coin pass from hand to upstretched hand—"we two would fain have speech with His Excellency N'ging. Go, therefore, servant of Pu-Yi, and say to his excellency, 'There be two strangers *from Bassak* who crave audience.'"

The dwarf repeated the message, and disappeared.

Whispered De Gys, hand at hip: "I wish you were armed, my friend. The good Negrini will not, I fancy, be pleased at our message." He transferred the automatic to jacket pocket; clicked safety catch forward with his thumb.

"What message?" began the Long'un, but already the dwarf had returned.

"His Excellency N'ging sends a thousand greetings. His excellency would gladly give audience to the strangers, but, alas, his excellency is extremely ill!"

"Say to him, servant of Pu-Yi"—De Gys interrupted the conventional excuses—"that the strangers' business is one that can with difficulty be delayed. Say also"—a second coin emphasized the word—"that we trust his excellency's health gives less cause for anxiety than it gave at Bassak, in the fifth moon of the year of the dragon."

Again, the dwarf disappeared; again the two waited, silent in the purple gloom of Pu-Yi's mansion. Five minutes passed—ten. Dicky, glancing at his watch, saw that it was already midnight.

"Which way did that yellow devil go?" muttered De Gys.

"Behind the statue. Think he's given us the slip?"

"I don't know. Keep your eyes open. Hello, what's that?" One of the lacquered doors moved on noiseless runners; showed a chink of yellow light; closed again. The Frenchman's hand tightened over the pistol butt. Dicky, subconsciously aware of danger, edged a pace toward the soapstone image. Then the lacquered door slid full open, and a voice called:

"His excellency desires speech with the men from Bassak. Let them approach, fearing nothing."

As they moved slowly toward the open doorway, Dicky heard De Gys rumble to himself, "His excellency, indeed. His excellency! That Italian maggot."

Lacquered door, sliding-to noiselessly at their heels, prisoned them in a vast, windowless apartment, matting-floored, scarlet-frescoed, walls hung with yellow silks that glowed and shimmered under the rays of high-hanging lanterns. Fume and perfume of the black smoke, whorls of blue-gray vapor, hung heavy in a dead atmosphere, through which—as through cotton wool—the two made their way across the room.

Half hidden by a teak screen in the far corner, body prone on a rice-straw mattress, head raised in suspicious welcome, lay His Excellency N'ging. By his side, long fingers busy cleaning the flat metal bowl, the thick bamboo tube and the jade mouthpiece of an opium pipe, squatted a young Chinese girl. Between them, on an ebony stool, among a litter of long needles, stood the lighted lamp and a silver-lidded pot of chased malachite which held the poppy treacle.

"Pray be seated," said N'ging, indicating two low stools, obviously prearranged for the visitors. "Will you honor me by partaking of the black smoke?"

"We are flattered," began De Gys, and plunged into compliments: while Dicky, inwardly fuming at his utter ignorance of Chinese, tried to sum up their unwilling host.

Nothing about the appearance of N'ging the Chinese revealed Tomasso Negrini, Genovese of Genoa. He wore the loose-sleeved jacket, the full skirt and embroidered house boots of a mandarin's undress. His hair, cropped fashionably short, was hidden by a black satin skullcap, under which the forehead showed yellow and wrinkled. Pendant mustaches framed beardless chin. Nose, ears, cheeks, scraggy neck—even the motionless fingers—all played adequate part in the Eastern illusion. Only the restless opium-reddened eyes—behind which Dicky seemed to catch, every now and then, the vaguest hint of fear—were somehow foreign.

The girl, pipe-cleaning finished, lifted the lid of the opium pot; took and dipped a needle; began cooking the first drop of black treacle in the flame of the lamp; watched it swell and bubble golden; added black drop to golden bubble, twirling the long needle in deft fingers till the odorous ball sizzled complete, stretched left hand to the cleaned pipe, dropped sizzling ball exact to center of the metal bowl, and passed jade mouthpiece to her master. N'ging sucked down the black smoke at a single draft; handed back the empty pipe.

For a full minute "his excellency" lay silent, blue vapor oozing from mouth and nostrils. Then De Gys spoke.

"Away with it, excellence!" Crisp French cut like a whiplash through the perfumed quiet. "Send the girl away, and let us to our business."

"Business?" Now N'ging, too, spoke French, metallically, as the Italians speak it. "What business?"

"Send the girl away," repeated De Gys.

"She does not understand *phalangsé*."

"Nevertheless she must not remain."

"Must not!" N'ging mouthed the words as though they amused him. "I am not a coolie."

"Very well then." The Frenchman bent forward, eyed the smoker scornfully. "Since you are not a coolie, and since the girl does not speak *phalangsé*, we will discuss our business in your own language, excellency. It is a pretty language, the Mandarin—and some say that it was first spoken by your excellency at *Bassak* in the fifth moon of that year of the dragon when a certain Italian——"

"The devil!" thought Dicky. "This is bluff with a vengeance. If the girl goes, I shall begin to believe those two thousand piastres were a pretty sound investment."

At a sign from N'ging the girl went!

There followed a tense silence, broken only by the intermittent gurgle of the opium lamp. Frenchman and Italian eyed each other warily: and to Dicky, watching them, it seemed at first as though advantage lay with the impassive figure on the rice-straw mattress. At last, Negrini spoke.

"You are a brave man, commandant; but like most of your race, a great fool. How much did you pay the old cow to give away my secret?" De Gys did not answer, and Negrini went on: "At any rate, she fooled you, commandant. They will never send N'ging, the Chinaman, to Pulau Condore. One cannot make convicts of the dead, and I am dying as I speak to you."

"What, *again?*" interrupted his opponent.

Negrini smiled. "It was, you will admit, a good trick that I played you. I have played you many since. But now the game is finished. The poison of Su-rah does not act quickly, yet it is very certain, as certain as death itself. Therefore"—this time Dicky could not mistake the fear that leaped to life behind the apathetic eyes—"you find me smoking the black smoke. Be thankful for these mercies, commandant, otherwise neither you nor your English friend would be here." And he added meaningly: "The house of Pu-Yi, the Yunnanese, is not a safe place for foreign devils. There have been many accidents to white men in the blue hall of Pu-Yi."

"Do not let us talk of accidents." Dicky sensed controlled anger in his friend's voice, saw his right hand steal to tunic pocket, close quietly round the pistol. "And, above all, do not let us talk of death."

For a while neither spoke. Silence, like the opium cloud, hung heavy between them. De Gys' mind had gone back to the past; he saw himself a young man again. He was on his first visit to Saigon, seated on a rattan chair in the newly built clubhouse. All round him, men—men long since dead or gone home—were gossiping. "Negrini is dead. Pontarlis sends the news from Bassak. *Le sale Italien!* He has stolen his last tical. The Siamese had him killed. *Vivent les Siamois.* Now, we shall have peace in the delta of the Black River. He was our enemy, that one. He was in league with the English—no, with the Yellow Flags. He was in league with the Hos—Deovantri told me. They say he meant to engineer a second Taiping rebellion. At any rate, he is dead now. Let us be thankful for his death."

But Tomasso Negrini was not dead; Tomasso Negrini, thief, murderer, *agent provocateur*, still threatened the safety of France!

"You are thinking of the old days," said Negrini. "Let the congäi come back—I need the black smoke"—again fear, fear of the unknown, kindled the dark pupils—"then we will talk of those old days. Why begrudge his little jest to one about to die." One yellow hand stretched languidly for the opium pipe.

"*Non!*" De Gys' pistol, jerked from jacket pocket, pointed sudden muzzle at the Italian's forehead. "Make one move, Negrini—and I fire!"

"*Comme vous voulez.*" A weary smile contracted the yellow features. "You came on business, I think. Shall we discuss *that business?*"

De Gys depressed the pistol muzzle. "Yes," he said, balancing the weapon on his knee. "Let us discuss *that business.*"

To Dicky, who held no clew to Negrini's past, the opening conversation had been almost unintelligible; he sat, half stifled with the opium fumes, looking now at his friend, now at his friend's enemy, groping his way vainly through a fog of doubt. But of one thing the Long'un felt quite certain: N'ging had not lied when he said he was dying; N'ging's smile might be assumed, but his fear was very real.

"You wish to know"—the yellow lips spoke with deliberate certainty—"why the girl Mélie was taken to Mother Mathurin's."

De Gys restrained a start of surprise.

"You are well informed, Negrini."

"I hope so, commandant. I pay good money for my information. *Eh, bien,* it is no great secret. She was my mistress, my white mistress; and I left her at the little café while I went on a journey."

"You lie!" The pistol muzzle lifted menacingly. "Mélie was never your mistress."

"I tell the truth. She came from Shanghai, from the Soochow Road, from Madame Blanche's. She came——" Suddenly words ceased, fear had its way with the man. "Let the congäi come back, commandant. I need the black smoke."

"No." The pistol muzzle never wavered.

"But I cannot—I cannot—I am dying, I tell you—dying." Yellow fingers twitched convulsively, clawed at the jacket silk. "The pain—the pain returns—I am afraid of the pain." He writhed as he lay, and De Gys watched him, pitiless.

"Mélie was never your mistress. Mélie did not come from Shanghai."

"No—she was never my mistress—she did not come from Shanghai. I lied to you. I will not lie to you again. I swear to tell you the truth." Sweat pearled the yellow forehead. "Only let the congäi come back, come back; let her cook me a pipe of the black smoke."

"No."

"But the pain—I am afraid of the pain—I can feel the pain already—I can feel it through my veins—flame—flame in the blood—the poison of Su-rah."

"Tell me the truth," said the Frenchman.

But now the Long'un intervened: "Why not give him the dope, *mon vieux?* It may make him talk."

"Not yet," whispered De Gys. Shudders took Negrini by the stomach; an acrid foam exuded from his lips. "Not yet. I fear a trap."

"Opium," moaned the thing on the mattress. "Opium—or the pain finishes me." His boots quivered.

De Gys handed the weapon to his friend. "Keep him covered. If his hands move, kill!" Dicky, sighting over pistol hammer, was aware of the Frenchman's huge figure kneeling by the lamp; heard him say: "The black smoke grills, Negrini. Will you trade us the truth for a night of it."

"Yes," gasped Negrini. "Only be quick and ——"

Dark drop at needle end sputtered golden to the flame, burgeoned and grew; fumes oozed from it; perfume as of sweet nuts burning cloyed the air. "The pipe is ready, Negrini. Take, but remember! If you lie to us, the pain returns." Foam-flecked lips fumbled for jade-mouthpiece, closed greedily, sucked and were still. His head dropped back to pillow; limbs relaxed.

"Has the pain gone, Negrini?"

"Yes. It has gone." Once more the weary smile contracted yellow features.

"Then tell us how the girl Mélie came to Mother Mathurin's."

This is the tale of Harinesia and what lay beyond Harinesia, as the two first heard it, while the dark treacle sizzled golden at the flame and the blue smoke whorls clotted thick and thicker round the high saffron lanterns; the tale that N'ging, the Chinaman, told them between his opium pipes in the great gold-and-scarlet room of Pu-Yi's mansion. Sometimes, he faltered in the telling, and once, when pain seemed very far away behind the black smoke, he thought to take his secret with him to the grave. But when De Gys blew out the lamp and threatened to break the pipe between two fingers—drug-stained fingers they were, for De Gys had small skill at the cooking—then memory of pain drove out courage of the black smoke; and yellow lips took up their story once more:

"I have always hated you French. When I was a dirty little boy, begging for *soldi* in the streets of Genoa, I hated you; now that I am an old man, I hate you still. You are a nation of thieves. You stole Nizza from us, and Mentone, and all that coast which is ours by right. Your boasted Riviera is but filched Italy. Always, our enemies have been your friends, your friends our enemies.

"Do not interrupt me, De Gys; I tell this story my own way—or not at all. You are a nation of thieves, I say, but had those at home done as I prayed them, you would have thieved no more. There would have been no victory of the Marne if Italy and Austria had fallen on your flank—only defeat, defeat for hated France. And then, then not only your Riviera but all this Eastern empire of yours, would have been ours.

"Yes, you are all thieves, and here in the East, fools also. Who but a Frenchman would have stolen the girl Mélie from Mother Mathurin's? Who but a Frenchman would have been such a fool as to think the theft undetected? Why, all Cholon knew that she was with you—living with you in your apartment on the Boulevard Bonnard! And if I had not been a dying man——

"Give me another pipe, Frenchman.

"At least, I have been a good hater. Siamese and Cambodians, Khas and Annamites, Black Flags and Yellow Flags, I have stirred them all up to fight you, paid them to fight you. Behind every war waged against France in this golden land, behind every intrigue and every murder—I stood. I, N'ging, the Chinaman! My money bred each revolt; my money sped each poisoned arrow; my money nullified each treaty.

"Money! I fought you with your own weapon, you see? A thief to catch a thief. And during five and twenty years all the money I used against you—all except that first bagatelle I borrowed from Siam—has come from your own pockets. Listen! For every piastre which France has filched out of Indo-China I—a dead Italian and a dying yellow man—have taken ten. And I spent them all against France. How did I get them? How? Ask the opium dealers of Ssu-mao and Talan; ask the merchants of Man-hao and Kai-hua; ask in Pé-sé and Nan-ning and Pak-hoi and Lien-chan!

"Ask—and they will tell you nothing. But to me N'ging, and to the emissaries of N'ging, they will say: 'It is a profitable trade, the trade of the black smoke which pays no *lekin* duty——'

"And all that black smoke which my

caravans smuggle across your frontiers into Yunnan and Kwangsi and Kwangtung, is grown.

"Cook the black smoke again, Frenchman. But for that, and the poison in my veins I would cheat you yet—you who thieve my secret. It is grown between the Mekong and the Song-Ka, in the Thäis country. You Frenchmen think you have explored those twelve cantons, the Muong Sip song chau thäis. Fools that you are, with your surveys that teach you nothing and your native guides who lead you astray among the forests and the mountains.

"There is a thirteenth canton, De Gys, and the name of that canton is 'yellow-island country;' Harinesia! A strange country, Frenchman, and one to which no whites—save only I, and Lucien whom I killed, the girl Mélie—have yet penetrated, for They of the Bow guard its frontier, and They of the Bow are not to be bought with money. But Kun-mer is to be bought and Pa-sif and the woman Su-rah——

"Why should I tell you any more. The pain is dead, and I am afraid no longer. The pain—no, no, no! For the love of God, don't break the pipe!—I will tell you everything.

"Southward from Mount Theng, seventeen days' journey, between Hua Pahn and the Ha Tang Hoc—Si-tuk my dwarf will show you the way to the Gates. And at the third arrow, you go forward alone. If Akiou be on guard, greet him from N'ging. Kun-mer or Pa-sif will sell you the opium, trading in the name of the people—and taking the profits for themselves. Bribe the woman Su-rah with a necklace of pearls. But if she falls amorous of you, beware! The yellow hell cat! Had it not been for her, I would have made me a trade ten thousand times more profitable than the black smoke.

"Give me another pipe and listen carefully. There is trouble in Harinesia. Ever since Mélie and Lucien came to Bu-ro, finding their way through the country of Pittising the Cat—past the temple of Ko-nan—there has been faction in the land. For Kun-mer and his party say the Flower Folk have grown weak, urging that They of the Bow should be sent against them. And in this Kun-mer has the support of the people. But Pa-sif and the woman Su-rah are for peace. That was why they gave Lucien and the girl Mélie into my keeping.

"Su-rah was a fool to be jealous of Mélie. I did not want the girl for my mistress. I did not kill Lucien for the sake of Mélie; I killed him because—— Bend your ear close to my mouth, I grow weak with the black smoke. I killed him because of the Flower. When Lucien was dead, only I—and the girl Mélie, whom I swore to torture if she but breathed the secret—knew of the Flower, of the little purple seeds which are worth more than all the drugs of the East. I brought her back to Saigon, and I gave her into the keeping of Mother Mathurin. Then I returned to Harinesia.

"But the woman Su-rah was too strong for me. She does not want the white women of the Flower Folk brought captive to Harinesia. She fears lest the beauty of the white women prevail against her own beauty. And Pa-sif is on her side. I gave Kun-mer ten thousand piastres, ten thousand piastres in stamped sycee silver, but even that did not tempt him. He did not dare send Them of the Bow to Quivering Stone.

"Curse all women! Curse the métisse Mathurin who betrayed me to a Frenchman! Curse the poisoning hell cat Su-rah! Curse Mélie and the women of the Flower Folk! Why was I faithless to the yellow man's god? The yellow man's god is money. I swerved aside from the pursuit of money to follow women. Because of that, I die. I should have given only the pearls; when Su-rah fell amorous of me, I should have played the fool. Then, the Flower would have been mine. We would have led Them of the Bow, Akiou and I, past the Temple of Ko-nan, through Pittising's country and beyond Pittising's country; we would have lit our last watch fires at Quivering Stone, and gone down, bows drawn, to speak with the Flower Folk.

"Cook me my last pipe, Frenchman. By the black smoke, I lived: let the black smoke ease my death.

"Take the women, Kun-mer. We have brought them all back for you. There is not one missing; not one single golden-haired white girl have we taken for ourselves. Akiou bears witness by the oath of the drum in the Temple of Ko-nan. And you need fear no blood-feud; their men all died by the bow. But the Flower is mine. I will send men to guard me the Flower. They are only purple beans, excellency; no good for the yellow men. Yes, for the white man

they are good medicine. Will he pay money for them? Perhaps—less than he pays for the black smoke. No, I will not share the profits with you, Kun-mer—the Flower is mine, mine only——"

Negrini's lips ceased their muttering. He lay very still on the rice-straw mattress—a limp figure, dimly seen through the stale smoke clouds.

"Is he dead?" whispered the Long'un.

"No. Only stupefied."

"What did he mean, De Gys? Where is Harimesia? Who are the Flower Folk?"

"The good God knows." For a full minute, the Frenchman stared at his enemy. Then he drew a long clasp knife from his pocket, opened it, tested keen point on stained thumb. "Is he playing a trick on us, think you?" He bent forward, and Dicky heard the slit of silk, heard a faint moan from the thing on the mattress. "No! It is not a trick. He sleeps well. Look?" There was blood on the knife point—a scarlet triangle of wet blood.

"*You* must go," De Gys spoke rapidly. "I will wait here. Get the doctor. Only a doctor can waken him now."

"But you," protested Dicky. "You cannot stay here—alone."

"Give me back my pistol, friend. And for the love of Heaven, don't argue!"

Si-tuk, the dwarf, crouching low behind the soapstone Buddha, caught the quick patter of shoes across the hall, sprang to his feet, saw a long figure leap into the night, heard the sudden beat of a started car, the dwindling throb of its departure.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW CYPRIAN BEAMISH DREAMED.

The doctor had felt very sore at his exclusion from the visit to Mother Mathurin's.

After his friends' departure he sat for a long time brooding over the fancied slight. The unaccustomed wine had roused a latent strain of cynicism in Beamish's nature, and he surveyed the come-and-go of the Rue Catinat with anything but a socialistic eye.

"Ants!" thought the doctor. "Ants! They have no souls, these people. Only bodies, endlessly and trivially employed. One day God will put his foot on the ant heap." For Beamish was essentially a religious man.

To console himself, he ordered a brandy and soda, drained it at a gulp. The East began to look more alluring. He took his soft hat, lit a cigarette, and went for a stroll. Strolling, resentment vanished; a whiff of romance blew away cynicism. There must be a thousand adventures in this Saigon. Adventure lurked in the provocative eyes of the half castes, in the sinuous forms of the Annamites, in the certain unhurried gait of the Frenchwomen. Adventure hung, a heady perfume of bruised flowers, in the tepid air. Adventure called, faintest music of reed pipes, from cloistered balconies, from bungalows half hidden in shadowy foliage. And Cyprian Beamish, rather shocked at his own imaginings, returned adventureless to the Hotel Continental.

Lo-pin, having carefully drawn the mosquito curtains, was just hanging clean pajamas over a chair back when his master came up to bed. Beamish submitted to the removal of his shoes, took off coat and collar, dismissed the boy, clicked on the table lamp, and sat down to read. Purposely he chose a well-thumbed margin-marked copy of Prince Kropotkin's "Farm, Field, and Village." After its recent excitement, the doctor's brain needed a soporific; and so far, the prince's statistics had always exercised that effect on it.

Within ten minutes the charm worked. Brain, half convinced and half muddled with misleading calculations, slid from drowse to unconsciousness. Spatulate fingers dropped their burden, dull eyes closed, gray-fringed ascetic head leaned backward, and the subconscious mind of Cyprian Beamish assumed its perfect freedom.

Dream, mirroring nature, took the initial shape of a woman—of a golden-haired, violet-eyed girl whom the subconscious mind had no difficulty in recognizing. She was Mélie, Mélie as Beamish best remembered her, lying prone on the great white bedstead in Singapore. But, in the dream, Mélie still lived; one pale hand reached upward from the bed, proffering the purple beans of happiness.

"Take them and eat," said Mélie, "and when you have eaten your fill, give them to the world. The world shall honor you for the gift. You shall be a second Lister, a new Ehrlich."

Beamish took the beans from her pale fingers and ate of them—not one but many, as many as his soul desired.

Followed vaguer shapes: a giant, huge of hand and red of beard, with whom the mind sped unafraid through vast tiger-haunted jungles; another giant, fair and laughing—but him the mind struck with clenched fist, so that he laughed no longer; sinuous shapes of women, heady-perfumed, eluding caresses; a shadowy altar where thousands of black-cowled monks knelt in penitence.

At last elusive visions gave way to the illusion of waking. The mind, convicted of dreaming, found refuge in statistics. It took three acres of unirrigated land to pasture one cow, but one irrigated acre could pasture three cows; and a man, working three hours a day, could produce enough food to keep himself for one year. Also—this is the mind proved by reference to a Russian who was thumbing an enormous book marked "Communism"—a grain of wheat properly pedigreed sprouted to an ear containing two hundred and sixty-four grains, and a market garden of two and one-seventh acres worked by thirty men and manured every three months with thirty tons of fertilizer produced enough fruit and vegetables to feed three hundred and thirty-three families for three hundred and sixty-four days. Therefore, nobody need work more than three hours for three days of three weeks every three months.

The subconscious mind of Cyprian Beamish was delighted with the truth of this solution.

Ensued an æon of breathless waiting, during which Mélie—lying white and rounded on a purple cloud—discoursed faintest music from a pipe of reeds. Then, suddenly——

"Beamish! Beamish! *Beamish!* For the Lord's sake wake up and get a move on. You're wanted, Beamish. Damn the man, he sleeps like a hog!"

The doctor's mind, jerked from dreaming, became conscious of the Long'un. His electric reading lamp still burned, but a pallid light as of dawn filtered eerily into the curtained room. The Long'un looked very tired; his blue eyes had sunk into their sockets; his silk suit was crumpled and stained with perspiration; also, he smelled, smelled vilely of stale drugs. But what most struck Beamish's newly awakened eyes was the fact that the Long'un carried, one in either hand, a brace of long-barreled, short-chambered, blue-black revolvers.

"What the devil——" began Cyprian Beamish.

"Get your clothes on and don't argue. Is there any antidote for opium poisoning? Atropine and apomorphine, did you say? Got any? Good! Hurry up with those shoes. Here's your collar and tie. Where's your medicine case? In the trunk? All right, I'll get it."

Still half asleep, the doctor found himself hustled out of his room, down the stairs, through the hall and into a waiting motor.

"Cholon," commanded Dicky. The Annamite began to protest. But he decided not to argue the matter further.

Dawn, the sudden dawn of the tropics, was just breaking as they roared down the silence of the Rue Catinat, swung right-handed for Cholon, made open country. The tufted palm trees, black and motionless against white sky, cast no shadows across the red-sanded road. Beamish, sleepily a-cold, buttoned his silk jacket across his chest, felt the drag of pistol at his pocket.

"What on earth's happened, Long'un?"

Hurriedly, Dicky explained: "We've found the bloke who killed Lucien. De Gys is with him now. He's an Italian—at least, he used to be an Italian—he's turned chink in his old age."

"But the drug," interrupted Beamish, abruptly awake. "What about the drug?"

"Apparently, it's called 'the Flower,' and it grows in a place called Harinesia. I couldn't make out half what the man said. He's been poisoned by a woman called Surah; seems to be dying, too. We had to give him opium before we could make him talk. The damned stuff stupefied him too soon. That's why I came for you. De Gys is still with him."

The car darted without warning into a perfectly quiet Cholon.

"Can't say I liked leaving De Gys alone in that house. You know how the Italians love the French—and vice versa. This chap—his name's Negrini—seems to have been stirring up the natives here."

They veered abruptly into the Street of the Duck.

"Hope nothing's happened to De Gys. That revolver's loaded. Better have it ready. Hallo, here we are!"

Seen in the dawn light Pu-Yi's mansion looked uninviting enough. The steps of its portico were red with dust, the gutter at foot of them black with slime. But the door still stood open—and for this Dicky's heart gave a throb of thankfulness. He and Bea-

mish sprang from the car, up the steps, and into the hall, before the Annamite had time to stop his engine.

The violet lamp had gone out, and the soapstone eyes of the huge image peered disconsolately across a dirty floor at tawdry silks and tawdrier gildings.

"This way!" called Dicky. He hesitated for a moment before three black-lacquered doors, slid back the center one, and passed through, motioning Beamish to follow.

No ray of dawn light had yet penetrated to the vast windowless smoking room. The high lanterns still glowed, blurred saffron among the blue-gray poppy clouds, and in the far corner, through the fretted chinks of the teak screen, the opium lamp still twinkled. De Gys had not moved; he sat, beard propped on one huge hand, peering down at his enemy. On the floor between them lay the open-bladed knife and the cocked automatic.

"He has not wakened," whispered De Gys. "Have you seen the dwarf?"

"No," from Dicky.

"Guard the door while the doctor's working on him. There's another entrance to the room, somewhere behind those hangings. Look!" The yellow silks on the opposite wall twitched ever so slightly, as though a hand grasped them. "We're being watched." The Frenchman grabbed for his pistol, pointed it at the wall. Twitching ceased.

"Can you do anything, doc?" asked the Long'un, one eye on the door.

"I don't know." Beamish bent over his patient. "Give me my medicine case. How many pipes has he had?"

"We gave him ten." De Gys' pistol still held to its aim. "And he had a good many before that, I expect. Is he alive?"

"Only just." Spatulate fingers, unbuttoning loose-sleeved jacket, discovered a lean, white breast, ribs protruding skeleton-wise, emaciated arms, a shrunken stomach. The heart still beat faintly, almost inaudibly. "What do you want me to do?"

"Make him talk—if it is only for five minutes," said Dicky.

"It'll kill him."

"What loss?" muttered De Gys.

"I daren't do it. It would be criminal."

"Don't be an ass, Beamish. The man's a murderer. He proved it to us out of his own mouth. And, anyway, he's dying."

"It's no good, Long'un. As a medical man——"

"You must. It's our only chance."

"I tell you I daren't do it."

"Then"—clarity of inspiration came to Dicky's tired mind—"it's good-by to all hope of our finding the drug."

"I tell you," began Beamish obstinately—and stopped. The drug! Suddenly, he relived his dream. Room, friends, his patient, vanished. Mélie lay before him—Mélie, white and rounded on a purple cloud. He heard the music of Mélie's reed pipe. "Evolution," whispered the music, "out of death, life—and for you, fame!"

He was bending over his patient; he saw the hypodermic needle glide home through pinched flesh, and watched the glass cylinder empty as his thumb pressed down the plunger.

"I cannot die," said the soul of Tomasso Negrini. "I am immortal. I live on always, lord of myself, lord of creation. That is Genoa below me. How blue the sea curves to her harbor masts; how white the Campo Santo lies—there behind the hill. And the Via Pellegrino, where my body played as a child, still climbs skyward from the great square. I can see the very house where my mother gave birth to me. I am lord of creation. East I fly and west; nothing hinders me. They are celebrating the Bow-Feast in City Bu-ro. There is Su-rah, watching from her yamen window. How the shafts sing. Su-rah is pleased; she gloats at the sight of blood. Indo-China lies like an island below me. I am lord of Indo-China. I have got me the Flower. I have driven the Frenchman from Indo-China. It is lonely to be the lord of creation. I would that I could find my body once again. They are hurting my body. *O mamma mia*, they are hurting your child's body. Look, *mamma mia*, it is no longer your child's body, it is the body of an old man. Look, *mamma mia*, down there through the smoke!"

And the soul of Tomasso Negrini dived downward as the arrow dives, into that abode of pain which was its body.

"Quick!"—it was Beamish speaking—"lift him up. Make him walk somehow. Do you understand me? He must be kept walking."

The Long'un stooped over Negrini's prostrate body, slung an arm round the shoulders, jerked it to its feet.

"What?" panted Negrini. Face and lips were livid, skin deathly cold, perspiration

poured from him, his mouth twitched as though he suffocated. Beamish gripped one of the emaciated arms, rammed hypodermic home, gave another injection.

"Make him walk, Long'un. Don't let him lie down again. Damn it, why isn't the man vomiting? I've given him enough apomorphine to make an elephant sick."

The doctor seized a rag which had been used for cleaning the opium pipe, began flicking it at his patient's cheeks. "Keep him moving." Up and down, grotesquely as a puppet on a string, Beamish flapping madly at its face, the body of Negrini danced in the Long'un's arms; up and down, boots—hanging loose from loose limbs—clip-clopping insensate jazz time on the matting.

A little color came back to the lips; the cold skin warmed; breath drew more regularly.

"What!" he panted again; and then, suddenly, low as the scream of a whipped child. "You are hurting me!"

"What's that?" interrupted De Gys, pistol still pointed at the silk hangings. They were twitching again, twitching violently.

"Don't stop, Long'un. Keep him on the go while I get some more juice," called Beaming, as he stooped to the medicine satchel.

"I am hurt!" screamed the hideous dancing face.

Came an answering scream from behind the hangings, a tearing of silk. Hair dishevelled, eyes mad with fear, breasts bared, the Chinese girl fell forward into the room.

De Gys covered her, but she took no notice of the pistol, only crawled to him, wriggling forward, snakelike, on knees and elbows.

"Do not torture him, great ones. Oh, I pray you do not torture him any more." She lay, breasts crushed against the matting, head low, palms upraised in supplication.

"We are white men; we do not torture." De Gys spoke gruffly. "Your master is ill. The white doctor cures him."

"Ai-yee, ai-yee, ai-yee!" The girl moaned at his feet.

"Be silent, I say!"

Moaning died away to the faintest whine, the whine of a stricken cat.

"It hurts. It hurts. It hurts." Negrini's legs stiffened suddenly, began to support his body. Ruthlessly, the Long'un propelled him forward, forcing him to walk. "It hurts, signor. Leave me alone. Leave me alone. Leave me alone!" They staggered across the room together, staggered back to Beamish.

"Hold up his arm, Long'un." Again the doctor's needle spurted its drug under the pinched flesh. "I ought to have some coffee—strong coffee. Make that girl get some." De Gys translated, and Wu-Hon slipped noiselessly away. "Now, carry on. Whatever you do, don't let him stop walking."

"And if he screams again, put your hand over his mouth," barked De Gys.

"There are three great foreign devils, and they carry guns," gasped Wu-Hon. "One of them has the master by the shoulders, jumping him up and down; another sticks needles into his arm. He of the beard orders to bring coffee."

"Take it to them." Si-tuk, eyes glued to the door crack, spoke in a whisper. "They try to cure him of the poppy poison. Let them cure him of the poppy poison if they can: they will not cure the black bane of Su-rah. To-day, N'ging goes to his ancestors."

"Can you not kill the foreign devils?"

"Assuredly. But first I would know what they want of the master. Listen carefully to their words."

"I cannot understand their words. The master speaks a strange language."

When Wu-Hon came back, bearing steaming pot and four cups on a chased silver tray, her master was lying pillow-supported across three stools. Above him bent the foreign devils. The smallest foreign devil held a great squirt in his hand; he took the coffee from her, poured it into the squirt.

"Turn him over, Long'un," ordered Beamish. "This is the last chance."

De Gys waved the congäi from the room. "Friend Smith, I do not speak the Italian. If he comes to——"

"If he comes to, leave the questioning to me," said the Long'un—and turned his eyes away from the thing Beamish was doing.

Atropine, apomorphine, and the last injection of coffee had done their work. Propped upright against the wall, pale and twitching, Negrini faced his inquisitors.

"What do you wish of me?" Approaching death had sloughed the mask of Ori-

entalism from him; he used the harsh jargon of his native town, mouthed it humbly as a beggar.

"You have told us"—Dicky's lips framed the unaccustomed diphthongs awkwardly—"of the Flower—the Flower. Tell us now of the Flower Folk. Where do they live, these people?"

"*Vicino*, they live." Thought could hardly frame itself into words. "But I told that to the Frenchman, signor. Southward from Mt. Theng, seventeen days' journey, between Hui Pain and the Ha Tang hoc. And from City Bu-ro, five days, through Pittising's country, past the temple of Konan and Quivering Stone."

"Ask him if they are French?" whispered De Gys.

Dicky repeated the question, but the dying man only shook his head. "I do not know, signor. I swear to you I do not know. It was the Flower I wanted—not the people of the Flower. And I gave Kunmer ten thousand piastres, signor; ten thousand piastres in sycee silver. But he would not send Them of the Bow to Quivering Stone."

De Gys bristled as a terrier at a rat hole. "Make him tell us more! Make him tell us—"

"*Laissez faire!*" said the Long'un, and turned to Negrini. "This flower—has it purple seeds?"

"Yes, signor."

"Who gave you this flower—was it Mélie?"

"No, signor. Lucien gave me the Flower."

"You killed Lucien for the Flower."

"Yes, signor."

"Why did you want the Flower? Was it to sell for money?"

"Yes, signor."

"Does Si-tuk, the dwarf, know about the Flower?"

Again the pale face shook in denial.

"But you said that Si-tuk could show us the way to the Gates. What Gates?"

"The Gates of Harinesia." Negrini's smoke-reddened eyes veiled themselves cunningly under scant lashes.

"Signor, I am only a poor man. We are all poor, we Italians. *Povera bestie, signor.*" His mind wandered; he was a child again, a little dirty child begging for money in the streets of Genoa. "*Un soldo, signor.*"

"*Senta*"—the Long'un's eyes held their man—"if you tell us the way to the country of the Flower, you shall be well paid. Ten thousand lire; twenty thousand lire."

"It is worth more." Negrini's failing brain groped back to realities. "It is worth millioni. But I do not ask millioni. What is money to a dying man? Also, it is my secret, mine only. The Tong has no share in the Flower, only in the black smoke."

"Which Tong?" prompted De Gys.

"The Tong of the White Tiger. Bend close, Inglese"—words came fainter—"will you swear an oath, a solemn oath to one who is dying?"

"Yes." The Long'un, eyes still holding their man, nodded assent.

"Then swear that you will send my body home to Italy—to Genoa; that you will have it buried in the Campo Santo. Swear that you will search out my brother, and my little sister; that you will tell them I died honorably. Swear, also, that if they are in need, you will relieve their needs."

"All these things shall be done, Negrini."

"It is good. I will show you the way to the Flower. Tell the Frenchman to summon Si-tuk; but quickly, quickly or death wins."

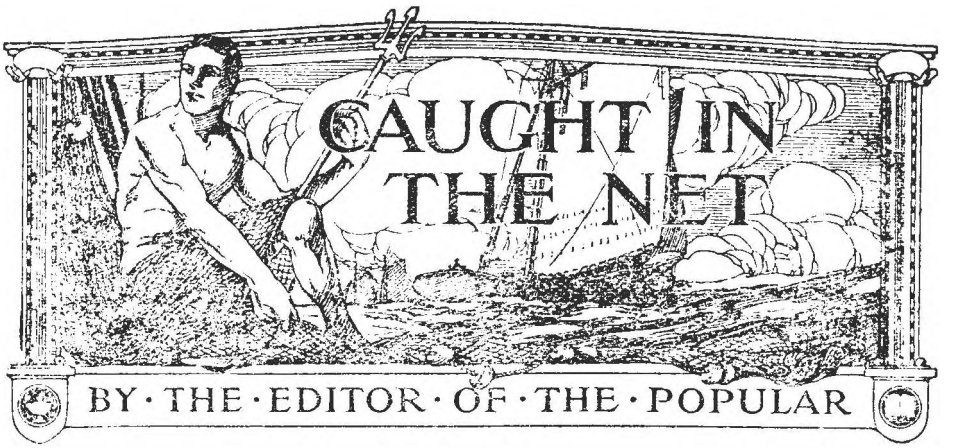
De Gys, understanding by instinct, sprang for the door, wrenched it open. "Si-tuk! Si-tuk! His excellency calls for you."

"I come." The dwarf shuffled across the floor, dropped on his knees before Negrini. Beamish, one hand on his patient's heart, knew the end very close; knew, in his own heart, the first twinge of remorse. "I oughtn't to have done it," thought Beamish, "I oughtn't to have done it."

But in Dicky's heart was no remorse: only fear lest Negrini should even yet trick them. Negrini was speaking in Chinese, giving some order to the hideous creature at his side. The whining syllables maddened Dicky. Twice he heard De Gys interrupt; twice Negrini repeated the same sounds. The Long'un questioned De Gys with his eyes; read, in answer, a puzzled doubtful affirmative. Suddenly, the dwarf raised one yellow paw, as if in token of understanding and obedience. Negrini stopped speaking Chinese.

"I have told him." Words rattled in the shrunken throat. "Told." No more words came, only the gasp and gurgle of death.

TO BE CONTINUED.



FOR EXPERT KNOWLEDGE IN CONGRESS

IN England there is being agitated a question which may well be considered by Americans: how to improve lawmaking bodies by electing a membership that will be at the same time proportional and truly representative. The original suggestion comes from Monsieur Ostrogorsky, a Slavic publicist, and is the result of fifteen years' study of the parliamentary systems of Europe. An English publicist, M. E. Robinson, indorses the idea because he thinks that "now, even more than in bygone days, parliamentary life is a low game of manipulations and evasions," and that something certainly should be done to improve it.

Monsieur Ostrogorsky's plan is, briefly, this: District representation would be fair enough if human beings were the same everywhere throughout the country, and if all belonged to the same class, or were all engaged in the same trade or business or profession. But in what part of the world is this the case? He proposes to supplement district representation by proportional representation based on collective opinions on any important subject that may arise. For instance, if as many as thirty thousand, or fifty thousand, or more, citizens anywhere in the country agree that any given problem which does not concern purely trade or professional gains and losses is a matter of national importance, they should be allowed a representative in the national lawmaking body to find a solution for it.

This might result in a parliament of experts, which would be much better than a parliament of mere politicians. Men of culture, widely traveled in foreign countries, if elected to solve problems of international relations, would know immensely more about the subject than backwoods Solons who had never been even to the national capital until their election. Advocates of temperance should have the right to elect representatives in proportion to their number, as the drink traffic affects all districts and classes—but so should the brewers and distillers and those who use their products, for all citizens in a democracy ought to be equal in law-making privileges.

The war gave rise to a universal demand for the knowledge to the lack of which the sins and miseries of life are largely due. The British and American governments were both handicapped by being represented in far corners of the world, suddenly become important in a diplomatic sense, by men ill equipped with knowledge of the problems they were to solve. In Finland, for instance, the British commissioner knew neither the Finnish nor the Russian languages, but the German representative knew both. Such incompetent appointees were the result of political systems which did not put a premium on special knowledge. In a congress of experts each member, with his supporters, would have the same sort of confidence in the decisions of the other members that a geologist has in a botanist's account of a plant, or a guild of sculptors in the judgment pronounced by a music fellowship on a symphony.

FOOD

IT is the happily established regularity of our meals that conceals from us their significance. Of all aids to life, food is the most fundamental. "An army travels on its stomach," was a Napoleonic dictum. Food won the World War. The economic blockade hastened Germany's peace plea. Her civilians were starving, and her soldiers at the last were not so well fed as the Allies'. Ludendorff in his book recently published says the advance of his troops in the last big offensive was slowed up at a critical point because the men stopped to eat some of the food they had captured.

A person nourished by digestible food is a long way toward being confident and energetic. The study of food as it molds human beings is a science that may in future well claim a chair in every university. Why certain nations or races have succeeded in war, in science, in the arts, and why others have failed may be better understood when their menus have been considered scientifically. "Tell me what you eat and I'll tell you what you are," is more than a joke, although in vaudeville it has been made preliminary to a laugh producer. On the stage the answer of the knockabout comedian thus interrogated was as follows: "Well, for dinner I had some filet mignon, a little *pâté de foie gras*, French-fried potatoes, a pint of champagne; some Nesselrode pudding, romaine salad, Roquefort cheese, demi-tasse, and few other things. Now tell me what I am," and the reply immediately was: "You're a liar."

In literature some of the most memorable meals have been simple. Shakespeare described only one complete dinner, which was eaten by *Falstaff*. Rabelais tells us of many fine feasts, and the gustatory delights told of by Dickens are numerous. We don't know what Shakespeare or Rabelais themselves ate, but from a letter of Dickens to a relative, while he was touring the United States in 1868, we learn that he said: "I rarely take any breakfast but an egg and a cup of tea—not even toast or bread and butter. My small dinner at three, and a little quail or some such light thing when I come home at night, is my daily fare. At the hall I usually take an egg beaten up in sherry before going in, and another between the parts, which I think pulls me up."

Thackeray said that when he was a boy he had by heart the Barmecide's feast in the "Arabian Nights." The culinary passages in Scott's novels were his favorites. "Next to eating good dinners," he thought, "a healthy man with a benevolent turn of mind must like to read about them." Disraeli described many a patrician repast. He said that a visit to a country house was "a series of meals, mitigated by the new dresses of the ladies." American literature is not yet epicurean enough to be famous for descriptions of eating. There is not, even in Holmes' "Autocrat of the Breakfast Table," a mention of what the *Autocrat*, the *Professor*, and the *Poet* ate except that on one occasion they had huckleberries and pie along with their breakfast. The food served at their table was largely mental.

CUBA

IT looks as if Cuba were to become one of the favored spots of earth. In less than twenty years, since the United States intervened in her behalf, she has grown in grace and wealth. With a population only half of that of the State of New York, her wealth per capita exceeds that of any other nation to-day. The sugar crop alone guarantees prosperity to the island, while the production of tobacco, citrus fruits, and vegetables is multiplying with every season. Coffee, too, may develop into an important industry.

But with the world-wide demand for sugar, and with the resources of her soil in this respect, Cuba offers untold riches to enterprising planters. Sugar cane is grown there with far less trouble than in our own South for the reason that when a first planting has been made, harvests may be gathered for seven years or more without fresh planting, new shoots growing out of the old stubble. The opportunities in the business are evident from the fact that of Cuba's forty-seven thousand square miles of area only slightly more than four per cent of it is under sugar cultivation. And it has been estimated that the crop this year will, if favorable conditions prevail, be about 4,250,000 tons, which, at present prices, ought to bring a return of $650,000,000.

The tobacco crop, unlike that of the sugar cane, must be heavily fertilized, and it requires the additional expense of cheesecloth protection against weather uncertainties. But it is a lucrative investment to the average grower. In the last years of the eighteenth century some of the finest coffee plantations in the world were cultivated in the mountains of Oriente Province, but the rise of sugar profits caused them to be abandoned; however, it is thought that coffee will again rank as a leading Cuban product before another generation has passed. Truck gardening has developed to an amazing degree on the island, and more vegetables than we are aware of come to our tables from that quarter.

Commerce between the United States and Cuba has been increasing by leaps and bounds during the past five years, and the Cubans have the kindliest of feelings toward their erstwhile foster mother. They are a most polite people, and do not want to hurt in the least the sensibilities of their friends, but they would like to see our manufacturers display greater discrimination in sending to them well-posted salesmen—men who know at least their Spanish tongue. This is a vital commercial factor mostly unheeded.

Returning to crops a moment, it is whispered that Cuba is to raise a bumper crop of pleasure seekers, that it is to become the Monte Carlo of the Western Hemisphere, where all gamblers may rejoice and the worshipers of Bacchus liquidate. Adapting the old rhyme:

Sugar and spice,
And everything nice
That's what Cuba's made of!

CAN OUR CLIMATE BE CHANGED?

RECENTLY reports of suggestions came from various sources in Newfoundland as to the possibility of lessening the cold in winter there by constructing a breakwater across the straits of Belle Isle, between the island and the mainland. It was held that the breakwater would divert far to the south the cold Labrador current flowing through the straits and also, incidentally, mitigate the cold in large seacoast districts of Canada and New England. This looked pleasant to many, but when the enormous cost of such a plan, if practicable, was thought of, all talk of it died away. Perhaps the plan will be again considered, more seriously, at some future time and carried out.

Many years ago, on account of the sudden cold waves in winter from the polar regions across a great part of the United States, which more than once at the end of a belated winter destroyed the promise of a normal growth of oranges, when a fork of the wave crossed Florida, a plan for changing our winter climate was timidly suggested by some one as a remote possibility. This was no less than to excavate, a certain distance south of the arctic circle, a depression many miles wide, across the continent, from the Atlantic to the Pacific. It was held that the cold of the polar winds in passing over the body of water to be thus formed, would be mitigated, as they are before they reach the countries on the western part of Europe, through passing over the Arctic Ocean. It is not on record that this project was ever seriously considered.

In France, Spain, and other European countries west of Russia, where the cold of the polar winds is somewhat tempered in crossing the Arctic Ocean, the cross currents of air caused by the indentations and promontories along the coast facing the Arctic often mitigate their violence. In Russia, where less of this intervening ocean tempers the polar winds, cold waves sweep across the country as they do here. In Great Britain and Ireland, which are within the same parallels as Labrador, the influence of the Arctic Ocean is also felt, besides which the northern half of the Gulf Stream, which splits after it passes the Banks of Newfoundland, reaches British waters and further modifies the climate.

The idea of bringing a big body of water across North America by the means talked of seems impossible and even ridiculous to most people, not to speak of the enormous sum of money that would have to be raised to meet the expenses. In view, however, of the many great projects which were deemed impossible, yet, nevertheless, were carried out in the past, the question what is impossible, in reference to such projects, is sometimes a difficult one to answer.

WHY "SPEED UP THE EAST?"

AN observer who has lived long in the East has recently said that it is well enough to cultivate trade relations with the people thereof, but that Occidentals should hesitate about teaching them too many Western ways. It would be better, he thinks, for China not to have railways and navies and airships than to have China awake to the possibilities of material and mechanical development in the way that Germany did.

The Oriental at present has only contempt for the speed at which Western people live. He is willing to admit that we do things more quickly than he does, but he will not admit that we do them better. Why hurry? One wears oneself out that way, and is less happy. The cultured Oriental has never conceded the superiority of Western civilization. What cultured men of the East have come to spend their days in Europe or America, as Lafcadio Hearn took up his permanent residence in Japan, and as Pierre Loti would prefer to do in some part of the East; and as not a few lesser-known Europeans have done?

In material progress the West has left the East far behind, but if the East should be thoroughly instructed in mechanic arts the East, and not the West, would dominate the world, if the East so desired. We have only to consider history since the beginning of the Christian era to realize what the East can do when conditions are equal. In the fourth century the Huns under Attila overran Europe and helped extinguish the Roman Empire, Mohammedans later conquered southeastern Europe, and part of Spain, and threatened France, and Genghis Khan in the thirteenth was master of most of Asia, and extended his sway westward almost up to where Berlin now is.

In the present century one European country—Russia—has already been conquered by an Oriental power that learned the art of war from Europeans—Japan. The Japanese are now provided with airplanes and submarines and all the other appliances of modern warfare. Among the aviators on the western front in the World War were Siamese, and behind the lines were many Chinese workers, and among the troops were thousands of men from India. In the Holy Land the Arabians fought alongside the British. Thus the East is already well informed, and partly drilled, in all the methods of up-to-date war-making. Suppose that the cry of "Asia for the Asiatics," heard in recent years, should be revived on a great scale, and the feeling of solidarity against the West should intensify, and a new Genghis Khan or Tamerlane should arise to lead unnumbered millions to conquest? It is well worth thinking about.

POPULAR TOPICS

DESPITE its many bedevilments, America is to-day the most favored country in the world. Many aliens who some months ago left our shores for their home lands, are returning. They have learned to appreciate the United States by contrasting it with Europe and Asia. Nothing could serve better as a cure to our malcontents than to sentence them for a stay in Russia, Austria, Germany, Poland, or Turkey.

WHEN England's railroad strike was settled it was noticed that the wages were agreed upon according to a "commodity index number." Inasmuch as this term may be used frequently in the future—for it is a modern idea—we think it timely to explain it. Therefore, the commodity index number is a device for keeping record of the variations in price of commodities as a whole, by establishing a certain average figure based on the prices of commodities in common use. Fluctuation in a commodity price affects the index number, thus affording a good record of one of the main factors affecting changing living costs.

IT has been estimated that we have ten million readers of foreign publications—or, rather, of publications printed in foreign languages—in this nation. There are two hundred and twenty-two radical newspapers published in foreign languages here at the present time. In addition one hundred and forty-four radical newspapers published in foreign countries are received and distributed to subscribers in our midst. Besides, we have one hundred and five radical newspapers published in English. Quite a formidable array. It may be of interest to know the number of these radical in their respective tongues: Armenian, 1; Bohemian, 2: Bulgarian, 3; Croatian, 4; Danish, 4; Esthonian, 1; Finnish, 11; French, 1; German, 21; Greek, 2; Hungarian, 23; Italian, 27; Jewish, 20; Lettish, 11; Portuguese, 1; Roumanian, 16; Slovenian, 8; Spanish, 8; Lithuanian, 16; Polish, 7; Swedish, 6; Ukrainian, 8; Yiddish, 15.

SUGAR has become a subject for constant conjecture and debate. Will we have enough of it to-morrow, next week, next year? Experts have made their 1919-1920 world sugar crop estimate, and they put it at 16,600,000 tons as against 16,320,654 tons in 1918-1919. It sounds as if we might have sufficient, providing prohibition appetites do not consume too many raspberry high balls and peach cocktails. The aforesaid experts say further that in view of the increased demand for sugar caused by prohibition, it would not astonish them if the world production of sugar had to be raised to 20,000,000 tons a year.

BECAUSE of sugar shortages many people are turning to the use of saccharin. The department of agriculture condemns the use of this substitute in food. So strong does the department feel about it that it will bring prosecution against any concern labeling saccharin as "harmless." Many of our States prohibit the use of saccharin in food.

CIGARS consumed during the fiscal year ending June last fell off 673,422,580, while cigarettes increased by 1,144,406,780. The decrease in the cigars, however, was entirely in the low-priced variety. Smoking tobacco and the chewing weed and snuff also showed a falling off.

THOUGH Congress killed the appropriation for military aviation, it does not signify that the flying game is dead. For example, the United States aërial post is carrying at the rate of 20,000,000 letters a year, and doing so at a saving of $174,000 annually over train service. Indeed, the flying mail has proved so economical that the former rate of six cents per ounce has been reduced to the regular charge.

WE have seen horseless carriages, steam-engineless trains, so why not wingless airplanes? At least, the French government has acquired patent rights to and advanced the sum of forty thousand dollars for experiments on a new model airplane without wings.

PEOPLE still argue the relative cost of an automobile in its upkeep with that of a horse. We came across a new angle of the question the other day. One man said the well-known words about a car not eating when it is in the shed. "Yes," said the other, "and a horse doesn't eat when he is working."

ALL of the leading countries and some of the minor ones are laying plans for railroad building. Many thousands of miles of tracks are needed. And it has been calculated that about $6,000,000,000 of new capital must be invested here within the next three years on our railways. Even to make up present deficiency, 800,000 freight cars, 20,000 locomotives, and 10,000 passenger cars are needed.

The Tower of Treason

By Gilbert K. Chesterton

Author of "The Man Who Was Thursday," "The Flying Inn," Etc.

This great English writer makes his bow to our readers with a mystery story that is notable for its original plot as well as for its atmosphere and literary charm

AT a certain moment, just before sunset, a young man was walking in a rather extraordinary fashion across a wild country bearded with gray and wintry forests. In the solitude of that silent and wooded wilderness, he was walking backward. There was nobody to notice the eccentricity; it could not arrest the rush of the eagles over those endless forests where Hungarian frontiers fade into the Balkans; it could not be expected to arouse criticism in the squirrel or the hare. Even the peasants of those parts might possibly have been content to explain it as the vow of a pilgrim, or some other wild religious exercise; for it was a land of wild religious exercises. Only a little way in front of him—or, rather, at that instant, behind him—the goal of his journey and many previous journeys, was a strange half-military monastery, like some old chapel of the Templars, where vigilant ascetics watched night and day over a hoard of sacred jewels, guarded at once like the crown of a king and the relic of a saint. Barely a league beyond, where the hills began to lift themselves clear of the forest, was a yet more solitary outpost of such devotional seclusion; a hermitage which held captive a man once famous through half Europe, a dazzling diplomatist and ambitious statesman; now solitary and only rarely visited by the religious, for whom he was supposed to have more invisible jewels of a new wisdom. All that land, that seemed so silent and empty, was alive with such miracles.

Nevertheless, the young man was not performing a religious vow, or going on a religious pilgrimage. He had himself known personally the renowned recluse of the hermitage on the hill, when they were both equally in the world and worldly; but he had not the faintest intention of following his holy example. He was himself a guest at the monastery that was the consecrated casket of the strange jewels; but his errand was purely political, and not in the least consecrated. He was a diplomatist by profession; but it must not be lightly inferred that he was walking backward out of excessive deference to the etiquette of courts.

He was an Englishman by nationality, but he was not, with somewhat distant reverence, still walking backward before the King of England. Nor was he paying so polite a duty to any other king, though he might himself have said that he was paying it to a queen. In short, the explanation of his antic, as of not a few antics, was that he was in love—a condition common in romances and not unknown in real life. He was looking backward at the house he had just left, in an abstracted or distracted fashion, half hoping to see a last signal from it, or merely to catch a last glimpse of it among the trees. And his look was the more longing and lingering, on this particular evening, for an atmospheric reason he would have found it hard to explain; a sense of pathos and distance and division hardly explained by his practical difficulties. As the sunset clouds were heavy with a purple which typifies the rich tragedy of Lent, so on this evening passion seemed to weigh on him with something of the power of doom. And a pagan of the mystical sort would certainly have called what happened next an omen, though a practical man of the modern sort might rather have hinted that it was the highly calculable effect of walking backward and being a fool. A noise of distant firing was heard in the forest; and the slight start he gave, combined with a loop of grass that caught his foot, threw him sprawling all his length; as if that distant shot had brought him down.

But the omens were not all ended, nor could they all be counted pagan. For as he

gazed upward for an instant, from the place where he had fallen, he saw above the black forest and against the vivid violet clouds, something strangely suitable to that tragic purple recalling the traditions of Lent. It was a great face between outstretched gigantic arms; the face upon a large wooden crucifix. The figure was carved in the round but very much in the rough; in a rude archaic style; and was probably an old outpost of Latin Christianity in that labyrinth of religious frontiers. He must have seen it before, for it stood on a little hill in a clearing of the woods, just opposite the one straight path leading to the sanctuary of the jewels; the tower of which could already be seen rising out of the sea of leaves. But somehow the size of the head above the trees, seen suddenly from below after the shock of the fall, had the look of a judgment in the sky. It seemed a strange fate to have fallen at the foot of it.

The young man, whose name was Bertram Drake, came from Cambridge and was heir to all the comforts and conventions of skepticism, further enlivened by a certain impatience in his own intellectual temper, which made him more mutinous than was good for his professional career: an active, restless man with a dark but open and audacious face. But for an instant something had stirred in him which is Christendom buried in Europe, something which is a memory even where it is a myth. Rising, he turned a troubled gaze to the great circle of dark-gray forests, out of which rose in the distance the lonely tower of his destination; and even as he did so he saw something else. A few feet from where he had just fallen and risen again to his feet, lay another fallen figure. And the figure did not rise.

He strode across, bent down over the body and touched it, and was soon grimly satisfied about why it was lying still. Nor was it without a further shock, for he even realized that he had seen the man before, though in a sufficiently casual and commonplace fashion: as a rustic bringing timber to the house he had just left. He recognized the spectacles on the square and stolid face; they were horn spectacles of the plainest pattern, yet they did not somehow suit his figure, which was clothed loosely like an ordinary peasant. And in the tragedy of the moment they were almost grotesque. The very fixity of the spectacles on the face was one of those details of daily habit that suddenly make death incredible. He had looked down at him for several seconds, before he became conscious that the deathly silence around was in truth a living silence; he was not alone.

A yard or two away an armed man was standing like a statue. He was a stalwart but rather stooping figure, with a long antiquated musket slung aslant on his shoulders, and in his hand a drawn saber shone like a silver crescent. For the rest, he was a long-coated, long-bearded figure with a faint suggestion, to be felt in some figures from Russia and Eastern Europe generally, that the coats were like skirts and that the big beard had some of the terrors of a hairy mask; a faint touch of the true East. Thus accoutered, it had the look of a rude uniform, but the Englishman knew it was not that of the small Slav state in which he stood; which may be called, for the purpose of this tale, the kingdom of Transylvania. But when Drake addressed him in the language of that country, with which he himself was already fairly familiar, it was clear enough that the stranger understood. And there was a final touch of something strange in the fact that the brown eyes of this bearded and barbaric figure seemed not only sad but even soft, as with a sort of mystification of their own.

"Have you murdered this man?" asked the Englishman sternly. The other shook his head, and then answered an incredulous stare by the simple but sufficient gesture of holding out his bare saber, immediately under the inquirer's eyes. It was an unanswerable fact that the blade was quite clean and without a spot of blood. "But you were going to murder him," said Drake. "Why did you draw your sword?"

"I was going to——" and with that the stranger stopped in his speech, hesitated, and then suddenly slapping his saber back into the sheath, dived into the bushes and disappeared before Drake could make a movement in pursuit of him.

The echoes of the original volley that had waked the woods had not long died away on the distant heights beyond the tower, and Drake could now only suppose that the shot thus fired had been the real cause of death. He was convinced, for many causes, that the shot had come from the tower, and he had other reasons for rapidly repairing thither, besides the necessity of giving the fatal news to the nearest human habitation.

He hurried along the very straight and strictly embanked road that was like a bridge between the tower and the little hill in front of the crucifix; and soon came under the shadow of the strange monastic building, now enormous in scale though still simple in outline. For though it was as wide in its circle as a great camp, and even bore on its flat top a sort of roof garden large enough to allow a little exercise to its permanent guards and captives, it rose sheer from the ground in a single round and windowless wall; so high that it stood up in the landscape almost like a pillar rather than a tower. The straight road to it ended in one narrow bridge across a deep but dry moat, outside which ran a ring of thorny hedges, but inside which rose great grisly iron spikes; giant thorns such as are made by man. The completeness of its inclosure and isolation was part of an ancient national policy for the protection of an ancient national prize. For the building, and the men in it, were devoted to the defense of the treasure known as the Coat of the Hundred Stones, though there were now rather less than that number to be defended. According to the legend, the great King Hector, the almost prehistoric hero of those hills, had a corslet or breastplate which was a cluster of countless small diamonds, as a substitute for chain mail; and in old dim pictures and tapestries he was always shown riding into battle as if in a vesture of stars. The legend had ramifications in neighboring and rival realms; and, therefore, the possession of this relic was a point of national and international importance in that land of legends. The legend may have been false, but the little, loose jewels, or what were left of them, were real enough.

Drake stood looking at that somber stronghold in an equally somber spirit. It was the end of winter, and the gray woods were already just faintly empurpled with that suppressed and nameless bloom which is a foreshadowing rather than a beginning of the spring; but his own mood at the moment, though romantic, was also tragic. The string of strange events he had left in his track, if they had not arrested him as omens, must still have arrested him as enigmas. The man killed for no reason, the sword drawn for no reason, the speech broken short also for no reason, all these incidents affected him like the images in a warning dream. He felt that a cloud was on his destiny. Nor was he wrong, so far at least as that evening's journey carried him. For when he reëntered that militant monastery, of which he was the guest, a new catastrophe befell him. And when next day he again retraced his steps, on the woodland path along which he had been looking when he fell, and when he came again to the house toward which he had looked so longingly, he found its door shut against him.

On the day following he was striding desperately along a new path, winding upward through the woods to the hills beyond, with his back both to the house and the tower. For something, as has been hinted, had befallen him in the last few days which was not only a tragedy but a riddle; and it was only when he reviewed the whole in the light, or darkness, of his last disaster, that he remembered that he had one old friend in that land, and one who was a reader of such riddles. He was making his way to the hermitage that was the home, some might almost say the grave, of a great man now known only as Father Stephen, though his real name had once been scrawled on the historic treaties and sprawled in the newspaper headlines of many nations. There is no space here to tell all the activities of his once famous acumen. In the world of what has come to be called secret diplomacy, he was something more than a secret diplomatist. He was one from whom no diplomacy could be kept secret. Something of his later mysticism, an appreciation of moods and of the subconscious mind, had even then helped him; he not only saw small things, but he saw them as large things, and largely. It was he who had anticipated the suicide of a cosmopolitan millionaire, judging from an atmosphere, and the fact that he did not wind up his watch. It was he also who had frustrated a great German conspiracy in America, detecting the Teutonic spy by his unembarrassed posture in a chair when a Boston lady was handing him tea. Now, at long and rare intervals, he would become conscious of such external problems; and, in cases of great injustice, use the same powers to track a lost sheep, or recover the little hoard stolen from the stocking of a peasant.

A long terrace of low cliffs or rocks, hollowed here and there, ran along the top of a desolate slope that swept down and vanished amid the highest horns and crests of the winter trees. Where this wall faced the

rising of the sun, the stone shone pale like marble; and in one place especially had the squared look of a human building, pierced by an unquestionably human entrance. In the white wall was a black doorway, hollow and almost horrible like a ghost, for it was shaped in the rude outline of a man, with head and shoulders, like a mummy case. There was no other mark about this coffin-like cavity, except, just beside it, a flat colored icon of the Holy Family, drawn in that extreme decorative style of Eastern Christianity, which make a gayly painted diagram rather than a picture. But its gold and scarlet and green and sky blue glittered on the rock by the black hole, like some fabled butterfly from the mouth of the grave. But Bertram Drake strode to the gate of that grave and called aloud, as if upon the name of the dead. To put the truth in a paradox, he had expected the resurrection to surprise him, and yet he was surprised unexpectedly. When he had last met his famous friend, in evening dress in the stalls of a great theater in Vienna, he had found that friend pale and prematurely old and his wit dreary and cynical. He even vaguely remembered the matter of their momentary conversation, some disenchanted criticism about the drop-scene or curtain, in which the great diplomatist had seemed a shade more interested than in the play. But when the same man came out of that black hole in the bleak mountains, he seemed to have recovered an almost unnatural youth and even childhood. The colors had come back into his strong face, and his eyes shone as he came out of the shadow, almost as an animal's will shine in the dark. The tonsure had left him a ring of chestnut hair, and his tall, bony figure seemed less loose and more erect than of old. All this might be very rationally explained by the strong air and simple life of the hills; but his visitor, pursued and tormented by fancies, felt for the moment as if the man had a secret sun or fountain of life in that black chamber, or drew nourishment from the roots of the mountains.

He commented on the change, in the first few greetings that passed between them; and the hermit seemed willing, though hardly able, to describe the nature of his acceptance of his strange estate.

"This is the last I shall see of this earth," he said quietly, "and I am more than contented in letting it pass. Yet I do not value it less, but rather I think more, as it simplifies itself to a single hold on life. What I know, with assurance, is that it is well for me to remain here and to stray nowhere else."

After a silence he added, gazing with his burning blue eyes across the wooded valley: "Do you remember when we last met, at that theater, and I told you that I always liked the picture on the curtain as much as the scenes of the play. It was some village landscape, I remember, with a bridge, and I felt perversely that I should like to lean on the bridge or look into the little houses. And then I remembered that from almost any other angle I should see it was only a thin painted rag. That is how I feel about this world, as I see it from this mountain. Not that it is not beautiful, for, after all, a curtain can be beautiful. Not even that it is unreal, for, after all, a curtain is real. But only that it is thin, and that the things behind it are the real drama. And I feel that when I shift my place, it will be the end. I shall hear the three thuds of the mallet in the French theaters, and the curtain will rise. I shall be dead."

The Englishman made an effort to shake off the clouds of mystery that had always been so uncongenial to him. "Frankly," he said, "I can't profess to understand how a man of your intellect can brood in that superstitious way. You look healthy enough, but your mind is surely the more morbid for it. Do you really mean to tell me it would be a sin to leave this rat hole?"

"No," answered the other, "I do not say it would be sin. I only say it would be death. It might conceivably be my duty to go down into the world again; in that case it would be my duty to die. It would have been my duty at any time when I was a soldier, but I never should have done it so cheerfully. Now, if ever I see my signal in the distance, I shall rise and leave this cavern, and leave this world."

"How can you possibly tell?" cried Drake in his impatient way. "Living alone in this wilderness you think you know everything, like a lunatic. Does nobody ever come to see you?"

"Oh, yes," replied Father Stephen, with a smile, "the people from round here sometimes come up and ask me questions—they seem to have a notion that I can help them out of their difficulties."

The dark vivacity of Drake's face took a

shade of something like shame, as he laughed uneasily and answered:

"And I ought to apologize for what I said just now about the lunatic. For I've come up here on the same errand myself. The truth is, I have a notion that you can help me out of *my* difficulties."

"I will do my best," replied Father Stephen. "I am afraid they have troubled you a good deal, by the look of you."

They sat down side by side on a flat rock near the edge of the slope, and Bertram Drake began to tell the whole of his story, or all of it that he needed to tell.

"I needn't tell you," he began, "why I am in this country, or why I have been so long a guest in that place where they keep the Coat of the Hundred Stones. You know better than anybody, for it was you who originally wanted an English representative here to write a report on their preservation, for the old propaganda purpose we know of. You probably also know that the rules of that strange institution put even a friendly, and I may say an honored guest, under very severe restrictions. They are so horribly afraid of any traffic with the outside world that I have had to be practically a prisoner. But the arrangements are stricter even than they were in your visiting days; ever since Paul, the new abbot, came from across the hills. I don't think you've seen him; nobody's seen him outside the monastery; I couldn't describe him, any more than I could describe you. But while you, somehow, still seem to include all kinds of things, like the circle of the world, he seems to be only one thing, like the point that is the pivot of a circle. He is as still as the center of a whirlpool. I mean there seems to be direction and a driving speed in his very immobility, but all pointed and simplified to a single thing—the guarding of the diamonds. He has repaired and made rigid the scheme of defense, till I really do not think that loss or leakage from that treasure would be physically possible. Suffice it to say for the moment that it is kept in a casket of steel in the center of the roof garden, watched by the brethren who sleep only in rotation, and especially by the old abbot himself, who hardly sleeps at all, except for a few hours just before and after sunset. And even then he sleeps sitting beside the casket, with which no man may meddle but himself, and with his hand on his heavy old gun, an antiquated blunderbuss enough, but with which he can shoot very straight for all that. Then sometimes he will wake quite softly and suddenly, and sit looking up that straight road to where the crucifix stands, like an hoary old white eagle. His watch is his world, though in every other way he is mild and benevolent, though he gave orders for the feeding of the poor for miles round, yet if he hears a footstep or faint movement anywhere in the woods round, except on the road that is the recognized approach, he will shoot without mercy as at a wolf. I have reason to know this, as you shall hear.

"Anyhow, as I said, you know that the rules were always strict and now they're stricter than ever. I was only able to enter the place by being hoisted up by a sort of crane or open-air lift, which it takes several of the monks together to work from the top; and I wasn't supposed to leave the place at all. It is possible that you also know, for you read people rapidly like pictures rather than books, that I am a most unfortunate sort of brute to be chained by the leg in that way. My faults are all impatience and irreverence; and you may guess that, in a week or two, I might have felt inclined to burn the place down. But you cannot know the real and special reason that made my slavery intolerable."

"I am sorry," said Father Stephen, and the sincerity of the note again brought Drake's impatience to a standstill with abrupt self-reproach.

"Heaven knows it is I who should be sorry; I have been greatly to blame," he said. "But even if you call what I did a sin, you will see that it had a punishment. In one word, you are speaking to a man to whom no one in this country will speak. A monstrous accusation rests upon me, which I cannot refute, and have only some faint hope that you may refute for me. Hundreds in that valley below us are probably cursing my name, and even crying out for my death. And yet, I think, of all those scores of souls looking at me with suspicion, there is only one from whom I cannot endure it."

"Does he live near here?" inquired the hermit.

"She does," replied the Englishman.

An irony shining in the eyes of the anchorite suggested that the answer was not quite unexpected, but he said nothing till the other resumed his tale.

"You know that sort of château that some

French nobleman, an exiled prince, I believe, built upon the wooded ridge over there beyond the crucifix; you can just see its turrets from here. I'm not sure who owns it now, but it's been rented for some years by Doctor Amiel, a famous physician, a Frenchman, or, rather, a French Jew. He is supposed to have high humanitarian ideals, including the idealization of this small nationality here, which, of course, suits our foreign office very well. Perhaps it's unfair to say he's only 'supposed' to be this; and the plain truth is I'm not a fair judge of the man, for a reason you may soon guess. But apart from sentiment, I think somehow I am in two minds about him. It sounds absurd to say that like or dislike of a man could depend on his wearing a red smoking cap. But that's the nearest I can get to it: bareheaded, and just a little baldheaded, he seems only a dark, rather distinguished-looking French man of science, with a pointed beard. When he puts that red fez on he is suddenly something much lower than a Turk, and I see all Asia sneering and leering at me across the Levant. Well, perhaps it's a fancy of the fit I'm in; and it's only just to say that people believe in him, who are really devoted to this people or to our policy here. The people staying with him now, and during the few weeks I was there, are English and very keen on the cause, and they say his work has been splendid. A young fellow named Woodville, from my own college, who has traveled a lot, and written some books about yachting, I think. And his sister."

"Your story is very clear so far," observed Father Stephen with restraint.

Drake seemed suddenly moved to impetuosity. "I know I'm in a mad state and had no right to call you morbid; and it's a state in which it's awfully difficult to judge of people. How is it that two people, just a brother and sister, can be so alike—and so different? They're both what is called good looking; and even good looking in the same way. Why on earth should her high color look as clear as if it were pale, while his offends me as if it were painted? Why should I think of her hair as gold and his as if it were gilt? Honestly, I can't help feeling something artificial about him; but I didn't come to trouble you with these prejudices—there is little or nothing to be said against Woodville; he has something of a name for betting on horses, but not enough to disturb any man of the world. I think the reputation has rather dogged his footsteps in the shape of his servant, Grimes, who is much more horsey than his master, and much in evidence. You see there were few servants at the château; even the gardening being done by a peasant from outside, an unfortunate fellow in horn spectacles who comes into this story later. Anyhow, Woodville was, or professed to be, quite sound in his politics about this place; and I really think him sincere about it. And as for his sister, she has an enthusiasm that is as beautiful as Joan of Arc's."

There was a short silence, and then Father Stephen said dreamily:

"In short, you somehow escaped from your prison, and paid her a visit."

"Three visits," replied Drake, with an embarrassed laugh, "and nearly broke my neck at the end of a rope, besides being repeatedly shot at with a gun. I'll tell you later on, if you want them, all the details of how I managed to slip out and in again during those sunset hours of Abbot Paul's slumbers. They really resolved themselves into two; the accidental discovery of a disused iron chain, that had been used for the crane or lift, and the character of the old monk who happened to be watching while the abbot slept. How indescribable is a man, and how huge are the things that turn on his unique self as on a hinge? All those monks were utterly incorruptible, and I owed it to a sympathy that was almost mockery. In an English romance, I suppose, my confederate would have been a young mutinous monk, dreaming of the loves he had lost; whereas my friend was one of the oldest, utterly loyal to the religious life, and helping me from a sort of whim that was little more than a lark. Can you imagine a sort of innocent Pandarus, or even a Christian Pan? He would have died rather than betray the holy stones, but when he was convinced that my love affair was honorable in itself, he let me down by the chain in fits of silent laughter, like a grinning old goblin. It was a pretty wild experience, I can tell you, swinging on that loose iron ladder, like dropping off the earth on a falling star. But I swung myself somehow clear of the spikes below, and crept along under the thick wood by the side of the road. Even as I did so came the crack and rolling echoes of the musket on the tower, and a tuft, from a fir tree spreading above me, dropped de-

tached upon the road at my right. A terrible old man, the abbot. A light sleeper."

Both men were gazing at the strange tower that rose out of the distant woods as Drake, after a pause, renewed his narrative.

"There is a high hedge of juniper and laurel at the bottom of the garden of Doctor Amiel's château. At least it is high on the outer side, rising above a sort of ledge of earth on the slope, but comparatively low when seen from the level garden above. I used to climb up to this ledge in that late afternoon twilight, and she used to come down the garden, with the lights of the house almost clinging about her dress, and we used to talk. It's no good talking to you about what she looked like, with her hair all a yellow light behind the leaves; though those are the sort of things that make my present position a hell. You are a monk and not—I fear I was going to say not a man; but at any rate not a lover."

"I am not a juniper bush, if the argument be conclusive," remarked Father Stephen. "But I can admire it in its place, and I know that many good things grow wild in the garden of God. But, if I may say so, seeing that so honorable a lady receives such rather eccentric attentions from you, I cannot see that you have much reason to be jealous of the poor Jewish gentleman, as you seem to be, even if he is so base and perfidious as to wear a smoking cap."

"What you say was true until yesterday," said Drake. "I know now that until yesterday I was in paradise. But I had gone there once too often, and on my third return journey a thunderbolt struck me down, worse than any bullet from the tower. The old abbot had never discovered my own evasion, but he must have had miraculous hearing when he woke, for every time I crept through the thicket, as softly as I could, he must have heard something moving, and fired again and again. Well, the last time I found the spectacled peasant who worked for Doctor Amiel lying dead, a little way in front of the cross, and a foreign-looking fellow with a drawn saber standing near him. But the strange thing was that the saber was unstained and unused, and I was eventually convinced that one of the abbot's shots had killed the poor peasant in the goggles. Revolving all these things in growing doubt, I returned to the tower, and saw an ominous thing. The regular mechanical lift was lowered for me, and when I reëntered the place, I found that all my escapade had been discovered. But I found something far worse.

"When all those faces were turned upon me, faces I shall never forget, I knew I was being judged for something more than a love affair. My poor old friend, who had connived at my escape, would not have been so much prostrated for the lesser matter; and as for the abbot, the form of his countenance was changed, as it says in the Bible, by something nearer to his own lonely soul than all such lesser matters. Well, the truth of this tragedy is soon told. For the last week, as it appeared, the hoard of the little diamonds had dwindled, no man could imagine how. They were counted by the abbot and two monks at certain regular intervals, and it was found that the losses had occurred at definite intervals also. Finally, there was found another fact, a fact of which I can make no sense, yet a fact to which I can find no answer. After each of my secret visits to the château, and then only, some of the diamonds had disappeared.

"I have not even the right to ask you to believe in my innocence. No man alive, in the whole great landscape we are looking at, believes in my innocence. I do not know what would have happened to me, or whether I should have been killed by the monks or the peasants, if I had not appealed to your great authority in this country, and if the abbot had not been persuaded at last to allow the appeal. Doctor Amiel thinks I am guilty. Woodville thinks I am guilty. His sister I have not even been able to see."

There was another silence, and then Father Stephen remarked, rather absently:

"Does he wear slippers as well as a smoking cap?"

"Do you mean the doctor? No. What on earth do you mean?"

"Nothing at all, if he doesn't. There's no more to be said about that. Well, it's pretty obvious, I suppose, what are the next three questions. First, I suppose the woodman carried an ax. Did he ever carry a pickax? Did he ever carry any other tool in particular? Second, did you ever happen to hear anything like a bell? About the time you heard the shot, for instance? But that will probably have occurred to you already. And third, amid such plain preliminaries in the matter, is Doctor Amiel fond of birds?" There was again a shadow of irony in the simplicity of the recluse, and Drake turned

his dark face toward him with a doubtful frown.

"Are you making fun of me?" he asked. "I should prefer to know."

"I believe in your innocence, if that is what you mean," replied Father Stephen, "and, believe me, I am beginning at the right end in order to establish it."

"But who could it be?" cried Drake, in his rather irritable fashion. "I'll tell the plain truth, even against myself; and I'd swear all those monks were really startled out of their wits. And even the peasants near here, supposing they could get into the tower, which they can't—why I'd be as much surprised to hear of them desecrating the Hundred Stones as if I heard they'd all suddenly become Plymouth Brethren this morning. No, suspicion is sure to fall on the foreigners like myself, and none of the others round here have a case against them, as I have. Woodville may have a few racing debts, but I'd never believe this about *her* brother, little as I happen to like him. And as for Doctor Amiel——" And he stopped, his face darkening with thought.

"Yes, but that's beginning at the wrong end," observed Father Stephen, "because it's beginning with all the millions of mankind, and every man a mystery. I am trying to find out who stole the stones. You seem to be trying to find out who wanted to steal them. Believe me, the smaller and more practical question is also the larger and more philosophical. To the shades of possible wanting there is hardly any limit. It is the root of all religion that anybody may be almost anything if he chooses. The cynics are wrong, not because they say that the heroes may be cowards, but because they do not see that the cowards may be heroes. Now, you may think my remark about keeping birds very wild, and your remark about betting on horses very relevant, but I assure you it is the other way round; for yours dealt with what might be thought, but mine with what could be done. Do you remember that German prime minister who was assassinated because he had reduced Russia to starvation? Millions of peasants might have wanted to murder him, but how could a muzhik in Muscovy murder him in a theater in Munich? He was murdered by a man who came there because he was a trained Russian dancer, and escaped from there because he was a trained Russian acrobat. That is, the highly offensive statesman in question was not killed by all the Russians who may have wanted to kill him, but the one Russian who *could* kill him. Well, you are the only approximate acrobat in this performance; and apart from what I know about you, I don't see how you could have burgled a safe inside the tower merely by dangling at the end of a string outside it. For the real enigma and obstacle, in this story, is not the stone tower but the steel casket. I do not see how you could have stolen the jewels. I don't see how *anybody* could have stolen them. That is the hopeful part of it."

"You are pretty paradoxical to-day," growled his English friend.

"I am quite practical," answered Stephen serenely. "That is the starting point, and it makes a good start. We have only to deal with a narrow number of conjectures, about how it could just conceivably have been done. You scoffed at my three questions just now, which I threw off when I was thinking rather about the preliminary approach to the tower. Well, I admit they were very long shots, indeed very wild shots; I did not myself take them very seriously, or think they would lead to much. But they had this value, that they were not random guesses about the spiritual possibilities of everybody for a hundred miles round. They were the beginnings of an effort to bridge the real difficulties."

"I am afraid," observed Drake, "that I did not realize that they were even that."

"Well," the hermit went on patiently, "for the first problem of reaching the tower, it was reasonable to think first, however hazily, of some sort of secret tunnel or subterranean entrance; and it was natural to ask if the strange workman at the château, who afterward died so mysteriously, was seen carrying any excavating tools."

"Well, I did think of that," assented Drake, "and I came to the conclusion that it was physically impossible. The inside of the tower is as plain and bare as a dry cistern, and the floor is really solid concrete everywhere. But what did you mean by that second question about the bell?"

"What I confess still puzzles me," said Father Stephen, "even in your own story, is how the abbot always heard a man threading his way through a thick forest so far below; so that he invariably fired after him, if only at a venture. Now, nothing would be more natural to such a scheme of defense

than to set traps in the wood, in the way of burglar alarms, to warn the watchers in the tower. But anything like that would mean some system of wires or tubes passing through the wall into the woods; and anything of that sort I felt in a shadowy way, a very shadowy way, indeed, might mean a passage for other things as well. It would destroy the argument of the sheer wall and the dead drop, which is at present an argument against you, since you alone dared to drop over it. And, of course, my third random question was of the same kind. Nothing could fly about the top of that high tower except birds. For I infer that the vigilant Paul was not too absent-minded to notice any large number of aëroplanes. Now it is not in the least probable, it is indeed almost wildly improbable; but it is not *impossible* that birds should be trained either to take messages or to commit thefts. Carrier pigeons do the former, and parrots and magpies have often done the latter. Doctor Amiel being both a scientist and a humanitarian, I thought he might very well be a naturalist and an animal lover. But if I had found his biological studies specializing wholly on the breeding of carrier pigeons, or if I had found all the love of his life lavished on a particular magpie, I should have thought the question worth following up, formidable as would have been the difficulties still threatening it as a solution."

"I wish the love of his life *were* lavished on a magpie," observed Bertram Drake bitterly. "As it is, it's lavished on something else, and will be expected, I suppose, to flourish in the blight of mine. But much as I hate him, I shouldn't like to say of him what he is probably saying of me."

"There again is the mistaken method," observed the other. "Probably he is not morally incapable of a really bad action; very few people are. That is why I stick to the point of whether he is materially capable. It would be quite easy to draw a dark, suspicious picture both of him and Mr. Woodville. It is quite true that racing can be a raging gamble, and that ruined gamblers are capable of almost anything. It is also true that nobody can be so much of a cad as a gentleman when he is afraid of losing that title. In the same way, it is perfectly true that the Jews have woven over these nations a net that is not only international but antinational. And it is quite true that inhuman as is their usury, and inhuman as is often their oppression of the poor, some of them are never so inhuman as when they are idealistic, never so inhuman as when they are humane. If we were talking about Amiel, or about Woodville, instead of about you and about the diamonds, I could trace a thousand mystery stories in the matter. I could take your hint about the scarlet smoking cap, and say it was a signal and the symbol of a secret society; that a hundred Jews in a hundred smoking caps were plotting everywhere, as many of them really are. I could show a conspiracy ramifying from the red cap of Amiel as it did from the *Bonnet Rouge* of Almereyda. Or I could catch at your idle phrase about Woodville's hair looking gilded, and describe him as a monstrous decadent in a golden wig; a thing worthy of Nero. Very soon his horse racing would have all the imperial insanity of charioteering in the amphitheater, while his friend in the fez would be capable of carrying off Miss Woodville to a whole harem full of Miss Woodvilles, if you will pardon the image. But what corrects all this is the concrete difficulty I defined at the beginning. I still do not see how wearing either a red fez or a gilded wig could conjure very small gems out of a steel box at the top of a tower. But, of course, I did not mean to abandon all inquiry about the suspicious movements of anybody. I asked if the doctor wore slippers, on a remote chance in connection with your steps having been heard in the wood. And I should like to know if you ever met anybody else prowling about in the forest."

"Why, yes," said Drake with a slight start. "I once met the man Grimes, now I remember it."

"Mr. Woodville's servant," remarked Father Stephen.

"Yes, a rat of a fellow with red hair," Drake said, frowning. "He seemed a bit startled to see me, too."

"Well, never mind," answered the hermit. "My own hair may be called red, but I assure you I didn't steal the diamonds."

"I never met anybody else," went on Drake, "except, of course, the mysterious man with the saber, and the dead man he was staring at. I think that is the queerest puzzle of all."

"It is best to apply the same principle even to that," replied his friend.

"It may be hard to imagine what a man could be doing with a drawn sword still un-

used. But, after all, there are a thousand things he might have been doing, from teaching the poor woodman to cut timber without an ax to cutting off the dead man's head for a trophy and a talisman, as some savages do. The question is whether felling the whole forest, or filling the whole country with bowling head hunters, would necessarily have got the stones out of the box."

"He was certainly going to do something," said Drake, in a low voice.

"He said himself 'I was going to——' and then broke off and vanished. I was very profoundly persuaded, I hardly knew why, that there was something to be done to the dead man, which could not be done till he was dead."

"What?" asked the hermit after an abrupt silence; and it sounded somehow like a new voice from a third person, suddenly joining in the conversation.

"Which could not be done till he was dead," repeated Drake, staring at him.

"Dead," repeated Father Stephen.

And Drake, still staring at him, saw that his face under its fringe of red hair was as pale as his linen robe, and the eyes in it were blazing like the lost stones.

"So many things die," he said. "The birds I spoke about, flying and flashing about the great tower. Did you ever find a dead bird? Not one sparrow, it is written, falls to the ground without God. Even a dead bird would be precious. But a yet smaller thing will serve as a sign here."

Drake, still gazing at his companion, felt a growing conviction that the man had suddenly gone mad. He said helplessly: "What is the matter with you?" But Father Stephen had risen from his seat and was gazing calmly across the valley toward the west, which was all swimming with a golden sunlight that here and there turned the tops of the gray trees to silver.

"It is the thud of the mallet," he said, "and the curtain must rise."

Something had certainly happened which the mind of Bertram Drake found it impossible at the moment to measure, but he remembered enough of the strange words with which their interview had opened, to know that in some sense the hermit was saying farewell to the hermitage and to many more human things. He asked some groping question the very words of which he could not afterward recall.

"I see my signal at last," said Father Stephen. "Treason stands up in my own land as that tower stands in the landscape. A great sin against the people, and against the glory of the dead, is raging in that valley like a lost battle. And I must go down and do my last office, as King Hector came down from these mountains to his last battle long ago; to that Battle of the Stones where he was slain, and his sacred coat of mail so nearly captured. For the enemy has come again over the hills, though in a shape in which we never looked for him."

The voice that had lately lingered with irony and shrewdness over the details of detection had the simplicity which makes poetry and primitive rhetoric still possible among such peoples. He was already marching down the slope, leaving Drake wavering in doubt; being uncertain, to tell the truth, whether his own problem had not been rather lost in this last transition.

"Oh, do not fear for your own story," said Father Stephen. "The Battle of the Stones was a victory."

As they went down the mountainside, Drake followed with a strange sense of traveling with some immobile thing liberated by miracle; as if the earth were shaken by a stone statue walking. The statue led him a strange and rather erratic dance, however, covering considerable time and distance; and the great cloud in the west was a sunset cloud before they came to their final halt. Rather to Drake's surprise, they passed the tower of the monastery, and already seemed to be passing under the shadow of the great wooden cross in the woods.

"We shall return this way to-night," said Stephen, speaking for the first time on their march. "The sin upon this land to-night lies so heavy, that there is no other way. *Via Crucis.*"

"Why do you talk in this terrible way?" broke out Drake abruptly. "Don't you realize that it's enough to make a man like me hate the cross? Indeed, I think, by this time, I really do. Remember what my story is, and what once made these woodlands wonderful for me. Would you blame me if the god I saw among the trees was a pagan god, and at any rate a happy one? This is a wild garden that was full for me of love and laughter; and I look up, and see that image blackening the sun, and saying that the world is utterly evil."

"You do not understand," replied Father Stephen quite quietly. "If there are any

who stand apart, merely because the world is utterly evil, they are not old monks like me; they are much more likely to be young Byronic disappointed lovers like you. No, it is the optimist, much more than the pessimist, who finally finds the cross waiting for him at the end of his own road. It is the thing that remains when all is said, like the payment after the feast. Christendom is full of feasts, but they bear the names of martyrs who won them in torments. And if such things horrify you, go and ask—what torments your English soldiers endure for the land which your English poets praise. Go and see your English children playing with fireworks, and you will find one of their toys is named after the torture of St. Catherine. No, it is not that the world is rubbish and that we throw it away. It is exactly when the whole world of stars is a jewel, like the jewels we have lost, that we remember the price. And we look up, as you say, in this dim thicket and see the price, which was the death of God."

After a silence, he added, like one in a dream: "And the death of man. We shall return by this way to-night."

Drake had the best reasons for being aware of the direction in which their way was now taking them. The familiar path scrambled up the hill to a familiar hedge of juniper, behind which rose the steep roofs of a dark mansion. He could even hear voices talking on the lawn behind the hedge; and a note or two of one, which changed the current of his blood. He stopped and said in a voice heavy as stone:

"I cannot go in here now. Not for the world."

"Very well," replied Father Stephen calmly. "I think you have waited outside before now."

And he composedly entered the garden by a gate in the hedge, leaving Drake gloomily kicking his heels on the ledge or natural terrace outside, where he had often waited in happier times. As he did so he could not help hearing fragments of the distant conversation in the garden, and they filled him with confusion and conjecture, not, however, unmingled with hope. He could only think that Father Stephen was stating his case, and probably offering to prove his innocence. But he must also have been making a sort of appointment; for Drake heard Woodville say, 'I can't make head or tail of this, but we will follow later if you insist.' And Stephen replied with something ending with 'the cross in half an hour.'

Then Drake heard the voice of the girl, saying, "I shall pray to God that you may yet tell us better news."

"You will be told," said Father Stephen.

As they redescended toward the little hill just in front of the crucifix, Drake was in a less mutinous mood; whether this was due to the hermit's speech or the words about prayer that had fallen from the woman in the garden. The sky was at once clearer and cloudier than in the previous sunset; for the light and darkness seemed divided by deeper abysses; gray and purple cloudlands as large as landscapes now overcasting the whole earth, and now falling again before fresh chasms of light; vast changes that gave to a few hours of evening something of the enormous revolutions of the nights and days. The wall of cloud was then rising higher on the heights behind them and spreading over the château; but the western half of heaven was a clear gold, where the lonely cross stood dark against it. But as they drew nearer they saw that it was in truth less lonely, for a man was standing beneath it. Drake saw a long gun aslant on his back. It was the bearded man of the saber.

The hermit strode toward him with a strange energy, and struck him on the shoulder with the flat of his hand.

"Go home," he said, "and tell your masters that their plot will work no longer. If you are Christians, and ever had any part in a holy relic, or any right to it in your land beyond the hills, you will know you should not seek it by such tricks. Go in peace."

Drake hardly noticed how quickly the man vanished this time, for his eye was fixed on the hermit's finger which seemed idly tracing patterns on the wooden pedestal of the cross. It was really pointing to certain perforations, like holes made by worms in the wood.

"Some of the abbot's stray shots, I think," he remarked. "And somebody has been picking them out of the wood, strangely enough."

"It is unlucky," observed Drake, "that the abbot should damage one of your own images; he is as much devoted to the relic as to the realm."

"More," said the hermit, sitting down on the knoll a few yards before the pedestal.

"The abbot, as you truly say, has only room for one idea in his mind. But there is no doubt of his concern about the stones."

A great canopy of cloud had again covered the valley, turning twilight almost to darkness, and Stephen spoke out of the dark.

"As for the realm, the abbot comes from the country beyond the hills which hundreds of years ago went to war about——"

His words were lost in a distant explosion. A volley had been fired from the tower.

With the first shock of sound, Stephen sprang up and stood erect on the little hillock. The world had grown so dark that his attitude could hardly be seen. But as minute followed minute, in the interval of silence, a low red light was again gradually released from the drifting cloud, faintly tracing his gray figure in silver and turning his tawney hair to a ring of dim crimson. He was standing quite rigid with his arms stretched out, like a shadow of the crucifix. Drake was striving with the words of a question that would not come. And then there came anew a noise of death from the tower; and the hermit fell all his length, crashing among the undergrowth, and lay still as a stone.

Drake hardly knew how he lifted the head onto the wooden pedestal, but the face gave ghastly assurance, and the voice in the few words it could speak, was like the voice of a newborn child, weak and small.

"I am dying," said Father Stephen. "I am dying with the truth in my heart."

He made another effort to speak, beginning "I wish——" and then his friend, looking at him steadily, saw that he was dead.

Bertram Drake stood up, and all his universe lay in ruins around him. The night of annihilation was more absolute because a match had flamed and gone out before it could light the lamp. He was certain now that Stephen had indeed discovered the truth that could deliver him. He was as clearly certain that no other man would ever discover it. He would go blasted to his grave, because his friend had died only a moment too soon. And to put a final touch to the hideous irony, that had lifted him to heaven and cast him down, he heard the voices of his friends coming along the road from the château.

In a sort of tumbled dream he saw Doctor Amiel lift the body onto the pedestal, producing surgical instruments for the last hopeless surgical tests. The doctor had his back to Drake, who did not trouble to look over his shoulder, but stared at the ground until the doctor said:

"I fear he is quite dead. But I have extracted the bullet." There was something odd about his quiet voice; the group seemed suddenly, if silently, seething with new emotions. The girl gave an exclamation of wonder, and it seemed of joy, which Drake could not comprehend.

"I am glad I extracted the bullet," said Doctor Amiel, "I fancy that's what Drake's friend with the saber was trying to extract."

"We certainly owe Drake a complete apology," observed Woodville.

Drake thrust his head over the other's shoulder, and saw what they were all staring at. The shot that had struck Stephen in the heart lay a few inches from his body; and it not only glittered, but sparkled. It sparkled as only one stone can sparkle in the world.

The girl was standing beside him; and he appreciated, through the turmoil, the sense of an obstacle rolled away and of a growth and future, and even in all those growing woods, the promise of the spring. It was only as the tail of a trailing and vanishing nightmare that he appreciated at last the wild tale of the treason of the foreign abbot from beyond the hills, and in what strange fashion he loaded his large-mouthed gun. But he continued to gaze at the dazzling speck on the pedestal, and saw in it as in a mirror all the past words of his friend.

For Stephen the hermit had died indeed with the truth in his heart, and the truth had been taken out of his heart by the forceps of a wondering Jew; and it lay there on the pedestal of the cross, like the soul drawn out of his body. Nor did it seem unnatural, to the man staring at it, that the soul looked like a star.

Starlight

By John Amid

Author of "The Go-Getter," Etc.

The author of this fine bit of fiction says: "Several times for several years I have begun the story that Starlight gave me—the story of a little bay mare, a wild-spirited, affectionate little beast that gave battle valiantly to man, but each time I have given up the attempt with sadness. The tale seemed too elusive, too closely akin to the infinities that lie just beyond reach of mortal mind"

STARLIGHT came from the great Nevada ranges, where the air blows free and clean over great hills and bare, wind-swept valleys; where the sun, at noon, is very hot, and the stars at night are very close; where the rocks and the sage and the sky with its soft, fleeced clouds, are everything, and where man, the strange, seldom-seen pygmy, is almost nothing—merely a distant menace, carrying all manner of treacheries and great cunning. A wonderful country, that great range land—where the colts roved wild with their mothers; a country of rabbits and rattlesnakes, of scurrying little lizards and silent-footed coyotes; a country of few men.

Starlight's story begins properly with her breaking, or, to speak still more accurately, with what was to have been her breaking. That occurred in southern California, when she was five years old—a proud, sturdy, self-confident little mare that scuffled along with head up and ears pricked forward, at the head of the herd, close to the leader's flank.

A terrible preface preceded the story—a preface that dealt with the sudden cessation of all the wild, free life she had ever known; a preface in which man, the insignificant, loomed suddenly close and ominous, as master and owner, overriding—with his skilled machinations and superior craft—all the startled efforts of these animals, his lawful property, whose very fears he regarded with contempt; a preface in which followed a long, wearisome journey on the hoof from Nevada uplands to the fruit-laden, man-filled valleys near the coast, during which the fine form of the leader shrank to the bony caricature of a horse, with bloodshot eyes and sunken flanks.

During that journey the little mare, Starlight, was among the few that kept alert, one of the horses whose ears were never motionless, and on whom the others of lesser spirit depended for warning and guidance. It was a fearful, parched, dust-filled, muscle-wearying journey; but quickly forgotten in the short weeks of plenty that followed before the band was put on sale.

That preface had in it little that concerned the mare's relations with man, her enemy and her friend. There were terrible moments, of course, of man's propinquity during the journey, as there had been during the years that preceded it—the days of the round-up, when snaky ropes circled through the air and bit the neck almost before the eye saw their coming—when their quick, treacherous strands suddenly enmeshed the feet, preceding a fear-blotted fall, when the branding iron seared suddenly into hair and hide, until, released, the fear-maddened animal plunged desperately through the dust, back to freedom. Though the long journey was man-controlled, it carried almost no element of struggle; the final round-up was not particularly terrifying; there was no roping, merely a gradual drawing in of riders until the avenue of least resistance, a seeming escape from danger, led into a large corral. On the journey the band traveled in its own way, the herders tending to their own business at the right side or the left, and in the rear concerning themselves only with such of the herd as showed a tendency to wander from the given trail—then there would ensue a sharp, sudden spurt to turn the straggler back into the band. Indeed, upon this whole journey, man, though always close at hand, seemed never very frightful; the horses were allowed to pick their own way, go their own gait.

The sale brought a change. After the band arrived in California it regained its flesh and vigor; the herd was taken week by week from town to town and sold off, one—two—five head at a time, here and there. Even then the conflict, which during all the weeks had been drawing closer and closer, actually began only for the horses purchased. Ropes circled about them immediately the selection was made, and they were dragged away, struggling and fighting, while the remainder of the band, still unmolested, circled whatever corral they happened for the time to be in, with dilated nostrils and noisy breath, heads high and feet well together, ready for any eventuality.

The bunch had dwindled to a mere remnant of barely twenty head when I saw it. Starlight, though one of the most promising animals of the whole original herd, had been passed over time and again on account of her size. She was not big enough for the rough carting to which most of the other horses were eventually broken. For my purpose she was exactly right—a splendid little saddle mare, with small, pointed ears tipped well forward; the hint of a curve in her neck; a fine, wide, chunky chest; trim, slender legs; and a clear, intelligent eye.

"That's the one," I said to the man who was selling the herd. "That little bay at the front there, with the white marks on her forehead." For, sure enough, the mare had the star marking which I understand differentiates at a glance many horses that figure in literature. "Looks to me as though she ought to have been picked before."

"She's small," said the seller, "small and full of fight. May be quite a job to tame her down. Most men want the big, slow fellows that will quiet down quick—the kind that'll take orders from the go."

"The kind with lots of life have got those beaten every time, once you get them broken."

"Yes," he assented dryly, "once you get them broken."

"You think she'll do some carrying on, huh? Cut some didos before she wears the saddle?"

He grinned.

"The only people who have looked at her so far," he remarked, "were some of the movie people down by Los Angeles. They wanted a real bucker; they picked her as the one that would give them the biggest film in the whole bunch, but when they put the saddle on her she never budged, and so they took another."

"Got a streak of balk, huh?"

"I reckon; but she'll have something new behind her headlight next time, unless I miss my guess."

"But you think she's a pretty good animal?"

"Best in the herd," he answered laconically.

And I bought her.

It took two of us, mounted, three hours to get the little beast home, and at that we only got her as far as our own town. It was so late that I left her in the livery barn for the night without trying to fight the balance of the way to my own stable.

The little mare—we named her Starlight, in a preliminary burst of enthusiasm—fought every step of the way. In the corral she was roped readily enough; that, of course, was inevitable in the confined space. She was quickly tied, and we put a strong halter on her; then, mounted on venerable plugs, we essayed the three-mile journey home.

Starlight made a rush as she left the corral, snubbed herself on the rope, fell, and struggled instantly to her feet, fighting like a whirlwind. She fought the entire distance, trotting docilely never more than a few rods at a time, and then, apparently, only until she had recuperated sufficiently to renew the struggle. She had been on the ground a dozen times, and was bruised and bleeding from minor cuts and scratches in many places, before we had made half our journey. Besides this, she galled herself very badly, first with the halter, and then, when we feared the halter would break, and reënforced it with a second rope around her neck, with this latter noose also. It was nearly dark when we reached the livery stable, and, worn out, decided to leave her. The large barn boasted only a few used stalls, where the half dozen horses that enabled an unbusinesslike management to resist feebly the final assaults of the automobile industry whinnied despairingly for larger rations.

In one of the vacant stalls we tied Starlight, forcing her first into the barn, and later into the stall, by raising a commotion behind her which in the end became even more terrifying than the unfamiliar and threatening unknown in front.

It was a bad move—this leaving her in a strange stable, among hostlers familiar

only with the broken-spirited horses who do men's bidding without question, the galled, equine serfdom of commerce. They did not realize the gulf which divided their poor plugs from this wild animal of the uplands, this untamed life that knew no master. When a measure of oats was thrown noisily down the shoot into the manger, the little mare became terrified beyond all semblance of control at the hissing attack, and, snapping both the halter rope and the heavier line about her neck, ran amuck.

The customary small circle of village loungers was gathered near the harness room at the front of the big barn as the small bay smashed back from her stall. When my friend Rayden, with whom I had fought Starlight during the afternoon, arrived on the scene his first impulse was to burst out laughing. The top of a big picnic bus was loaded down, three ne'er-do-wells having scrambled on to it in a mad rush for safety. One of these in his flight had seized a whip from the rack, and was cracking it vigorously, to prevent an attack from Starlight. The livery-stable keeper was still in the loft, whence he had thrown the oats, afraid to descend the stairs; one of the stable hands was clinging to a stanchion, standing on the partition between two stalls; all down stage left was occupied by Starlight, who had backed into a defensive position facing the demoralized foe, her feet spread, her nostrils wide. In her first tearing rush she had smashed the side out of one of the stalls, and a moment later—in a delirious frenzy of fear—had tripped and gone down all by herself on the water tub, breaking and upsetting it, the wet and wreckage adding to the effect.

Rayden, who has handled horses since he was old enough to walk, slipped a lariat from the harness room, opened the noose, and, approaching Starlight, tossed it over her head with a single motion, and in a few moments more had her safely back in the stall. He even tried to rub a little grease on her hurts, but this threatened to precipitate another stampede, and he gave up the attempt. All night she stood motionless in her warm quarters, trembling at every sound, the food untouched beneath her nose—an unsubdued, noncomprehending little captive, a wild animal suddenly tossed by destiny into the arena to give battle at terrible odds to her archenemy, man.

Her bruises and wrenches stiffened, the blood on her neck and flanks clotted and dried, while the long night dragged slowly overhead; she waited, half-dead with fear, yet alert with the alertness of the wild, for whatever terrors the dawn might bring.

I went to her in the morning, resolved to experiment a little slowly with this, the finest and the wildest broncho I had ever seen; I spent an hour working into her stall, and another hour greasing her hurts; then, mounted again, and with Rayden to help, I took her to the little stable that was to be her home. She fought with the same terrible fury that had marked the journey of the preceding day.

That was the beginning.

During the weeks that followed I proceeded with the mare's education slowly, carefully, a step at a time, while the village laughed scornfully, or, shaking its head with the great wisdom of mankind, announced that this horse which had nearly torn down the livery stable would never be tame. Once a broncho, always a broncho, was, I remember, one of the phrases that came up time and again; meaning, I suppose, that even though this wild horse should come to accept her status as captive with docility, she would never be reliable, but might at any time revert to the old instincts, the terror spasms of the unthinking wild animal.

There are two ways of breaking bronchos. Notice the distinction—bronchos, not horses. The average colt, bred from trained ancestry and accustomed from its earliest days to the hand, the voice, and the proximity of man, is teachable enough; but the real broncho, the horse of the plains, of the uplands, of the wild mountain ranges, is a thing apart. It can be subjugated suddenly as in the old reckless days, when man, careless of loss, went into the herd, roped the likeliest head, saddled, bridled, and rode in an hour—sometimes. Some times, but not always, for not infrequently the most spirited animals would be spoiled irretrievably by that rough handling, killed outright perhaps, maimed, or rendered outlaws through the failure of the first terrible processes.

The second method is the one which I was using in these later and more civilized days, when the remnants of the free range herds are brought down into civilization and sold into slavery. This method is to go ahead gradually, much as with an ordinary man-accustomed horse, only infinitely more patiently, more cautiously.

For a day or two I repeated the process of that first morning in the livery stable, accustoming Starlight to my presence, to the feel of my hand on her hide. For two weeks she would start and tremble at the slightest touch; for a week she would snort in alarm at even a suggested approach; for a fortnight she would touch no food while any one was near, standing always motionless, alert, ready to rear, plunge, and fight should a new danger threaten. Occasionally after leaving the stable I would stand outside, motionless, for some moments, listening to see if she would eat, but there was never a sound while I remained in the vicinity. Only when her alert ears assured her that she was temporarily, at least, safe from mankind, would she cautiously crunch her hay—stopping the chaumping every few seconds to become again tense and motionless, listening to make sure she had made no mistake.

By slow stages the preliminary processes were successfully undergone. At length Starlight stood quietly enough while I bitted and bridled her. To accustom her to being saddled took longer, but in the end that, too, could be done safely and quietly. She always trembled a little when the heavy breaking saddle was poised ready to be flung upon her back, braced herself to receive it, and was always ready to lunge and plunge if anything untoward occurred.

Once I could saddle and bridle her, and lead her out into the sunlight, the battle seemed almost won.

One morning I went with Rayden to the top of a small plateau that had been newly plowed; then I vaulted into the saddle. Starlight showed no tendency to balk. She was scared, of course; but she was not terror-struck beyond the control of her muscles. She retained control of her muscles far better than I of mine. Even in plowed land, where it was hard to get good footing, she plunged and reared, bucked and swung sideways until I was quite ready to dismount; but there was no chance for that now; it was a question of ride or be thrown.

I had broken horses before, and considered myself a fair rider, though nothing unusual. In the soft earth of the plowed field it seemed incredible that the horse could show such strength, such resourcefulness, such a vast capacity for dispossessing herself of the unwelcome burden on her back. In spite of her handicap, Starlight had all the best of the argument.

After a particularly vicious series of bucks I felt that I was going. I was still in the saddle, but no longer sure of myself. A couple of bucks more and I would be off, defeated, and all the work would be to do over again. No, worse than that, for, once a broncho has thrown the first rider, it will redouble its efforts to rid itself of the next rider. But I was saved by the unexpected. Starlight reared again—straight up this time —too far. She failed to comprehend the difference in balance which the hundred and seventy-odd pounds on her back made. Perhaps she was deliberately trying to throw herself and fall on me. I don't know. At any rate, she went straight up—balanced a moment—then crashed over straight on her back.

It is a spectacular sight when a horse rears and falls back, attempting to crush the rider; but it is not nearly so dangerous as it appears. Dangerous it is for one who has never been through the process before, but it happened that one of the horses I had previously broken used this trick repeatedly, and I knew what to do. It was no effort—standing as I was in the stirrups, almost parallel with the horse's back, as she reared straight up, to free one foot and swing to the side.

When Starlight toppled onto her back I came down easily on the soft earth, standing at her side. Then, seizing the bit before she could rise, I sat on her neck and rested. We were both winded; but I knew now that I had won. Starlight thrashed about a bit on the ground, trying to get up. She kept getting more tired. I pillowed my back against her foreshoulder. It was a comfortable place, and in ten minutes I was as fit as ever.

Then I got up and allowed the mare to scramble to her feet. It was an unequal contest from that time on. I vaulted again into the saddle, as secure as at the first attempt. The bucking started anew, but this time she didn't have a chance; she was tired. Though her plunging doubtless appeared quite as spectacular as before, it was in reality less formidable.

I felt that if the need arose I could ride her indefinitely. She felt it, too, and after a few minutes of violent effort, desisted as suddenly as she had begun.

The first round of the contest had been decided, and Starlight had lost.

She felt, and felt for all time, that once

the man-thing straddled her back, he would be able to stay there in spite of her best efforts. Of course, from time to time she tried other tricks as they suggested themselves to her, tried rolling, tried running away, once even showed again a trace of balkiness, sullenly refusing to do anything. The most dangerous moment of all came when she tried to throw herself from the edge of the plateau, making a straight dash for a precipice and attempting to plunge over it. Had we been alone she might have accomplished her purpose, and we would have gone crashing into the little gully below the hill. But Rayden saw the danger as it arose, and spurred forward. Fighting against the big Spanish bit, that cut cruelly, Starlight could not make very good time over the plowed ground, and before we reached the edge of the hill Rayden was in front of us.

Only once after that first day did Starlight definitely pit her endurance, her strength, her strategy, her will against mine. It was as though she reckoned the whole thing out, saw that she was gradually being bent to the will of man, and resolved once and for all to have it out. This was about a month after the session on the hill. During that time I had little trouble with her; she was more or less accustomed to me, and having once accepted the idea that she could not throw me, made few attempts to do so.

She was far more terrified now at other things—teams, buildings, dogs, and especially children. Curiously enough she showed no particular added fear of automobiles; it was as though she was becoming accustomed to a world of such supernatural terror that the worst enigmas of all were discounted—her well of thrills had run dry. When there were so many things to be afraid of, the most terrible of all was only one among many.

On the day her rebellion came she was, it seemed, determined to settle the question of supremacy once and for all. Was she to have her way, or was I to have mine? I mounted; she gave her customary little double buck, then shot down the road like an arrow. This was normal and usual, but beyond that everything was different. When I pressed the reins against her neck to turn to the right, she tossed her head and turned toward the left; when I kicked with my heels to make her hurry, she slowed down.

Finally it came to an out-and-out fight. The bucking was not as bad as on the first occasion; Starlight, I suppose, was hampered by the fixed idea that she could not get me off. But then she balked, and that was the worst.

Knowing that you cannot torture a horse out of a balk, I coaxed her for a little while, then tried to scare her from her place, and in the end won.

That fight marked the cessation of hostilities. Starlight never gave me any more trouble as a saddle horse, save in a very different way—which I shall come to a little later.

One peculiarity, however, had developed unnoticed. I had done all the work with the little wild animal myself; I had fought her, had handled her roughly, but I had also handled her with a good deal of patience and a good deal of consideration. She was no longer afraid of me, and in the end liked me, but she drew a sharp line right there—a line I have never observed to such a marked extent in any other horse. Although I could do almost anything with her, no one else could even come near her; she was as afraid of the rest as at the very first.

For me she was now a very fair saddle horse; to all others she was still the untamed, unbroken broncho. This was shown one day when one of my acquaintances tried to ride her during my absence. She made trouble for him in the corral before he had her saddled and bridled, and when he mounted gave as beautiful an exhibition of bucking as could be wished for. Her feet were on hard ground this time, and the rider, though a far better horseman than I, never had a chance. It seemed strange to me that after this success—for in the end he gave up and turned her back into the corral—she failed to match her force against mine. But she did not try. She was my horse now. The rest of the world might still be against her, but I was her master, and, perhaps she felt, her friend.

By a curious chain of coincidences her reputation in the village had gone from bad to worse. The old horsemen of the place, the transplanted Arizona cow-punchers, who, in the afternoon of their existence, had moved across the San Jacinto hills to the coast valleys—shook their heads and said she was a bad bronk. "Oh, yes! He can *ride* her all right," they said contemptuously, "but you wait! She'll get him yet. That

horse is waiting her time. Once a broncho, always a broncho. You haven't seen any one else ride her lately, have you?"

But they were wrong. Starlight had a clear eye, intelligent, without treachery; she had accepted me, and I knew that I had nothing to fear from her except through one of the wild flashes of terror which broke over her occasionally when unforeseen contingencies arose. She was my horse—I had broken her to my own purpose.

But that was not enough. She would have to learn others, would have to be thoroughly subjugated, have to have her will broken if she was to be a satisfactory horse, for that is the fate of the wild creature that falls into the bondage of man. It must be subjugated not only to one man, but to all men; the last spark of rebellion must be crushed out, or else its life will draw swiftly through a succession of tragic defeats to a close.

I began to accustom Starlight to the presence of others. I would force her close to other horsemen when I dismounted to speak to any one. I would have the stranger come and pat her on the nose. I felt that I was making progress, though slowly, in overcoming her aversion to all other men.

Then, unexpectedly, I was called away.

There were complications. The mare was with foal. I would be gone for eight months. Though now partially broken for certain purposes, she was still unaccustomed to being handled, and was now in no condition for undergoing another long siege of breaking. I turned her into a great pasture to await my return.

There I found her, eight months later.

The pasture was a hilly one, with steep, precipitous slopes, with broad, smooth valleys, with rounded hilltops, with brush-filled cañons. Starlight had been turned out in the California spring, early in the year, when the new grass was lush and green, and the gurgle of running water arose from each ravine. Other horses were turned in, too; thirty or forty head; they roamed together in a band.

Starlight had her foal, and a pretty little filly it was—dapple iron-gray, built like Starlight, but on account of the different color utterly unlike her in appearance. Protecting the foal from the coyotes, guarding it with all the mother instincts of the wild, Starlight reverted to her old, untamed condition. With the foal running at her flank, she was soon once more in her old position of authority, running close to the flank of the male that had fought his way to leadership of the herd. It was a tame enough herd, to be sure, of dull, domesticated animals for the most part, but with here and there a thoroughbred or blooded colt, that welcomed the leadership which the little bay mare and the rangy roan stallion provided.

During the hot months of the California summer the grass dried up and died, the streams dried up and vanished, leaving only here and there a muddy water hole that would contain some moisture through the remainder of the dry season. The pasture was eaten out and the owners came to take their stock away.

Never had there been such difficulty in getting horses out of that pasture. So I was told upon my return. The band took advantage of every ravine, of every steep slope, of every crest. Where ordinarily it would have been the work of only a few minutes to drive the herd from the slopes of the pasture to the corner where the corral was, this year it proved an exceptionally difficult undertaking. The first two or three times, it is true, the thing was accomplished without great delay, the desired horses were roped and taken away, and the remainder turned back into the pasture.

Then matters changed. Starlight and the roan stallion constituted themselves the brains of the herd. From the hilltops they watched the approach of any horsemen and whirled the band to safety around brush-covered shoulders. Only with the hardest kind of riding could the band be brought down to the lower levels and forced into the corral.

But the horses had to be taken out; vaqueros had to be found who could turn the difficult trick.

One by one the animals of the herd were roped and led away, until only three horses and two colts remained—the roan stallion, Starlight, and her filly, and a beautiful black mare with a bay colt. The black mare, though speedy, was docile enough, and would doubtless have been caught readily enough had it not been for her foal. The little animal, sensing greater security with Starlight than with his own dam, followed the broncho, and the mother, of course, followed them both.

Finally, however, the black was roped and taken away, and Starlight was left with both the colts—her own and the foster bay.

Then, on a hot, dry day of late summer, the roan stallion was caught off his guard and driven pell-mell to the corral.

Starlight was alone with the two colts. Several efforts were made to remove her, for the pasture was all eaten out, and the owner of the land feared that the animals would die if not taken to better ground. But all efforts to take the trio—the mare and the two young—proved utterly fruitless.

When I returned, just before the first rains, all efforts had been abandoned. Starlight, with the two colts, had been left to die. That she had not died before was the wonder. She was so gaunt that her skin was stretched tight over the ribs, and above the eyes were hollows in which a man might sink his finger. It was during these starvation weeks that the mare, doubtless searching everywhere for food, found the loco which in the end turned her story into a tragic one.

I wanted to get the horse out of the pasture. The little mare meant more to me than I was willing to admit. When an animal, even of as alien an intelligence as that of a horse, comes to you for protection from other men, it means much.

But I found that the mare was a wild thing now, protecting her young in the great pasture, leading them away from danger, pitting her wits, her instincts, against the strategy of the pursuers that would drive her into the corral. I had as many as seven horsemen in one attempt to rope the mare or drive her into the corral in the corner of the pasture, and she eluded them all. It was a marvel.

"If I had not seen it myself," one old horseman told me, and he was a rider of no mean ability, "I would not have believed it. No, sir, not in a hundred years!"

Finally I went to a Mexican of whom I had heard much. He lived a dozen miles away in the San Gabriel valley, and when I found him he agreed at once to catch my mare for me. I doubted his ability. He was overgrown, a man of middle age, whose years had seen the fat accumulate on him until at forty-five he stood a picture of useless indolence—a piglike beast of two hundred pounds.

"Eef I don't catch your horse," he said to me with elaborate courtesy, "you pay me nothing."

I asked him if he wanted help. He only smiled and shook his head. I was skeptical until I saw him mount; but as he slipped into the saddle one could not but feel that here was one of the born horsemen of the world—a man of Spanish blood, accustomed from the cradle to the riding of horses, to plan for their circumvention. Arrived at the great pasture, he trotted alone on his wise old saddle pony—Joker, he called him, and the name fitted well, for the crafty beast had the speed of an arrow combined with the strength of a cayuse, under the heavy burden—from hill to hill, looking for the mare and the colts, and surveying the ground.

Finally he located Starlight and drove her—the colts streaming along behind on either side, down toward the corral. He had realized at a glance the difficulties of the situation, and did not crowd the mare too closely. She doubled around the corner of a hill when half a mile from the corral, and in a flash was headed back into a rocky ravine.

The Mexican trotted on to where I waited and unfolded his scheme. The mare was afraid of the corral, he explained; she had been that way too often: it was useless to try to drive her into it. Instead, we would take down a section of the fence, here. Then I would get out on this side, so, and he would drive her from behind the hill, so. When in this corner she would see the break in the fence and go through. From the pasture adjoining, which was only thirty acres in extent, it would be an easy matter to drive her into the corral. We would take down another section of the fence for that purpose.

The plan was a good one, and, enhanced by superlative riding, succeeded.

But when Starlight and the colts had clattered through the fence and into the smaller pasture—uncognizant of the fact that they had lost, the Mexican rode up to me and flung himself from his horse.

"You mak heem walk," he said briefly. "If he stand still he die." Then he flung himself on the grass.

From the smaller pasture, an hour later, it was a comparatively simple thing to herd into the hated corral.

Then another astonishing thing happened. The Mexican roped Starlight. At the first throw—his roping was scarcely less marvelous than his horsemanship—the loop settled over Starlight's head. We braced ourselves for a tussle.

None came. Starlight had made her fight. Now, having lost, she accepted defeat philosophically. Once the rope had circled around her neck she submitted to the inevitable, apparently recalling all her former unavailing struggles. She allowed him to bridle her and put on the saddle, and when I vaulted onto her back gave only the one or two little bucks to which I had been accustomed, and bolted down the road, whinnying to the colts to follow.

For two months after that all went well. Yarded in a big corral with sunlight and shade, cool clean water, and plenty of well-cured alfalfa, the trio throve wonderfully, putting on weight day after day with a rapidity that astonished the eye.

From time to time, as occasion arose, I saddled Starlight and rode her at my will. And she, for her part, as her strength returned, appeared to enjoy these outings as much as I did, quite as much as could any horse accustomed from birth to the dominion of man. She would whinny at my approach, greeting me like an old friend, and nuzzle about for sugar or other tidbit like a staid old farm horse.

At the end of the month, now that the colts were in fair flesh once more, the man who had owned the black mare of the pasture came and claimed his bay. Since he had a legal, though certainly no longer a moral, right to her possession, he was permitted to rope and drag her away into I know not what tale.

It was also at the end of the month that I first noticed Starlight's tendency to stumble, and racked my brain trying to recall any similar occurrence during the months of the preceding year. For stumbling is rarely an acquired trait. She had traveled always with her feet close to the ground, but always with perfect ease and security. Her most characteristic gait was a loose-footed shuffle, often called a cattle-trot, that took her along at a pace somewhat faster than a walk, raising clouds of powdery dust. But as far as I could recall, in those first weeks she had never stumbled. She had cleared rocks in the rough roads of the mesa above the orange groves by the merest fraction of an inch, it is true; but she had always cleared them.

Now there seemed to be just that fraction of an inch of difference. Instead of being as sure-footed as a cat, I felt that the little mare was, for some unaccountable reason, dangerously apt to stumble. Once she actually went down under me, suddenly and quite unaccountably. Fortunately, we were going slowly, and the place was soft, so no damage was done. I didn't even have a bad fall, nor did Starlight bark her knees.

It was about at this time, too, that I decided, in order to accustom her fully to the proximity and the dominion of man, of all men, to break the mare to harness. She was coming six years old now, the mature dam of a promising gray filly, and was rather old for further work in this line; but she appeared so docile, so intelligent, that I considered it safe to make the attempt.

Beginning at the beginning once more, accustoming the mare bit by bit, through successive steps, first to the strange terror-inspiring harness, then to the intimidating buggy, it was only a matter of a couple of weeks or so before I felt that it would be safe to try driving her. Her old balky streak returned--the streak that she had shown but once or twice in her first breaking, and I felt that I would have to go very carefully with her. I drove her a little, quite successfully, but ever safely. Beyond a certain point she didn't seem to progress. Driving along a deserted road, she would shy suddenly and violently at some object by the roadside--a wheelbarrow, perhaps, or a telegraph pole.

Have you ever noticed what a terrible thing a telegraph pole is, seen from a horse's standpoint? How big it is, how heavy, how long? Suppose now, just suppose, it should suddenly jump and kick you, or drop without warning across your back! I suppose that was how Starlight felt; she would shy violently, and immediately the rattle of the buggy wheels, the still not-familiar tension of the lines and traces, would throw her into an unreasoning panic, and she would revert to the old wild animal, plunging and kicking, tearing to get loose from the noisy chimera on wheels that followed her about like a shadow.

She broke three buggies for me, one after another, each time after an interval of tranquillity that took me off my guard. And the townfolk who had watched the war from the beginning--it was a small town and the horse had proved an absorbing topic of conversation for many months--the townfolk never ceased shaking their heads and saying, in their great wisdom, "I told you so. Once a broncho, always a broncho. That horse

will get him yet. She's a bad one, that mare is."

It was rather inexplicable to me—this sudden halt in the progress that had been so steady during the time of my early association with Starlight. Something seemed to be wrong; the horse was as affectionate as ever, seemed as intelligent, trusted me as completely; her eye was still clear, her fear of all mankind had diminished to a great degree; yet there was a difference. Instead of gaining more ground I felt that I was losing. I tried using her under saddle again, in order to return to the point of her highest efficiency, and found that the stumbling seemed worse than before. She was no longer a safe mare to ride. More docile than formerly, willing to do my bidding instantly, willing to do her best, she was yet unsafe, because unsure on her feet. Once, hurrying her over a three-mile stretch of rough road on an important errand, she gave me a rather nasty fall, going down in a heap in a stretch of smooth, sandy road, from a full gallop.

There were no two ways about it. She was no longer useful as a saddle horse. It was harness or nothing. I continued my efforts to drive her. The balky streak returned and developed; she lay down in the road and refused to budge. I tried every expedient that I knew to break her of balking. All in vain. Once I lost my temper, and that, too, did no good. She appeared, however, to harbor no resentment. In fact, she appeared to be more and more dependent upon me, although her fear of all other humans, which had never entirely left her, began to come back with renewed force.

One of the last things I tried, to break her of balking, was to hitch her tandem behind a huge yellow farm horse. She balked, of course, but the big horse plowed ahead and dragged her with him, her feet scraping furrows in the road. She threw herself on the ground; the big lumbering plug in front merely pushed himself into the collar and went forward, dragging her along the road until in desperation she came to her feet again, fighting like the wild animal she had been when the rope first circled her neck. Finally she flung herself sideways with a terrific leap, as though deliberately bent upon suicidal destruction of the entire outfit. A shaft and one wheel were broken in the mix-up that followed.

I never drove her again. Instead I decided to put her in pasture for a while to allow her to recuperate from whatever her strange malady, if malady there was, might be.

The early rains had started up the grass again in a hill pasture at the side of the valley—not the pasture in which she had eluded all attempts at capture for so many weeks. It was an unfenced cañon area on the lower slopes of the San Gabriel range. Its steep, rounded foothills were covered with various brittle California brush-growths, greasewood predominating, and with here and there tufts of the dry, sweet bunch grass that cattle find to their taste.

In the ravine bottoms the growth was more luxuriant. There young trees grew—cañon oaks and sycamores; quantities of poison oak also, luxuriant with glossy foliage, and near the gurgling streams small patches of lush grass.

Each week I went to look at the mare to make sure that everything was all right, for I had come to care inordinately for the little beast.

I found her always on the alert—wild, watchful, motionless as a statue, ears pricked forward, nostrils wide—and gloried in her beauty. She was always ready to clatter away if I approached too near; ready, that is, until her quick eye, or still keener nostril, assured her who it was that drew near. Once she recognized me she would whinny joyfully and allow me to come up and pet her or feed her sweetmeats, merely shrinking and trembling for a brief instant when I first touched her with my hand; but no other human being could get within a hundred yards of her.

On one of these visits I came across a bad slide through one of the steep little trails on the side wall of a ravine. Evidently the little mare, browsing along the precipitous hillside, had lost her footing and received a bad shaking-up.

Another time I myself saw her go down. I had come around a corner of a hill suddenly and startled her. Without recognizing me she broke into a canter, and almost on the first jump stumbled and fell in a heap, then rose and stood trembling. I went up and looked her over; she had barked her knees.

Shortly after this I began to notice something utterly alien about her. It was as though a second horse stood and looked at me out of her eyes. This strange creature

was a dull, clumsy beast with bloodshot eyes, and no manners at all. I was amazed the first time Starlight appeared to me this way, and at first could hardly believe I was looking at the same horse. The creature did not appear to recognize me and merely endured my advances in a sullen, unfriendly way. I was with a friend that day and asked him to see if he could come near. He did so, quite easily. The mare appeared to be no more afraid of him than of me, until suddenly, when he was hardly a yard from her, she snorted, reared, and plunged off up the hill.

The following week she was my own Starlight again, and whinnied at my approach.

Once she appeared to be both horses, first the half-witted animal, not particularly afraid of anything and friendly to nothing; and a few moments later changing suddenly to the affectionate little mare with her whinny of welcome.

I was troubled about her. What was this strange development? What did it mean? Was I face to face with one of those queer, unbelievable phenomena apparently unreconcilable with scientific knowledge?

I took others to see the mare; they knew no more about it than I: indeed, not half as much. They saw only a scared little red horse that recognized in me her only friend, or a sullen-eyed chunk of a mare that knew no one and cared not, apparently, whether she lived or died.

One day, I took a veterinary, a man who knew horses well and who was thoroughly familiar with Western stock diseases, to the ravine pasture to look at the little mare. We could not find her. For more than an hour we looked, searching branch ravine after ravine throughout the whole of the territory over which she was accustomed to roam. She had never traveled far, staying always near the ravine where we had first placed her, as though almost craving the protection of the corral where her colt, now a fine, thriving yearling, flourished.

At last about to give up the search, I was startled by hearing her whinny, seemingly almost under my feet. I was standing at the edge of one of the smallest ravines, and almost directly below me rose tops of young sycamore trees. We found Starlight lying on her side, wedged in between two bowlders. She had slipped from the opposite side of the gully into a little stream among the sycamore roots, taking a bad fall. It took us some little time to free her so that she could rise. When all was clear she had barely strength enough left to struggle to her feet.

Once a horse is down, it tires; a mare's strength will not last as will that of a cow. "She's in a bad way," said the vet. "She'll probably die if you leave her in here. Better take her back to the corral." We led her home slowly; she followed gratefully enough, stumbling a little. Phelps got behind her and watched her gait closely.

"She's loco," he said when he came up to me.

I was startled. I had heard of locoed horses, had seen a few, but never anything like this. Moreover, I knew that the real loco didn't exist in California.

"No," Phelps answered when I asked him about it, "there's no true loco weed in California, either purple or white, but there is a California rattle weed which is almost the same thing, though not quite so virulent in its effects. I don't think horses go crazy for it as they do for the weed in Arizona and other districts. You know how it goes with cattle there; after they once eat enough of the stuff they refuse to eat anything else and sometimes even die of starvation. Once they get a chance, they go on eating more and more until they die, stark mad. The California weed doesn't catch them like that, but you can see that it's bad enough."

"What's the treatment?" I asked. He shrugged his shoulders.

"Hard to say. Some claim it's curable, some say it isn't. A change of feed always helps. Tell you what—there used to be a vet down Santa Ana way who made a specialty of the thing, first in those States where there is a true loco and later out here. You might get him to come up and have a look. He might suggest something."

I got him, but all he did was to confirm Phelps' verdict. "The mare's locoed, all right," he said. "It is right in the spine. It's a queer-acting thing. Nobody knows any too much about it. It affects the brain and the nerve centers. There, watch now."

He threw a bit of dirt at Starlight, and she trotted off, her head up.

"See her hind feet? That action isn't normal. You can almost always tell a locoed horse that way."

"What's the answer?" I asked. "Isn't there anything I can do?"

"It's worth a try. Keep her in the corral

here and see that she gets only green alfalfa. Then, if she isn't better, switch off and try something else—say dry oat hay. Let me know how you come out."

I let him know. It was discouraging news. The slight lift of the hind feet that we had noticed in her trot became more noticeable. Hardly three weeks passed, after I put her in the corral, before her hind legs appeared to give out. Her hind quarters swayed a little from side to side as she stood, and after she had lain down for a while she was able to rise only with the greatest difficulty.

She was strangely dependent upon me these days, and would whinny for me almost constantly whenever I came, and follow along her side of the corral fence, coming as near to me as possible.

I fought it off as long as I could, hoping against hope. Then one day I went to the corral and found the little mare down. She tried repeatedly to rise, but each time her poor, weak hind legs gave out at the last moment, and dropped her down again into a sitting position that would have been ludicrous had there been anybody by able to laugh. There was nothing to do.

I phoned the vet, getting him by long distance shortly after noon. He assured me that the fight was over.

"Wait a little longer, if you wish, on the chance that she may get up. If she's not back on her feet in the next hour or two, why, anything else would be cruelty."

I spent a bad two hours. Starlight's strength was about gone. By getting my back against her hind quarters when she tried to rise I once got her almost on her feet, but it was useless. The hind legs were almost paralyzed; what small control of them remained with her was slipping rapidly. The flies were terrible; it was a hot day; I got her a pail of water and she drank it greedily, lifting her head and watching me as I appeared with it, and whinnying her thanks.

She was my own little mare now; the strange, dull horse, that terrible creature of the loco weed, had disappeared forever. I gave her some tufts of fresh, green grass, which she appeared to relish mightily, for she whinnied her thanks each time. Then for a little while I sat on my heels by her head, waving off the flies. A buzzard was circling in huge circles overhead.

"Good-by, little horse!" I said, and felt for my revolver.

As I went up to the corral the next day, weighed down with more sorrow than I would suppose any human could feel for a horse, I wondered why it had all been. It seemed so unfair, so useless. This little bay mare, this wonderful thing of beauty, this wild life taken from the great Nevada ranges, hurried down into California, and broken to the will of man—all for what purpose? Nothing had come of it.

The years had traveled overhead. We had had some pleasant rides, Starlight and I. Then I had tried to break her to harness, and failed. Failed? Almost succeeded, rather, although the finger of fate had been pointed at us scornfully while the loco weed took effect.

The little mare, upon the great Nevada range, where the air blew free over bare hills and great empty valleys—a short struggle in the sunny Southland—all for nothing. It was too great a matter to comprehend.

I was startled out of my reverie by a sharp whinny that broke the stillness. It was Starlight's whinny. There was absolutely no mistaking it. Had I been touched by the loco weed, myself? Still wondering what could be the answer, I shook myself and looked about me.

Watching me over the corral fence was the gray filly—Starlight's foal.

GOOD TEACHING: POOR PERFORMANCE

CHAMP CLARK, ex-Speaker of the House of Representatives, did many different things to earn money in his youthful years. One of his desperate resorts was the teaching of singing.

"My lessons were all right," he said, explaining his failure to turn out a Caruso or a Mary Garden, "but the pupils' throats were weak."

'Ard Luck 'Illary

By Charles Somerville

Author of "Angel Face," Etc.

Somerville has given us many a tale of mystery and murder, but in this one he turns to humor and irony for a change. Hard Luck Hillary was a gent of parts, but Dame Fate took peculiar pleasure in playing kill-joy to him

STARTING with a statesman's funeral at ten in the morning and from that on covering for my newspaper a dressmakers' convention in the afternoon, a political banquet at seven, a murder at ten, and a gas-tank explosion at two the following morning, thus arriving at the end of a perfect day in a reporter's life, I sought relaxation at three in the Flea Bag, a little inn situated obscurely off the Bowery but conducted in most comfortable fashion by "One-eye" Geegan for those of his numerous patrons who happened to be out of jail.

One Eye had established the Flea Bag following retirement from the safe-cracking industry. This was due to the miscarriage of a certain job, the premature explosion of the "soup" he would explain to new acquaintances, "carryin' away me port lamp." But whatever indictments were to be laid to the character of his past were not to be charged against One Eye as a host. His goods were honest, the beer and whisky the "real thing," the stews, beef and oyster, which he specialized in serving between midnight and dawn, the recognized hours of toil and disportment of the underworld, were always piping hot, wholesome, and savory.

And if his patrons were curious folk of the shadows, they were, of course, of liveliest interest to a reporter whose duty clearly is to be little brother of the rich and poor, the famous and infamous, to study intensively the humdrum and the picturesque, the comedy and the tragedy of life and all its mixed and intermediate phases—that is, if he is to become any kind of a reporter at all.

On the way back to the eating room I stopped at the little cubby of a bar to have One Eye personally mix my Martini for, believe me, the old safe blower could concoct a wizard of an appetizer even with his good eye shut. And there I came elbow to elbow with Jimmy the Wisecracker. One Eye made the Martini for two, and thereafter I hooked an arm within that of the Wisecracker and piloted him to a cozy corner table as my supper guest.

You couldn't for the life of you look into the youthful countenance of Jimmy under its trig Shepherd plaid cap and figure there was guile back of his boyish grin, nor that aught but good nature could ever glint from his merry blue eyes. But—well, no exposure of the Wisecracker's career is contemplated here anyway. He held my lively interest because he was the oracle, philosopher, and raconteur of the Flea Bag—a gentleman Scheherazade of the crooks' resort. That fair Oriental lass told many a strange and exciting tale, but she had, in my humble opinion, nothing on James.

We hadn't been sitting two minutes at the table when a waiter passing on the other side of the room with a big tray bearing at least a dozen huge "scuttles o' suds" for a large, noisy party in the rear, stumbled in front of a lone man at a small table. The giant tumblers shunted clear of the tray and a cascade of beer and glassware fell upon the lone man. He leaped up, dashing the beer off his legs and scooping it out of his eyes and said much vehemently which nobody would care to print.

"Of course," chuckled Jimmy the Wisecracker, "it couldn't have happened no other way. Not with 'Hard Luck Hillary' sittin' there. If the waiter was goin' to stumble that was the spot he had to do it in—where good ole Hillary was."

"Some bawth, Hard Luck, old boy!" shouted Jimmy. "Eh, what?"

The unfortunate man showed a shock of yellow hair and a florid face in which two blue eyes crackled furiously as he drew away the towel the waiter had fetched him.

"Shut hup, you little hawss!" he yelled back at the Wisecracker. "Go tyke a 'op into 'ell for yourself!"

"Polite guy, ain't he?" grinned Jimmy. "Not but what if I was him I wouldn't be running around foaming at the mouth biting women and children and policemen and chauffeurs every day of my life. There's a guy got a right to be sore on the whole world and then some. I'll tell the world itself all that about Hard Luck Hillary."

"Hard luck?"

"Sure—hard luck is right. Say, feller, exceptin' if you was born blind, crippled, and balmy in the bean all in a bunch, nobody could match up on the hoodoo stuff with this guy Hillary."

Jimmy suddenly waved a hand.

"Good night, old top!"

This time Hillary, who had arisen and was moving away, turned a countenance into which good nature had been restored.

"All right, nipper," he answered. "No 'ard feelings. I'm goin' out to hawsk the loan of a clotheswringer. Ta-ta!"

"Yeh, and I'll bet five smackers against a tack he gets his fingers caught in the rollers," commented the Wisecracker. "I'm telling you, feller, that if that geek wasn't born on Friday, the thirteenth, there was something wrong up in heaven with the dope. Get this—he's only been on earth over there in merry, hold Hingland a few weeks, and you know the tag they fastens on him? Hillary Cecil Albert Edward Binklebinny—honest! Maybe that ain't givin' a guy a flyin' start on the road to ruin?"

The Wisecracker lighted a cigarette and over the flame of the match, remarked:

"The first time I meets this pill," he said, "is one morning when I'm down in the Tombs police court bailin' out some friend of One Eye's that's in a jam for a bit of yeggwork, and One Eye chases me down with the cash to put up to walk the guy out till his trial.

"Hard Luck's there, and he's a prisoner, too. He has both lamps closed, a split lip, and a ragged chip off his left ear. He favors one leg, too, leanin' against the rail in front of the judge, and his clothes is tore to rags.

"And what do you suppose has come off with this guy? Hard Luck, it seems, goes into a restaurant and orders himself some chuck, and while he's waitin' for it he accidentally knocks over the salt bottle and spills a lot of salt on the table. Hillary is as superstitious as a old maid or a gambler. He's got the dope that if you spills the salt it means you're goin' to have a fight. And all Hillary's lookin' for in this world is the peace he ain't never had. So—you know the stuff—if you wants to get out of havin' a fight on account of spillin' the salt, you grabs up some of the salt and heaves it over your left shoulder. That's what Hillary does. Yeh—and the salt goes into the eye of the big, husky waiter bringin' him his chuck. The waiter slams the tray down on Hillary's konk, and while he's got H. Cecil Albert Edward Binklebinny stunned, knocks him for sixty-two touchdowns and twelve gools and makes him what he is that mornin' I lamps him in the Tombs court.

"And that ain't the end of the drammer, neither. When the beak hears the story he don't see nothin' to laugh at about it, the bloke what runs the restaurant bein' a political pal of his, and he turns on ole Hillary and says:

"'You're one of those fresh gents that likes his little joke and thought he was safe pickin' on a poor, hard-workin' waiter to play it on. I've a good mind to fine the waiter for not killin' you. Thirty days!'

"'Why, an' if it please your worship,' begins Hillary.

"'What name is that you called me?' yells the beak. 'Ten days more!'"

The Wisecracker gave a little attention to his oyster stew. Then put down his spoon and shook his head.

"Where a boob with the banshees after him hard as all that ever got up the nerve to turn crooked—forgin' is 'Hlary's graft—is somethin' I'd go to college to find out.

"And me? You'd think after what I lamped myself up in the Tombs court there, I'd have strangled myself when I began to scheme takin' Hard Luck in on a little deep, dark plot o' my own.

"But no. I falls. But I got a alibi to show that I ain't got no dancing mice in my roof. There was nothing to it. The leadin' villain in this here piece o' mine had to be Hillary. On account of that long, skinny shape he's got and those bunch of yellow hair and them long nose and funny, little squinty blue eyes an' his big mouth and buck teeth. And what use he ain't got for his 'h's.' Yep—it just had to be Hillary. I admits I oughter insisted maybe on

Hillary's carryin' a rabbit's foot, touching a humpback's hump and meetin' a cross-eyed coon before goin' on the job—but, hell's-bells, there ain't nothin' no time, nowhere, nohow could never get a toe-hold on Sir Hillary Binklebinny's hoodoo. It's a Dempsey."

The Wisecracker swallowed some more stew, heaved bottom-up a scuttle o' suds, and lighted another cigarette, but there was sorrow, not contentment, in the glance he turned my way.

"It was such a pretty job," he mourned. "Such a pretty job. With any guy for a side-kick that could get half a break out o' luck I'd 'a' pulled one of the best and safest little stunts of berry pickin' the graft ever knew. I sure would!

"You see it's like this way: I'm a nice, neat little inspector of meters for the electric-light company, and what I don't know about the insides of some houses and flat houses, ain't in the architects' designs. Of course, I don't set the yeggs to go up and turn off a dump the next early mornin' after I been inspectin' the meter. I ain't givin' the bulls no such handicap like that. 'Bout a month or two later my friends calls.

"Well, there's a ground-floor apartment I goes into which has a good-looking brass sign on the front door that says 'Madame Loya'—just like that and that's all. This here Madame Loya is by rights Esther Levine, and born in London like 'Ard Luck 'Illary, but when it comes to black eyes and hair and that stuff 'cheek,' she's as French as the blackest coffee you ever saw. She can spill the frog-talk, too. Esther is there with the rep for hairdressin' with a bunch o' the swell dames. She's a professor of henna. She can turn a brunette into a blonde or make a Carmen of a Swede in one somersault—this tricky ladybird. She jakes a lot of loot—about ten dollars a second by a stop watch. And, listen: She hates banks! She's sore on all things what can be called anything like a bank. I'll shoot you the reason for that in a minute. But what I gets to know is that she keeps her pelf on the premises. Yeh—a wise dame like this, but s'welp me! in a sock in a bottom bureau drawer, s'welp me! Ain't it true that sometimes the wiser the woozier about some things?"

The Wisecracker yanked the peak of his trig cap hard over his eyes and leaned across the table. James was getting down to business.

"What?" he demanded. "How do I get this line on madame and her mazuma? Well, not by snoopin' around the dump. No such lob stuff as that. Nix, it's information I gets full and free and without what the beaks calls 'crim'nal intent' from Elegantina, the dinge cook and bottle washer workin' for Madame Loya—a high-class, ninety-dollar-a-month cook, Elegantina tells me she is, but payin' most of it back to madame for maybe with enough treatments forever takin' the kinks out of El's hair—yeh!

"I takes a long look at Elegantina's bean and tells her, sure, it looks right that the madame is putting it over because, honest, I can see for myself the kinks—only I calls 'em curls—is comin' out straight. So, then, ain't I the nices' little white man inspector the 'lectricity company ever done sent to that house, jess the polites' an' most pleasin'? Sure, I am! You try to tell Elegantina to this day any different and a fryin' pan's your answer.

"Then I calls her Cutey and Eleganteenie and sometimes just Teenie, and she weighin' two hundred and twelve pounds falls fine for that. Yep, I gets solid as a rock with this Nubian slave.

"I'm telling you Madame Loya is sore on banks. Yeh, and insurance companies and all them kind of corporations, and when Elegantina tells me why is when Hard Luck gets into the picture.

"First, Teenie asks me one day don't I think a girl fixed like she is ought to have a revolver in the buzzom of her dress all the time, and do I know where I can get her one? It's about on my third visit for the electrical company. And I asks her what she wants the gat for. Teenie says about a month before she walks into Madame Loya's bedroom forgettin' to knock, and there's madame kneelin' in front of a open bottom drawer of the bureau stuffin' a big chunk of yellow bills into a long stockin', and the stockin's bulgin' already way up the knee, Teenie says. First off, Madame Loya is sore somethin' fierce and is goin' to fire Teenie, but then she says maybe it's just as well she saw what she saw—that is, if she can trust Teenie. And the dinge says: 'I'se a hones' girl, ma'am,' and madame says, 'I know you are, my dear, but in case you ain't and this money was ever found missin', I know just who to have pinched, because there ain't another livin' soul knows it's here.

And now you knows you must never let anybody go through the flat when I ain't here. When customers are in the parlor waitin' for me when I'm not in, be sure to stick around.' Teenie asks why she don't put it in the bank, and madame says no, indeed, she don't trust insurance companies, nor trust companies, and banks ain't no better. She'll keep every dollar she lays her hand on right where she knows where she can lay her hand on it again at a second's notice in case of fires or earthquakes or the Germans capture the United States. She's had to work hard enough for that money, she says, and ain't lettin' anybody else play with it.

"'There's more'n five thousand dollars in that stockin',' she tells Teenie, 'and if it wasn't on account of the cheatin' of one of them things, I'd have five thousand more.' 'What—a bank, ma'am?' asks Teenie. 'No, a insurance company. An' it's a cryin' shame!' And then madame busts into tears and spills the whole sad story to Teenie.

"Four years ago madame's husband mysteriously disappeared and the insurance company wouldn't pay up his five-thousand-dollar life policy. Wasn't it a outrage when they must know, if they knew anything, that it could only be death by the submarines which could ever keep her Alexander from her side. And what's more, hadn't she told the insurance company that three times Alexander's spirit had come to her bed in the middle of the night and told her his body was at the bottom of the sea? And didn't she get four messages from him on the ouija board, sayin' the same thing? And a clairvoyant says she saw Alexander plain as plain could be somewhere deep down in the Atlantic Ocean. His arms was stretched out and his face was something pitiful, and he was calling something. What it was the clairvoyant says she couldn't hear on account of all the bubbles comin' out of Alexander's mouth, but she could see by the shapin' of his lips it was 'My darling! My darling!' And the nerve of the insurance company to say they had evidence to show that the last heard of Alexander he was shippin' on a South American tramp after tellin' everybody that would listen to him in four saloons around the dock that the idea the devil had horns and a spiked mustache and was colored red was all wrong—that the devil was a she, and he was escaping from her, submarines or no submarines!

"The wretches, to say such a thing! Whatever little quarrels she and Alexander ever had was their own business, although when he was a electrician and she was a stewardess on a ocean liner and asked her to marry him she certainly didn't know some things about him she learned afterward, and didn't expect to have to be right on the dock at the end of every one of his voyages to snatch him off the gangplank and rush him straight home if she wanted to see any of his pay. Sometimes, perhaps, she had got a little sore thinkin' of how she might have married the second officer instead of a mere electrician, and maybe a few times told Alexander so, and once, only once, so help her Heaven! she had threw a hair brush at him when he told her he wished he had her over in his home in merry, hold Hingland where there was an old-time sayin' about skirts that the 'more you beat them the better they be,' which was lived up to. And if he was dead he must be sorry for all he had made her suffer, and what more natural his spirit would try to make things right by comin' to her and tellin' her his mortal remains was at the bottom of the sea and go collect the policy?

"And there's a beautiful picture of Alexander Dubey—Madame Loya's married name was Dubey—hangin' out in the parlor in a big gold frame with a crape bow tied on it, and would I like to see it, Elegantina asks me. She says madame ain't home, and she knows I'm honest by my eyes, and it's all right for me to walk through the flat, don't I think so? Of course, I says, 'Sure,' nabbin' the chance to get a peek at the layout 'specially with my eye on madame's bedroom with the bureau with the five-thousand-dollar sock in it. An' I does.

"But when I get in the parlor and sees the colored crayon picture of the dear, departed Alexander Dubey, first-class electrician and fourth-class husband, I gets it right away this need be no job for some burglar friend o' mine on a dark night. My rake-off as tipster on those jobs ain't what it ought to be, anyway, the jimmy jerkers figurin' they takes all the risks. No, right there with Elegantina by my side, I figures out another kind of a job entirely—somethin' neat and clever—where I get a fair split of the swag—even Steven, 'awf and 'awf, using my dear friend, 'Illary.

"Sure—there wasn't nothing to it—it had to be Hillary. Alexander up there in the gilt frame with the crape bow is Hillary over

and over, eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth. Same bunch o' molasses-taffy hair, blue eyes, long nose, red face, and everything. All that's missing from Hillary that Alexander's got is long, yellow hair streamers on the upper lip. And I can get the same for Hillary at any theayter-costume joint.

"Now don't think I'm figurin' to put it over on Madame Loya that the dead's come back to life, that this 'Illary's 'er Halexander! Pershush!—it's only in the movies you can bunk a rag with some bird fakin' up to be her long-lost husband! Nix. My dope swings on Elegantina.

"'Well!' I says to the cute little two hundred and twelve pounds o' mahogany at my side, 'you hadn't oughter to be left alone this way with all that money in the bureau and maybe I ought to get you a pistol. Does the madame often leave you alone in the house this way?'

"'Monday and Thursday de whole day long on accountin' she goes attendin' rich ladies in dere country manshuns on Long Island. She done stay out tweil eight and nine o'clock et night dem days,' spills Elegantina, and when she breaks this good news I'm near to huggin' her, dinge or no dinge.

"But I just says, 'I'll sure see about gettin' you that gun, and madame oughter be mighty proud and happy she's got workin' for her such a fine, honest girl like you,' I says.

"After that there's nothing to it, but I gotter have a cup of coffee and a chunk of apple pie of Elegantina's own makings before she'll let me say ajoo. I'm puttin' up no kick at that. This pie of Elegantina's was all to the pazzazza, I'm tellin' you, feller.

"But you can gamble just so soon as I can make my get-away, I goes touring the Bowery lookin' into the Inferno, Cripples Creek, Suicide Hall, and a bunch o' other dumps huntin' for Hillary. Finally I finds him in the Bird's Nest, a chink chow house in Pell Street. Hard Luck's just busted a tooth on a chicken bone in the yat ko mein, but I ain't got the sense to take this for a warnin' and shoots him my proposition. When he hears it he forgets all about the busted tooth and acts like I'm a bag o' money thrown into his lap. He says there ain't nothin' to it how easy he can put the thing over, and I'm his life-saver because he was down to chink grub exclusive and five-cent shock-house booze because he's got rheumatism in both fingers of his left hand what is his writin' hand and things was fierce with him in the forgin' profession. So we crosses over to The Doctor's and signs the contract with about five stiff jolts o' rye each, and Hard Luck says for me to watch. What I'll see, he says, is a worm when it turns. He'll be the worm turnin' on Misfortune and laughin' in her face, that's what he'll be. So I adjourns the meetin', then, because on a sixth jolt of The Doctor's stuff I'd be booked to see laughin' worms myself or maybe think I was one."

II.

The Wisecracker studied the fresh scuttle o' suds I had ordered for him and nodded his strange young head.

"I'd better be drinkin' this down," he said, "before I starts weepin' into it. Brace yourself, Montmorency, there's a sad story comin'. Wise this:

"I gets Hillary his yeller mustache, and down in South Street I gets him a second-hand—I guess it must have been a tenth or fifteenth hand—blue, double-breasted-jacket suit like a mate'd wear, and an' old peaked cap with a little fringe o' gilt left on it where they used to be a band. And when he has this on and the lip streamers and has his molasses-taffy hair combed just the way I seen Alexander's was in the crayon picture—well, I'd almost been willin' to let him go up against Madame Loya herself to say nothin' of Elegantina.

"That Thursday I'm on the ground early and spots Madame Loya leavin' the flat in the morning carryin' a little satchel that's got her hair-dressin' machinery in it, just accordin' to Elegantina's dope that this is one of the days each week she goes out to the rich dames in the Long Island mansions. I'm takin' no chances. I follies her to the Pennsylvania Station and sees with my own eyes she makes her train.

"Then I goes back to Hillary's dump and spends all the rest of the morning and part of the afternoon rehearsin' him in his act. He's good. I'll say for Hillary that if Alexander Dubey himself met him he'd jump back thinkin' he was walkin' into a mirrer. I throws a couple of hookers o' hootch into Hillary and sends him on his way with a slap on the back.

"'Good luck, Haleck!' I yells after him.

"Good luck! Yeh—if I had the dope on Hillary I got now, I'd 'a' choked. I'd be wise it was like wishin' long life to a bloke in the 'lectric chair.

"First crack outer the box, Hillary has a narrer shave. He steps up to Madame Loya's door and presses the button. The door opens and there's Elegantina.

"'What's youse wantin'?' she asks.

"'To see my wife—my beautiful, beloved wife,' says Hillary.

"'Huh?' demanded Elegantina.

"'Yes—I know, my dear girl, hit may be a surprise to yer as hit will be to 'er. But here I am—Alexander Dubey—her husband!'

"He steps in the door then and comes strong into the light. He takes off his cap so's to show the yeller hair and hair comb just like Alexander's picture on the wall.

"It goes stronger than he thinks. The dinge gives a look at him and a look at the picture, and Hillary says Elegantina got the color of yeller pea soup. She starts screamin'. One scream, two screams, three screams, four screams!

"'Hush,' says Hillary in a sharp whisper. 'Hush I sye!'

"'Oh, Mistur Ghos'—*Miss*tuh Ghos', don' tech me! Please, Mistuh Ghos', please, please, please! De lady yo' is wantin' to ha'nt ain't home. I don' know kin a ghos' see clear, but I'se just a darky girl name o' Elegantina, wukks fo' yo' wife—das all I is, Mistuh Alexander Ghos'—dat all!'

"'Quite right, my dear, and a very good girl I can see you are. Look,' says Hillary comin' forward, 'feel my 'ands, quite warm and cozy, and you'll know I'm flesh and blood!'

"'Ow!' bawls Elegantina, 'jess like de spirit meejum lady she done say she seen'um at de bottom ob de sea comin' wid his hands out. But only deys ain't no bubbles fum his mouf!'

"And she screeches again.

"'Shut up!' says Hillary. 'Don't act like a damn fool!' He's hearin' people rushin' down the stairs to see what the yells is about. He jumps forward to grab her in his arms to show her there's a livin' bloke inside the clothes.

"That only makes Elegantina give a final beller you could hear as far as Shantung, and Hillary is standing there with two hundred and twelve pounds o' North Carolina dead faint in his arms when in rushes Mrs. This and Mrs. That and Mrs. Somebody Else from the flats above, and a vawdeville actor out o' work from the top flat and five kids and a delicatessen storekeeper, a tailor, a butcher, a grocer, and a scissors grinder from the street, and then some—only, Hillary thanks heavens, no cop.

"The dames pipes up on the shrieks, the men hollers 'Robber! Murder! Thieves!' the vawdeville actor says, 'Ha—we've took the villain red-handed!' and Hillary yells back at 'em, 'Yer a lot of bloomin' hawsses, that's what you are!' He lays Elegantina out on the floor. 'Shut up a minute, all o' yer, and I'll explain!'

"'Vot you do in dot lady, Maddum Loya's house?' shoots the delicatessen storekeeper.

"'I'm her 'usband, you piece of cheese!' says Hillary, 'an' that's what I'm doing in her house, an' who the 'ell's got a better right?'

"They all shut up then, an' Hillary faced 'em down.

"'How long has madame been livin' in this 'ouse?'

"'Two years and three months and about five days,' says one dame. 'But her husband's dead. Now, what have you got to say about that?'

"'No—thought to be dead,' busts in another dame. 'Gracious, didn't you ever hear the sad story?'

"'I did,' admits the first skirt, 'but I never did think there was no husband anyway. I thought she was coverin' up something, and I ain't sure yet I'm not right—her and her airs. And that big brute of a captain that's always callin' on her!'

"'Here, you!' yells Hillary, 'don't you go a scandalizin' of my wife, you hear! She's as sweet and lovin' an' good an' pure an' splendid and elegant a little woman as ever breathed, from whose buzzum I been torn by the cruel war—submarined and 'eld prisoner—that's what's 'appened to me,' says Hillary. 'A prisoner for four long years an' my lovin' wife thinkin' hall the time I'm dead!'

"Hillary's goin' good now, and he goes better. He throws a glance up at Alexander.

"'Look!' he says, 'look how she's mourned for me! Ain't it pitiful? Crape on me pitcher—crape on me pitcher on the wall!'

"And, of course, there ain't nothing to it when they looks from Hillary to the picture. This gent is sure Alexander, all right!

"'You poor, dear man!' says one o' the dames turning on the weeps, and they all goes to it, and Elegantina what's come out of her trance and has been sittin' up gapin', heaves up on her feet and mooches over and touches him and sees he's all there and sets up a camp meetin' wailin' and shoutin' mixed with a little buck and wing, screamin' 'Halleeluluh—halleeluluh! De daid come back to life—de daid come back to life! My missus' man he come fum de bottom ob de sea, glory ob de Lord!'

"And the vawdeville ham throws back his hair and clenches his hands and says: 'My Gawd! what a dramatic situation! I must write it for the movies!'

"Hillary's swellin' around now and smilin' and forgivin' everybody until he happens to look at the door again an' he gulps. There's a big cop eyin' Hillary with a scowl. He bleats out he wants to know whose murdered or wat'ell it's all about? But six o' the Janes jumps for the flatty and fills him full of all the explanations he's lookin' for, and he waves his club at Hillary and says, 'Welcome home, stranger, and good luck!' And Hillary tells me he blows a kiss of acknowledgment to the bobby as the guy departs.

"'Ah,' says Hillary, 'this is a 'appy moment to find myself once more in my 'ome and among friends. But the 'appiest moment is still to come when I clawsps my lovin' little wife in these arms! Don't weep for me, ladies, the grief and hardship of four long years isn't too great a price to pay for the 'appiness of the present!'

"Then he gets down to the stuff him and me writes the words and music for.

"'It was in latitude forty-seven, longitude one 'undred and twelve by the log,' says Hillary, 'when——'

"'How comes it?' snaps in one of the hickeys—you know, rags, dames, skirts, Janes—'how comes it you disappeared so mysterious without a word to your wife? Wasn't that cruel, Mr.—er——'

"'Captain, ma'am, Captain Alexander Dubois, now, ma'am, V. C. M. C., and recommended for further promotion. No, ma'am, not cruel. No, don't say that, ma'am! Patriotism, it was, ma'am, sudden, fierce, flamin' patriotism surges in me breast at the very beginnin' o' the war and old Hingland—the life of old Hingland is threatened, ma'am! I must inlist, I must get into the fightin'! But 'ow to tell me wife of me determination? I cawn't! We've been that lovin'. It'll kill 'er, the thought of me in danger. So I leaves the house givin' 'er just a kiss, and with a smile on me lips, knowin' not to what foul death my fate'll take me. I jumps aboard a merchant ship and am greeted with cheers when they finds I'm goin' to go into the fight for me country. You see, I'm thinkin' all the time as 'ow soon as we gets out to sea I'll send me dear—me—er—dear wife a message of farewell. I'll hawsk 'er to be brave for my sake. But, swelp me! we 'adn't got two steps hover the three-mile limit when up pops a sub an' cracks off our wireless with 'er deck gun. And there I was! What could I do? 'Ow could I send me precious one the message of farewell? I leans against a—a funnel and bursts into tears!'

"'Wasn't it terrible in them German prison camps?' puts in a skirt, her voice chokin'.

"'Awful!' says Hillary.

"The dames was all ready to cry, and one old gal slips out and comes back with half a glass of rich, old booze.

"'My husband would kill me if he knowed I touched his bottle, but my heart ain't marble—here,' she says to Hillary.

"'No, ma'am, your 'art ain't marble,' responds Hillary after shootin' the jolt, 'hit's pure gold, ma'am.' And he gets up and bows.

"The vawdeville ham lets out a piteous cough, but the old gal turns on him and says:

"'Not if you was dyin' I wouldn't dare touch another drop of it out of that bottle.'

"And then Elegantina butts in:

"'Yo' po' Mistuh Captain Alexander,' she says, 'yo' just waits a little bit and dis here darky gal's goin' to give you something fine for that po' stahved stomach ob yose—yes, she is!—fried chicken and yams and waffles drippin' wiff honey and coffee an'——'

"'Hurry to it, my dear,' nods Hillary, 'and I can tell you something that's goin' to happen two minutes after my wife gets 'ome, and that is your wages is goin' to be increased.'

"'I'se mos' natcherly deep obliged, Mistuh Captain, suh,' says Elegantina, pullin' a bow heaved up from the days of slavery, and goes out to skirl the skillet.

"There's three more dames goes up and taps their husbands' hootch reservoirs in

the good cause of Hillary, and the vawdeville ham leaves the room bitin' his wrist.

"And Hillary tells 'em how when the armistice is signed and he makes his getaway to old Hingland, the first thing he has to do is be took straight up to the king and George pins medals on him, and how the Prince of Wales tells him to be sure to look him up when he's touring over here and they'll have a night of it, and how his wife changes her address and the whole British secret service is put to work to find out where she's livin' and that's how Hillary knows where to come—only the secret-service men didn't tell her anything about it—figuring he'd rather give her the surprise himself—which was true.

"And they all follies him inter the dinin' room, and Elegantina has outdid herself, and they sits around smiling and almost breakin' out into applause at every bite Hillary pushes into his trap. And you can't blame Hillary for figurin' that at last he has ole Mister Hoodoo bitin' the dust.

"The hard luck is with the husbands in that flat house, for some one of the Janes goes up, taps her husband's belongin's for a couple o' good Havana ropes, and you're hep, I hopes, that Hillary's havin' one grand afternoon and evenin'.

"Now I ain't mouchin' nor grouchin' because he kind o' forgets the passin' o' time and what the hell he's in the house for anyway. But after a while it comes to him, there's a money sock waitin' to make it a perfect day, and the boy is there with salve. He makes 'em all a bow.

"'My gratitude is deeper,' he says, 'than I could ever express. Never was people more kind to a unfortunate man. But,' he says, 'would you think me rude if I now hawsks you to withdraw? My 'eart is in a turmoil. I'd like to sit alone and collect my emotions—I'd like when my lovin' wife arrives 'ome she'd find me alone. I'd like us to be alone just then. Them will be sacred moments.'

"The skirts all gets up and dabs their eys and shakes his hand, and so does all the storekeepers just rememberin' they been out o' their stores all that time, but the kids they has to drag away from Hillary by the neck.

"And when they's gone Hillary beams on Elegantina, and he says, 'My dear, your cookin' is wonderful—simply wonderful, my dear. I injoyed everything most immensely. And now,' he says, 'how about a little nap for me till my dear wife comes 'ome?'

"'Yes, suh, Mistuh Captain Alexander, yes, suh. You kin maybe,' says Elegantina, who ain't goin' to be no piker on the welcome-home stuff, 'jess go right in madame's room and shed yo' shoes and tek yo' sleep on her baid.'

"Hillary ain't sure though but what Elegantina, knowin' about the sock o' money in the bottom bureau drawer, might get uneasy and keep watch on him in that room, so he comes back:

"'No, thank you. Right 'ere on this comfortable lounge in the parlor will do for me, thank you. But you might turn out the lights'—did I spill that the afternoon has wore away and the moon's been out a quarter of an hour?—'I cawn't sleep in the light, it 'urts me eyes.'

"'Yes, suh, Mistuh Captain Alexander; yes, suh.'

"'And if you don't mind, there's a good girl, you might close the kitchen door so the rattle of the dishes when you are a-washin' 'em won't disturb me sweet dreams of meetin' me wife again after all these years. 'Ow often I dreamed of it in the dreadful German prison camps, never thinkin' I'd ever 'ave a chawnce to meet 'er this side of 'eaven!'

"'Yes, suh, Mistuh Captain Alexander, suh,' says Elegantina, snappin' off the lamps with weeps in her own. 'Yes, suh.'

"So there's Hillary alone in the dark, the dining-room door cuttin' off Elegantina in the kitchen and her a-wrastlin' with noisy dishes. Yeh—you bet—it's Hillary's time to snoop and cop. He sneaks into madame's bedroom, and he works soft and patient on the bottom bureau drawer so it don't never make a squeak nor a creak openin' wide enough for Hillary to stick his mitt in. It falls right away on a fat, stuffed stockin'. He has it out, is up and sneakin' back to the parlor when he stops short in his tracks like somebody pushed a gun against his head in the dark. The electric bell of Madame Loya's flat rings sharp and long.

"Hillary's got to make his bean work fast. It's too dark to see where to hide the money sock and the sock's too blame long and big to shove into his pocket or hold under his coat. Hillary feels his old hoodoo chokin' him again when it comes to him that this here mate's suit I prig for him to dress in to be Alexander was made for a damn fat

mate. One shove and the trick is done. Hillary's got the money sock in the seat of his pants. He's over on the lounge snorin' in the dark when Elegantina comes through to answer the doorbell.

"'Hello, there,' says a voice when the smoke opens the door. And Hillary says it's the deepest, roughest voice he ever heard in his whole, awful life.

"'Well, my lan', captain, suh, how does you do?'

"'Fine,' this guy barks. 'Where's the missus?'

"You knows, captain, suh, dis yere is one ob her late nights—yessuh.'

"'Not to-night,' he barks again. "I got an appointment at seven. She's to be in early. I'll step inside and wait.'

"'Er—er—captain, suh, you cain't!' stalls Elegantina.

"He let a yell out o' him that lifted even Elegantina off her feet.

"'Can't come in? Why not? Where do you get that stuff, yeller girl—can't come in? I—can't come in?'

"'Well, leastways,' says the smoke, shaky in the pipes, 'cause maybe youse wouldn't wanter.'

"'Why wouldn't I?'

"'Case a mos' wonderful thing done happened, captain, suh. 'Case madame's longlos' husband done come back from the daid.'

"'What, that low, wife-desertin' rummy of a sea swipe, Alexander?'

"'Yessuh, Mistuh Captain, yessuh.'

"'Where do you get that dope?'

"Hillary is rememberin' with a sinkin' heart that there's no front fire escapes on this flat, him hearin' this guy what by his roar must be ten feet high and weigh five hundred pounds repeatin' to the dinge:

"'Where do you get that dope?'

"'Case the gemmun done bin hyah all de afternoon.'

"'Gentleman—hell! He was?'

"'He am.'

"'He is? Where?"

"'In dere?'

"'What, in the dark—waitin' for her in the dark, hey? Waitin' in the dark so he can choke her and take her pocketbook and make another get-away—that's all he'd ever come back for, the wife-beatin', wife-desertin'——'

"Here Hillary takes what looks to him like the only way out. He hops up and turns on the lights.

"'Ere, 'ere!' he says. 'What's all this infernal noise in me 'ome?'

"And then he seen the bloke. Yeh, Hillary says, the voice was no lie. This here's a snarlin' giant in a Canadian captain's uniform, and Hillary says he looks like he might have just got through lickin' the German army single-handed, and intends to pick on Hillary next. Hillary ain't left guessin' about that.

"'So,' says this guy stalkin' into the room and turnin' his head a little to a side so it won't bunk against the chandelier, 'you chewed-up, spit-out hunk of nothin' at all—you've come back, hey? You've got the *nerve* to come back? Just as the sweet woman you once deceived into marryin' you, you yeller-haired walrus, is gettin' everything fixed nice to have you declared legally dead, collect the insurance, and marry me and live happy—you—you've *come back?* I'm tellin' you, you dirty dud,' he says, pushin' a fist bigger'n Hillary's head under Hillary's beazer, 'you ain't goin' to get away with it. See? That dear little woman is goin' to collect that insurance money if I have to go to the electric chair to see it through—you mush-faced excuse for a giraffe!'

"This here Elegantina, though, is true to Hillary.

"'You-all shouldn't talk dat-away to dis gemmun, Captain Ironsides,' she says. 'He am a captain, too, and done fit brave in de war.'

"Captain? What of? The Barleycorn Fusiliers? Fighter, hey? Well, let's see if he can fight now!'

"'Stop!' says Hillary, puttin' up his mitt solemn. 'You forgets, sir, you forgets yourself—forgets you is talkin' to a sick and wounded brother-in-arms, one that's been submarined, wounded, and 'as endured the torments and tortures and 'ardships of the 'orrible German prison camps.'

"'And ain't dead yet? What a shame!'

"'Aw, now, dass wrong and heapish cruel, Mistuh Captain Ironsides, suh,' butts in Elegantina.

"'Hush, girl,' says Hillary, for all the time he's thinkin' what for does he want to get sore and get in a jumble with the captain what's got it on him in reach, weight, and a right to be there? All Hillary wants is out—out carryin' what's sag-

gin' the fit o' his pants. 'Captain Hironsides,' says Hillary, 'if it's true, as you says, that in my unfortunate, enforced absence after surviving submaarine dangers, and prison camps, my wife has allowed her 'eart to pass into the keeping of hanother, I 'ave no wish to see her more. I leaves, and I leaves now and——'

"'Right,' says the captain, 'you got ten seconds to do it in, Aleck.'

"'Girl, tell me wife,' Hillary sobbed, 'I'm to be found at the—the'—Hillary ain't goin' to let the other guy get away with everything—the Waldorf-Hastoria! I'll not return until she sends for me.'

"'Hey, you!' yells the big captain, 'don't you go appealin' to her pity, you dirty swipe!'

"'I have nothing to say to you, sir, excepts you forgets the dignity due to the uniform you wear—his majesty's uniform, Captain Ironsides.'

"With that Hillary turns dignified toward the outside hall door—the last jab kind of jolkin' the burly brute to the ropes. But there's a quick twist of the lock and the door flies in and bumps Hillary on the snoot. An' with it comes Madame Loya.

"'Where is he?' she's yellin', 'where's the wretch—and the insurance company just about to settle!'

"You're wise, of course, that the Janes was layin' outside waitin' to break the news to her—breakin' their necks to slip her the gossip 'cause it breaks their hearts if they don't. So Madame Loya knows her long-lost has came back.

"Hillary just gets out of the way of another collision—with Madame Loya instead of the door—and, doin' it, has to back out into the light.

"'Oh, she says, and 'O-o-o-oh!' she says, 'you villain, you rum-soaked, vile reprobate and viper that deserted a decent, trustin' woman and now has come back because maybe he hears she has a few pennies laid by. What right has yer to come up out of the bottom of the sea just as the insurance company begins to believe there's where you are, what——'

"But Madam Loya of a suddent gets lockjaw. She peers close at Hard Luck.

"'Why,' she says, glarin', 'you ain't my Alexander—er—my Alexander that was,' she puts in quick, with a neat look at the big captain.

"'He ain't!' booms the big gun.

"'Certainly not! Aleck was bad enough, Heaven knows, but to think I'd ever have been fool enough to marry any such contraption as this—why—lookit!'

"What this Jane does—you couldn't expect to fool a expert in that stuff—is, reaches out and brings away half o' Hillary's mustache.

"'It's false!' she yelps.

"'Maybe,' says the big captain, 'his golden hair is, too!'

"And Hillary says what it might as well of been false because the cap with a horrible yank brings most of it away in his hand, anyway.

"'What the devil's the meanin' of this?' asks the captain, backin' Hillary to the wall and bumpin' his nut against it, and Hillary says he seen smoke comin' out of the cap's nose and ears.

"'Yes,' says the spitfire little madame, 'what does this mean, masqueradin' around like my poor, poor dead husband?'

"You gotter give it to Hillary. He deserves better of this world than he gets, that geek does. He's there with the headpiece.

"'I'm ashamed of myself, ma'am,' he says.

"'You oughter be!' says she.

"'What have you gotter say before you lies dead on the doorsill?' belches the cap.

"'Please—pahdon—may I explain. My conscience 'urts me ever since I was drawed into it. But what could I do? I 'ad to obey orders. I has a wife and eight children at 'ome to support and succor,' he says. 'When the order came to come up 'ere and pertend to be your 'usband, ma'am, I had to do it.'

"'Who give such an order?' yawps the cap.

"'Who dared?' squeals madam.

"'The rotten insurance company, ma'am, that's who! And it's the lawst piece o' dirty work I'll ever mix in, swelp me! Yes'm, they compels me to adopt this 'ere disguise and show myself around yer neighberhood and your 'ouse, so's if you brings suit they can bring all your neighbors up for witness 'as 'ow your 'usband was seen 'auntin' the premises in flesh and blood. It's a contemptible trick they put me up to, ma'am, and it hurt me conscience to play in such a 'orrid game and I made up me mind to wait 'ere and see you, and if you looks a good, decent lady like I can now see you

are, ma'am, and not a crook—some people I wasn't sure of that I met 'ere before you came in,' says Hillary with just a peek at the cap, 'I made up my mind I'd expose the 'ole thing, I did, swelp me!'

"'Just like that swindlin' company,' says madam, some bitter. 'Anyway, this creature is better than Alexander ever was. He's willin' to do something, anyway—no matter how low and vile and mean and contemptible it may be—something, anyway, for his wife and family.'

"'You look here,' says the cap, 'here's a pencil and paper. You put down your name and address. Remember you'll be called as a witness, and Heaven help you if you don't show up and testify the truth for this lady here!'

"'I'm only too willin' to expose the 'ole rotten concern, even if I starves for it,' says Hillary, writing down the name and address of a bartender he knows what'll never swing 'im for the drinks.

"'And now,' says the Canuck giant, 'get out!' And ups his foot.

"But Hillary's on the bounce too quick and the cap misses. But Elegantina don't. She's waitin' for Hillary in the hall. She lands square and full, and Hillary lands rights out on the middle of the sidewalk. But he comes up smilin'. Where Elegantina landed Hillary was padded.

"Well," said the Wisecracker, "we're dated to meet here at the Flea Bag when the dirty work is did, and Hillary doesn't lose any time gettin' here. He's so excited he's chewin' on the other half of the phony mustache. He spits that out and says wildlike:

"'Ho, Jimmy, old dear, I got it—I got it—'ooray!'

"With that he makes a swift reach behind and drags out the sock stuffed plump and fat clean above the knee like Elegantina tells me it was. I looks around the dump, and they's nobody around we can't trust, so I says:

"'Go ahead, Hillary, spill the swag right on the table here!'

"He holds the stockin' toe up and gives it a yank. Then he stares blank at what tumbles out on the table.

"'My eyes!' yips Hillary. 'I say, you know! What's this?'

"I'm starin' down at the table like a blip my own self.

"Where we expects to see rolls of yellerbacks—twenties and fifties and all that—what spills out is a lot of little chunky packages done up in newspapers and tied with red-and-white cord with white labels stuck on 'em that's marked 'Brown' 'Gray,' 'Silver,' 'White,' 'Gold,' 'Chestnut,' and like that. Hell an' hootchamacooch! I finds out on my next inspection trip about this stuff in the packages. Elegantina tellin' me all about the excitin' afternoon. What did yer expect? Sure, Hillary grabbed the wrong sock. Instead o' the silk leg o' money, he's reached out in the dark and hopped off with a stockin'ful of combin's what madame saves from the beans of her customers and sells to the wigmakers! What's the use?

"An', can you beat it, what happens still to Hard Luck that night? We both sits here and gets plastered to the eyes tryin' to forget it, and Hillary finally blows and staggers into his room in the dump he lives at, and he ain't got no ambition to take off his clothes. He just chucks his hat on the floor and throws himself at a big white patch in the center of the room. And he never stops fallin' till he brings up with a helluva bump. What's happened is, Hillary's landlady moves the bed to another side of the room and ain't told Hillary. And when he gets home fixed like he was, he sees the white patch where the bed used to be and—yeh, breaks his arm tryin' to go to sleep on a moonbeam. Honest," said the Wisecracker, "if I'm lyin' I hopes I turn into a nut sundae or a custard pie."

THE WORST OF ALL JOBS

LITT MALLORY, the Solomon of Virginia, announced to his circle the other day: "The worst job I know of is listening to no-count men who are always saying this life ain't worth living and they'd be better off dead. The live ones don't mean what they say. If they did mean it, they'd kill themselves. The only truthful ones in the crowd are the suicides—and suicides don't report back to us."

The Master Key

By Francis Metcalfe

Author of "Treasure of Trebizond," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

Her father's death leaves Kathleen Hempstead with little money in New York, and she tries vainly to obtain work while her small store of cash dwindles. She is a tall brunette, with beauty of face and form, and this fact, together with her manner of writing in answer to an advertisement, causes her to be engaged by a man who tells her his name is Ware. She is to wear costly dresses and jewels, and, on occasions, a ruby in the center of her forehead, and appear with her employer in public places. Soon after this a man who gives his name as J. Blackthorn Smith, of Denver, establishes a credit with the brokerage firm of Loftbury & Senlis, and makes a profit of thousands of dollars in Monometal stock, against their advice. He then disappears from the financial district. Later, Miss Hempstead appears, gorgeously gowned, with a Mephistophelean-looking man, at Fragonard's, a fashionable restaurant, and attracts much attention. Loftbury and Regan, another financier, are among those who observe the striking couple, and Loftbury predicts that if the mysterious beauty attends the opera she will dim the glory of the star, Trixie Tricastle.

At the opera Miss Hempstead does attract so much attention that she creates a sensation. Miss Tricastle herself is affected, and when she describes to the audience a battle among aviators in which "her Darcy" is engaged, she falls in a faint. The explanation of her knowledge of what is going on at the front in France is that she has "gone *fey*," as the Irish say of those who are for a time gifted with psychic powers. Kathleen Hempstead becomes fearful of the power over her of Ware, and the couple continue to be the theme of conversation in financial and social circles. Loftbury and others plot to obtain control of Ajax, a powerful concern making munitions of war, and known as a "war bride."

(A Four-Part Novel—Part III)

CHAPTER X.

LOFTBURY'S heart was not in the business which Regan and his associates had placed in his hands, but he dared not refuse it. He knew that their advance information was accurate and that gaining control of Ajax at anywhere near the present quotations would result in a tremendous profit. The corporation was a "war bride" which had enjoyed a hectic financial honeymoon following the landing of tremendous Russian contracts. The stock had soared, the capacity of its plants had been doubled and redoubled; the company's paper profits were enormous until the rapid decline of Russian credits suddenly brought them down to the vanishing point. There was no question as to the quality of the ammunition which it produced and the other Allies would eagerly have absorbed the entire output, but with the allegiance of Russia already wavering they dared not furnish further pretext for discontent by entering into competition, and they were equally wary of bolstering a credit which might result in a tremendous quantity of very superior ammunition falling into hostile hands should Russia change sides. The corporation had been forced to borrow heavily, its financial assets, consisting largely of unsecured claims against Russia, were shrinking day by day, and the stock had steadily declined, and finally slumped until it hovered about fifty, with small and infrequent sales.

But while the stock was practically motionless at the low level, it was jealously watched, for both the speculative and investing public realized its possibilities under changed political conditions. Its manipulation would require the greatest skill; just such an operation as Loftbury ordinarily delighted in, but one which under the present circumstances he hesitated to undertake. It was tacitly understood that his firm should take a very considerable financial interest in any of the large operations which it carried on for the

Wholly Trinity. Ostensibly it was a privilege and granted as a favor; in reality it was a safeguard adopted by that suspicious trio to insure the loyalty of their agents. For financial reasons, Loftbury should have welcomed the opportunity for a quick clean-up; for several months the market had gone steadily against him in his private ventures, and a long inactivity in the speculative market had cut the customary profits of the firm heavily.

Had his interview with Regan before the opening of the Exchange been face to face, instead of over their private telephone wire, it is probable that the proposed operation would have been postponed, abandoned, or intrusted to other guidance, for Loftbury's face plainly betrayed a loss of confidence and a lack of decision which indicated a weakened nerve. But his voice was steady enough, and Regan, warned by his morning cables of impending events which made speed imperative, curtly ordered him to "Cut loose and go the limit!" and effectually silenced protest by hanging up the receiver. Loftbury pulled himself together and penciled the memorandum of the selling order which would be the opening gun of his campaign. The entrance to his private office was carefully guarded, he had given explicit orders that he was not to be disturbed, but from the moment he put pencil to paper he had the uncomfortable feeling that he was not alone. A glance about the office reassured him, but when he again turned to his desk he shielded the pad on which he was writing with his left hand, so strong was the feeling that prying eyes were peering over his shoulder to surprise his secrets and anticipate his plans. It was not until that memorandum had been sealed in an envelope and sent by a messenger to their floor representative that he was free from the sensation of an invisible and intangible espionage, and the memory of it was so vivid that he systematically searched the room, peering beneath and behind the furniture, examining the telephone booths and even exploring the interior of the private vault.

"By Jove, I'm getting the willies!" he exclaimed irritably when the negative result of his search, which should have reassured him, failed to shake the vividness of his hallucination. "Confound that business last night! I feel as if I had taken three times as much champagne as I really needed." A nervous glance at his watch told him that it still lacked ten minutes of the opening hour of the Exchange, and, picking up his hat, he slipped quietly, almost furtively, out through a private exit to the street and in a quiet buffet broke the habit of years by gulping down a cocktail liberally fortified with absinth. He was back in his office, the ticker tape between his fingers, when the instrument recorded the opening transactions on 'Change, and he frowned as he read the record of the sale which he had ordered. His thousand shares had been taken in three lots: two hundred at forty-nine, a point below the closing on the previous day; three hundred at fifty, and less than a minute later the remaining five hundred at fifty-two

Through the succeeding hours Loftbury fought a steadily rising market with every trick and artifice at his command. Rumors of an impending receivership spread like wildfire through the financial district, the news that the Industrial Trust had flatly refused the application for another loan leaked out and was spread broadcast by the private wires of the firm, and the imminent closing of the large New England plant because of labor troubles was predicted in authoritative circles. The five thousand shares with which he had expected to depress the quotations were skillfully fed out during the first two hours and, following the tip that Loftbury and Senlis were selling Ajax, their following of professionals unloaded twice as many more; but instead of breaking the stock rose steadily. Loftbury snatched a hasty bite of luncheon, against all precedent prefacing it with another cocktail. No one in the Street controlled more accurate sources of information than did he, but for once they served him only in a negative way. He discovered who were *not* buying Ajax, for the professional traders were afraid of it and left it severely alone. There was no contradiction of the depressing rumors which had been set afloat and no reassuring ones to counteract them, but the representatives of a dozen of the leading brokerage firms snapped up every share which was offered. The closing quotation was seventy-eight, and Loftbury & Senlis were short twenty thousand shares, with every prospect of a further advance at the opening of the market. That shortage, as such things are reckoned in the Street, was comparatively small, but it was dangerous for the reason that it represented such a large

percentage of the total capitalization of Ajax.

Loftbury derived little comfort from his quick analysis of the day's trading, for there was no record of a single large transaction to suggest the operation of a professional bull clique. The bulk of the sales had been made through their offices, but the buying had been in comparatively small lots by firms recognized as the brokers of the trust companies which handled investment accounts—conservative firms which did a strictly commission business. Given sufficient time, he would have been able to trace those transactions back to the original investors, but that could not be done overnight, and he must be ready for decisive action at ten o'clock on the following morning. He knew that there could have been no leak of information from their own office, for even to Senlis he had confided but a small part of the truth and their speculative following had run true to form; unloading Ajax on a rising market for no better reason than that Loftbury & Senlis, their financial bellwethers, were on the bear side. Study it as he would, he could find no tangible clew to the influence which had so effectually worsted him on the opening day of the campaign. The memorandum before him showed that to cover their shortage at the closing quotation meant a loss of approximately a quarter of a million, which would have been a small matter had his manipulation accomplished the expected result. With accurate knowledge of the identity of his adversaries it would still be simple, for through their powerful control of credits the Wholly Trinity could have curbed them. And then, sitting at his desk in his private office behind securely locked doors, Loftbury's ruddy face suddenly went white and his hands instinctively covered the memorandum he had been studying as he glanced furtively and apprehensively over his shoulder. He was alone; after he had locked the door a second careful and complete search had convinced him of that before he put pencil to paper, but, in spite of the evidence of his senses, he could not rid himself of the feeling that he was watched by invisible eyes.

With an oath he crumpled the paper beneath his hands, twisting it into a spiral which he set ablaze, holding it until the flame scorched his finger tips, and then grinding the charred remnants viciously into the heavy rug with his heel. With the destruction of that paper, which in cold black and white had demonstrated the danger of failure in the business instrusted to him by the Wholly Trinity and his personal financial ruin, came a measure of relief from his immediate apprehensions, the hallucination of espionage vanished, but it left him strangely nervous and unstrung.

Loftbury had consumed a most unusual amount of champagne on the previous evening, and he awakened after a troubled sleep with a bitter taste in his mouth and a dull pain above his eyes. The stimulants he had taken had given him momentary relief, and the excitement of the battle he had directed by messenger, telephone, and telegraph from his private office had buoyed him up, but with the closing of the Exchange the realization of a defeat which to-morrow might intensify to actual disaster left him with badly shaken nerves. The unaccustomed absinth had proved a disastrous experiment; the stimulating effect of its first, quick-acting alkaloid had worn off to be replaced by the second slow but sure poison with its inevitable depression. He started violently at the sharp, insistent ringing of the telephone instrument on his desk. He pulled himself together as his hand mechanically took the receiver from the hook; forgetting for the moment that the instrument connected with Regan's private wire was in one of the sound-proof booths, he anticipated listening to a few caustic remarks from that gentleman, but it was not the familiar metallic voice which came to his ears. Instead, it was suave and soft, but even through the medium of the telephone Loftbury detected a subtle note of mockery.

"I suppose that by this time you have figured up about where you stand on the day's business," it said. "I just called you up to let you know that I'll be ready to take up all of the Ajax you have to offer to-morrow. Good-by!"

An unmistakable click in the receiver warned him that the connection had been broken, and with a trembling hand he hung up his own instrument. He could not place the voice, although he would have sworn that he had heard it before, but on the blank wall at which he stared his imagination conjured a sufficiently distinct vision: the face of a man swarthy of skin and with a thin aquiline nose suggesting a predatory bird, a Mephistophelean mustache and goatee, and

long, black hair falling almost to his shoulders! Gradually that face changed; it remained identical in form and outline; the beady, snakelike eyes still stared at him malevolently, but the long hair vanished to be replaced by white bristles *en brosse* and mustache and imperial blanched! With a half-strangled exclamation which might have started either as an oath or a cry of terror, Loftbury rose from his desk and, although the buzzing of the bell in the booth proclaimed that this time it was Regan calling him, he disregarded the summons and, grasping his hat, passed hurriedly through the private entrance to the street.

Again he had recourse to the artificial stimulus of absinth, and then, without returning to his office, jumped into a waiting taxi; but for the first time in many a day his business perplexities and anxieties rode with him as he left the financial district behind him. Almost regretfully he remembered that Miss Tricastle was dining with him that evening, for he would have much preferred to be foot loose, at liberty to look in at the half dozen different places where society dines on the chance that in some one of them he might encounter the mysterious couple of the previous evening. At any rate, he would establish the man's identity by questioning Otto, and he directed the chauffeur to drive to Fragonard's. For good and sufficient reasons, Otto was devoted to him; he always tipped lavishly, in addition he had more than once dropped hints on the market which had proved profitable, and, above all, his unerring skill in ordering a dinner and his sure taste in vintages appealed sympathetically to the expert maître-d'hôtel.

"Monsieur Loftbury, I am desolated that I cannot tell you!" exclaimed that suave functionary in unaccustomed but obviously sincere embarrassment in answer to his curt demand for information. "The reservation was made by my confrère, Auguste, of the Café Doré—and you will understand, monsieur, that such a request I honor without question. *Bien*, I reserve the table and later comes the order for the dinner; a *chef d'œuvre*, monsieur, believe me! Auguste have neglect to give me the name of his client—*mais, mon Dieu!*—the menu he have select, that is sufficient; of a verity he is a *gourmet; a bon vivant!* Immediately I am intrigued——"

"Cut that out, Otto; I'm interested in the man, not his appetite!" interrupted Loftbury irritably. "Who is he?"

"Ah, my dear monsieur; for the first time since the colonial room is open to its clientele so distinguished, I am unable to answer to such a demand!" protested Otto, his shoulders almost on a level with the top of his head in the emphasizing shrug. "Even his nationality I cannot tell of a surety; he speak the French perfectly, but not the French of Paris *d'aujourd'hui*. On the moment he compliment me on the service so perfect and the cuisine so excellent, I ask of him his name; that he may again find a table reserved. He smile and say, '*Voilà; mon carte de visite;*' but it is a gold certificate of twenty dollars which he gives to me."

Loftbury looked at him suspiciously.

"You could have had five times that from any one of a dozen climbers for reserving that table last night," he said, and Otto smiled and bowed.

"Of a surety, monsieur; but it would not have been offered with the grand manner, you will understand. *Ecoutez*, Monsieur Loftbury; when the gentleman and madame, his so beautiful companion, have made the departure I can no longer contain my curiosity. I rush to the telephone; I demand to speak to my confrère, Auguste, of the Café Doré. *Sacre nom d'un ragout*—Auguste has made the depart for France at five o'clock on the *Tarascon—voilà!* And to-day I have been ask the questions by *tout le monde*—Mrs. van Sturtevant, by Mr. Bulango, Mr. Devereux, Mr. Hemingway; by many, many others. Now, Monsieur Loftbury, I am more than before desolate, for I believed that you might tell me."

"Why?" asked Loftbury sharply, and Otto smiled.

"Because always monsieur knows the strangers distinguished," he replied. "Also, the gentleman knew monsieur—I have heard him say to madame, 'There is Monsieur Loftbury.'"

"What else, Otto?" demanded Loftbury eagerly, for Otto's manner suggested that there *was* something untold.

"It was not much; monsieur is too well known to require explanation; he said 'Monsieur Loftbury, of the Bourse, and dining with him is Monsieur Regan of the high finance; of a surety there must be in preparation some coup'—the remainder I did not hear; but I remark that it has excite the

interest of madame, for she look at you, monsieur, like——"

Loftbury's face flushed.

"See here, Otto, at one time or another you must have served pretty much everybody who is anybody in civilized society. It's hard to believe that you let these people into the colonial room without having some sort of a line on them, and I'm cocksure they never got out without your making, at least, a guess. What was it?"

"Nothing, monsieur, to cause me to regret their entrée of last night, nor to deny it in the future," answered Otto quickly, his tone betraying a shade of annoyance. "Monsieur has seen that last night madame was the cynosure of all eyes—as so often the guests of monsieur have been, but it is because she is *toute-à-fait grande dame;* it is she, herself, who confer dignity on the colonial room. *Mon Dieu,* monsieur, that ruby of a verity is of a crown or coronet and——"

"Confound the ruby!" broke in Loftbury, irritated as much by Otto's subtle implication that his own guests had been conspicuous because of their notoriety as by his disappointment. "Are they dining here to-night?"

Otto hesitated a moment.

"Does monsieur wish a table reserved?" he asked.

"Suppose you answer my question first?" snapped Loftbury, and Otto shrugged his shoulders.

"That, monsieur, was my endeavor," he explained. "Ten minutes before monsieur entered I was called to the telephone and asked if Monsieur Loftbury was dining *chez* Fragonard this evening."

"By whom?"

A gesture of Otto's hands eloquently expressed his inability to answer categorically.

"The gentleman did not give his name, but he asked in French—which is not the French of Paris *d'aujourd'hui,*" he said significantly.

"And your answer?"

"Obviously, that as yet I did not know—and the gentleman say 'Au revoir,' and hang up the receiver."

"Au revoir, eh?" said Loftbury thoughtfully. "Very well, Otto, if he rings you up again you may tell him I *am* dining here—a table for two; Miss Tricastle is to be my guest. And, by the way, if your mysterious clients should again *honor* the colonial room, you might put us at neighboring tables."

Ignoring the sarcasm of the emphasis, Otto made a memorandum of the reservation, but he looked up in unfeigned surprise when Loftbury sharply ordered him to send a waiter for an absinth cocktail. A moment before he had mentally resolved that Loftbury's dinner that night would surpass any previous efforts and at the psychological moment he would request a hint as to the financial coup which he believed was about to be pulled off, but as he noticed the tremor in the hand which raised the glass and the eagerness which which the poisonous apéritif was gulped down, he quickly revised his opinion as to the probable value of the market tip he had hoped for.

To his chagrin, Loftbury found Regan waiting for him in his library when he drove home to dress for dinner.

"I missed you at your office, and it strikes me that at this time you ought to be on the wire and gathering all the information you can pick up," he explained grimly.

"That's just what I've been after—and much good it has done me; I've wasted an hour with Otto and he swears he doesn't know who that beggar is, in spite of having neglected everybody else in the room to kotow to him last night," said Loftbury.

Regan made a gesture of impatience.

"You don't go to a blacksmith to get your hair cut, why should you expect to get market information from a head waiter!" he exclaimed as he shot out his cuff and consulted a memorandum he had made on it. "Lofty, as you know, the total capitalization of Ajax is only ten million, all common stock. Forty-five thousand shares were sold on 'Change to-day; not much under a controlling interest."

Loftbury found it difficult to make his nod indifferent.

"I knew that before I left the office—the trading will be even heavier to-morrow," he answered. "My hunch was right, Regan."

"Hunches don't go; I'm talking facts—facts which you don't know because you didn't stay on the job. I'll tell you one right here: only a very small proportion of those forty-five thousand shares sold to-day appear in the lists of securities offered to secure loans by the brokers who bid them in and you know what that means—the stock was either bought outright for investment, to be taken off the market and stowed away in safe-deposit boxes, or acquired by an individual or pool strong enough to

finance the whole thing without borrowing. Three millions in cash would have swung to-day's operation."

"Neither one of those conclusions is particularly comforting to the holders of a short interest of twenty thousand shares," admitted Loftbury. "There is small chance of hammering the stuff down, Regan. Our best bet is to run to cover. I'm ready to throw up my hands. There is a new element against us in this deal; something I can't fight because we are not able to drive it into the open where we can get a crack at it and I know when I'm licked."

"Loftbury, the trouble is that you were licked before you jumped into the ring!" exclaimed Regan half contemptuously. "You didn't go into this with a clear head this morning; I'll bet that what happened last night slopped over into your office this morning and that you went at it with your fingers crossed to keep off the hoodoo."

"You win," said Loftbury in a voice hardly above a whisper, and Regan noted that he glanced furtively and apprehensively over his shoulder. "I told you last night at Fragonard's that it would be riding for a fall to start the thing, but you wouldn't listen to me. That hunch was stronger than ever when I called you up this morning, but again you refused to listen. I felt that we had a jolt coming to us, but I played the game as well as I knew how and against opponents who know the rules it won; you know that all of the old hands refused to touch it, and those who had any of the stock on hand dumped it when my manipulation made them believe we were getting out from under. In spite of that, some influence that even you are unable to trace has hornswoggled us; we let go of five thousand shares which we owned and we've got to deliver twenty thousand more which we don't. You've come up here with two guesses; I tell you flat that I only need one. The nigger in the woodpile is that pirate who did so much to gum the Monometal game and who reappeared at Fragonard's last night when you insisted on going on with this thing. I felt then that those infernal black eyes were drilling into our brains, and I've felt all day that they were watching every move I made. Confound it, I'm not even sure of this place, from which I've always done my best to shut out every thought of business; I feel as if the brute were here now, gloating over the fact that he's got us by the tail with a downhill drag. Last night you got off some cock-and-bull theory about the ruby which the woman wore. If that got you as hard as his eyes got me, you would have been on edge to-day, too!"

"I didn't let it get on my nerves—nor drive me to drink," retorted Regan, sniffing significantly. "See here, Loftbury, it's time for a show-down, and you'd better lay your cards on the table, face up. What's the truth about this man—what have you done to him—what motive can he have for getting after your scalp?"

Loftbury laughed derisively.

"What's your motive in playing the market? He picked up a quarter of a million that we know of in Monometal; he may have made a lot more through other brokers. That isn't a marker to what he can do to us in this deal if he has used that loot to cinch up the stock we've got to have to cover our shortage. I don't have to look further for a motive."

"You'd better—and find it, too—or stop using the plural in speaking of this deal," said Regan icily. "I'm not a quitter, but I'm not fool enough to back a madman. I agree with you that it's time for any one short of Ajax to cover and you'd better get busy. If it is done with a cool head and as a business proposition, no one will be hurt; to-day that stock is worth intrinsically better than double the closing quotation to any one who can finance the corporation temporarily; within ten days it will be worth more than twice that, but I never grew rich by paying what a thing was worth. Now you come down to brass tacks, Lofty, and watch your step. If you've got any private feud with this man, tell me about it right now, or forget it. To-morrow morning you will go to your office clear-headed, leaving all this sort of thing"—he indicated with a sweep of his hand the autographed photographs of a dozen beautiful feminine celebrities—"on the north side of the Dead Line. You will stick to business and not muddle your brains with alcohol until you see things which are not there and have no business in the office of a broker who is using other people's money. Do that and you will be backed to the limit. But let a hunch interfere with your business judgment, or resentment over having been robbed of your place in the spotlight of this piffling fluffy-ruffle game tempt you to use the market to get

even and——" He paused abruptly with a significant gesture which made Loftbury shrink back as if he were threatened with an annihilating blow.

"Well, the alternative?" he gasped in a voice which he could not recognize as his own.

"The alternative is that I shall still go into the market for the control of Ajax—and Loftbury & Senlis can cover that shortage," said Regan grimly. "I gave you five thousand shares and I was ready to back you, win or lose, as long as you played the game according to Hoyle. But when you drop your hand and run as if the devil was after you as soon as the Exchange closes, and I find you here smelling like a wormwood patch after wasting an hour with Otto on a wild-goose chase when you should have been analyzing the play and preparing for the next deal with a clear head, I feel that I was straining a point for friendship's sake to give you another chance. See here, Lofty, no man has risen in the Street as fast as you have without making enemies; we know that it's a game in which men get to the top by pulling others down and stepping on their shoulders. If this man who has got your goat is really the nigger in the woodpile, you can flush him in the market and trim him at a game you know from the ground up. After all, the Monometal business was probably only a lucky fluke, and we know that those things don't happen twice in the Street. If he's got it in for you personally, it's probably because you trimmed him before in one of the many deals you've forgotten—most of us like to forget the details—and victims—of some of the things we pulled off when we were trying to get our feet on the ladder. Rack your memory for that, if you like; it may give you a line on how to get him again, but don't let him get on your nerves—nor get your nanny by tempting you into a game in which he is your master. There is no use in grouching about it, Lofty, for, if your guess is right you can nail his hide to the fence in the game you do know, but last night he smeared it all over you and made you look like an amateur in the one you amuse yourself with. Forget the woman—forget everything but Ajax when you go downtown in the morning, but don't forget that Dutch courage never enabled a man to beat a market which was breaking against him. Remember, what I said to you goes as it lays—and call me up at nine-thirty!" With the curtest of nods Regan strode from the room, and, sinking into a chair, Loftbury gazed silently at his back until it disappeared through the doorway.

He knew that Regan had said his last word and that he would abide by it, and, remembering how he had dealt with other men who had failed him or played him false, he was almost surprised at the leniency with which he had been treated. If he failed to make good, bankruptcy stared him in the face, for Regan never made an idle threat; but, strangely enough, apprehension of that affected him less than the capitalist's contemptuous reference to his hobby and the defeat he had met the previous evening. Coming on the heels of Otto's subtle but unflattering comparison, it stung like the cut of a whiplash and he looked with a distaste verging on repulsion at the photographic souvenirs of the life which he had found so pleasing to his vanity and so thoroughly satisfying and enjoyable. The memory of the mysterious woman of the ruby as she had appeared at Fragonard's, her absolute indifference to the tremendous sensation she created, her obliviousness to the fact that in her box at the Metropolitan she was of greater interest to the audience than the galaxy of stars on the stage, justified Otto's shrewd judgment; she was *grande dame* to her finger tips.

The women whose faces smiled at him from the photographic frames were beautiful; each and every one of them had in his company been the center of attraction; at the time his vanity had been tremendously flattered, but now the artificiality, the posing, attitudinizing and the self-centeredness of many of them flashed through his memory with humiliating distinctness. The dregs of the poisonous distillation of wormwood were depressing him, Regan's threat made ruin appear to hover over his head like a Damoclesian sword, and Loftbury lost his sense of proportion. For a moment he forgot the face of the man which had haunted him and remembered only the face of the woman whom he had escorted, and suddenly he realized that he had lied when he told Regan that it had made no impression upon him. It stood before him with startling distinctness, and Loftbury, who had never denied himself anything, also realized that never in his life had he desired anything so much. Why? He could not have answered

that question himself, but it was an obsession. He wanted her and he would have her, not hitched to his chariot wheels with chains of gold as these others had been, but for his own. But for the moment there was something else he must have to satisfy a craving and he rose unsteadily to his feet. A moment later the sickishly sweet perfume of absinth permeated the room and Loftbury, never in greater need of every mental endowment, deliberately swallowed a tumblerful of the poison of the wormwood which steals men's brains.

CHAPTER XI.

Afterward every one who had been brought in connection with Loftbury on the day which inaugurated the Ajax campaign would have testified that he was not himself. Senlis and his office employees had cause to remember his unwonted impatience and irritability, Otto had been shockingly impressed by his abuse rather than use of the good things of life, and his valet noted with surprise his use of the cellarette which was rarely opened save for the entertainment or refreshment of guests.

Had Trixie Tricastle been in her usual frame of mind she would have noticed the difference in his manner and bearing immediately when he called to escort her to dinner, but she was so preoccupied with her own affairs that it was not until they were seated at the table in Fragonard's that she was conscious of the unusual pallor of his face and the scowling brows above reddened eyes. Her own face was radiant, but a shade of annoyance came to it when Loftbury seemingly forgot that she was his guest in his eagerness to identify the diners at the other table. As usual the colonial room was well filled, but an adjoining table with covers laid for two was still vacant and Otto kept an expectant eye upon the entrance doorway. He met Loftbury's look of inquiry with an expressive shrug of his shoulders.

"Nothing of a certainty as yet, monsieur, but I have the hope," he said before Loftbury could put his question into words. "For a half hour, at least, I shall hold the table reserved."

Loftbury muttered something expressive of disappointment as Otto turned away to answer the summons from another table and without ceremony gulped down the cocktail which a waiter placed before him. Miss Tricastle looked at him curiously as she more deliberately raised her own glass.

"'The hope' is a wonderful thing; it keeps one alive when life seems hardly worth living," she said. "I don't know what Otto is hoping for, but here's that his faith may be rewarded as amply as mine has been!" She took a sip and replaced the glass on the table, and Loftbury, suddenly recalled to the responsibilities of his position as host, glanced ruefully at his empty glass.

"I beg your pardon for omitting the formalities, but I have been bothered about something," he said apologetically. "I, too, hope that his wish may come true, and, if you will permit me, I shall drink to it." He reached across the table and, taking the glass from which she had barely sipped, drained the contents. "I know that you only make a pretense of taking a cocktail out of deference to our national custom, and these waiters are so infernally slow," he laughed as he replaced the empty glass on the table. "By Jove, Miss Tricastle, you have certainly recovered completely from your indisposition of last evening."

"Indeed, and I have, for I've had the best medicine in all the wide world, and that's good news!" she exclaimed joyously. "Not only that, Loftbury, but the most wonderful and interesting experience—but it's little you care, for you are not listening to me!" She broke off abruptly, for Loftbury, his attention drawn to Otto, who was hurrying to the entrance, had turned his eyes eagerly toward it. It was only a couple of belated guests for a party at another table, however, and mumbling an apology he again looked at her.

"Good news is always a wonderful experience—it would seem so to me at any rate; it's so long since I've had any," he said. "You have heard from home? You have heard that the fears of your *fey* vision were unfounded?"

"No, don't make light of what you can't understand, Loftbury," she answered seriously. "Remember that we Irish are all children who won't grow up; we believe in fairies and pixies—the little people—when our hair is white. And, faith I believe in more than that—in the good angels people talk of; for I've met one this very day, the most beautiful creature in all the world, I think, and—may the Lord forgive me—only last night I was close to believing that she

was but an implement of the devil and traveling in close company with her master."

Loftbury, whose attention had again wandered, evinced a sudden interest.

"What's that? Who was it—the woman of the ruby?" he asked eagerly, leaning across the table.

Trixie smiled and shook her head.

"After what Mr. Regan told us last night of the evil of rubies, I prefer to think of her as the angel of the pearls; she wore the most wonderful string of them to-day. I have never seen——"

"But the woman—she was the same; the one who dined here last night and sat in the box with that white-haired devil?" interrupted Loftbury, his impatience making the question a demand which verged on rudeness.

"White haired he is; but, if he is a devil he is at least a kindly one with the courtesy and manners of a gentleman," she answered quietly, but the subtlety of the reproof was lost on Loftbury and only the quick withdrawal of her hand prevented him from grasping her wrist in his eagerness. In drawing back his hand he upset his glass of Burgundy, and he smiled derisively as he surveyed the crimson stain which a splash of the wine made on his white shirt front.

"Regan's vision has come true with small damage!" he exclaimed mockingly. "You'll have me believing in such things; it would be easier than to convince me there is anything good in your polished Mephisto." She looked at him curiously, a puzzled expression in her eyes. Never before had he been anything but the personification of kindliness and courtesy, but his eyes glowed with hatred and a vindictive twist distorted the usually smiling lips.

"I'm more than suspecting that there's good in the worst of us and perhaps a mixture of evil in the best," she said slowly. "Believe it or not, there is something in the visions which come with the blessed hour of sight, but there is always something beyond, something which eludes us, or which we do not rightly interpret. So it was with me last night, Loftbury; perhaps because I was so overcome with my own selfish and personal grief, but that angel of a woman got it, caught what my Darcy's brave spirit sent to me across the wide ocean, and, Heaven bless her!—to-day she was the first to give me the news which eased the pain in my heart."

"And you would have me believe that her diabolical companion was sufficiently angelic to contribute to that happy result?" he exclaimed derisively. "What sort of hocus-pocus was he working on you? I tell you the brute is a sharper, or worse. Devereux, who has charge of the homicide bureau and spends his time studying murderers says he has the eyes of a killer and Davy swears that he is the devil incarnated. I don't want to be a kill-joy, but I should advise you to distrust anything which comes from him. What price did he demand for his gold brick?" A flash of anger came to the girl's eyes.

"What's come over you, Loftbury?" she asked impatiently. "Do you expect payment for the many kindnesses you have shown me? Certainly not—and no more does the man you mistrust. And I could not make it if I would; I do not even know his name. I tried to thank him, but he would not even listen to that; he told me himself that he was but an insignificant connecting link in the chain and that we should probably never meet again."

Loftbury had barely tasted of the food, but he had drank copiously of the heavy Burgundy and his face was flushed. Until the previous evening he had cared more for Trixie Tricastle than for any one of the long succession of beautiful and attractive women upon whom he had showered his favors. There had been small hint of sentimentality in their association: he had not even been piqued by the frank confession of her love for another man which she had made in the stress of strong emotion. But her trust in and defense of this man whom he identified as the cause of all his business perplexities and misfortunes irritated and angered him, and a contemptuous retort came to his lips. But something in the expression of her face warned him to be careful, and he pulled himself together. For the first time she suspected that the change in him was due to the influence of alcohol, and he realized from the movement of repulsion with which she drew back as he leaned across the table that it would take but little more to cause her to rise from it and sweep from the room.

"I'm afraid that I don't get the rights of it, Miss Tricastle!" he exclaimed quickly. "New York is the happy hunting ground of so many smooth grafters and plausible fakers that we old-timers get suspicious, and to me this man and his companion had the

earmarks. It's dollars to doughnuts that I can put my finger on the scheme if you will tell me the story of it. I should be sorry to do anything to destroy the comfort you get from a delusion, but sometimes the rosiest of them are the most dangerous." His effort to regain his self-control had been so far successful that most of the outward and visible signs of his unaccustomed libations vanished and the girl, perhaps made lenient and charitable by her own happiness, was molloned and reassured.

"That's better, Loftbury, and faith, I know that you may have cause to be suspicious," she said, smiling. "It's more than one man—aye, and the women, too, are not above it—that's tried to wheedle from me if you've given me any tip on the stock market. But if you've guessed that of this man, you're wrong entirely, for he never so much as mentioned your name. You know that last night I was a heartbroken woman. As plainly as I now see your face I had seen the vision of my Darcy dashed to the earth behind the German lines, and it was then I fainted and saw no more. It was a long, sleepless night I passed after Davy took me home. This morning I telephoned to the embassy to ask if they had news. The ambassador—kindly gentleman that he is—spoke to me himself over the wire, but even his diplomacy could not soften the truth. Yes, they had received news, and I must steady myself to hear it, as women in palaces and hovels bear it and carry on over the broad face of Europe. The whole thing had been seen only too distinctly from the British lines, but what he told me was nothing new to me, for I, too, had seen it in my vision. There might still be a ray of hope—perhaps a chance in a million that he still lived, but I must not build upon it. But I did, as the drowning man clings to a straw. Can you wonder that I listened eagerly when this man told me that if I would come with him I would hear something to bring me relief and happiness—that I went with him without stopping to ask questions?"

"One minute. You have told me nothing of how you made his acquaintance!" interrupted Loftbury. "Who introduced him?"

"Faith, and he introduced himself—and now that I come to think of it, it was a queer thing entirely!" she exclaimed. "They have strict orders at the office to permit no one to come to my apartment unannounced, but I had no warning of him until I turned from the telephone to see him smiling at me from the doorway of my boudoir. And after his first words I had no wish to question, for the straw in my hand changed to something firm and the wonderful eyes of him transformed hope to something near certainty. Even now I hardly remember leaving the hotel, for I was flying with the wings of hope, and I recall only that in the taxi he evaded my questions—he said that he could tell me nothing, that he could not understand himself; that I must be patient and judge for myself the value of what I should hear."

"We must be playing at cross-purposes—I can hardly believe that you could have been induced to trust yourself to the man I have in mind!" remonstrated Loftbury. "All of the men you met last evening distrusted him and you——"

"You are wrong, Loftbury; it is the same man and I did that very thing, but I know what you mean!" she interrupted nervously. "I would have trusted myself with him to the ends of the earth; never once did I have the slightest fear or misgiving. I felt that to me he would show only kindliness and protection, for surely I had done nothing to deserve anything else at his hands. But, nevertheless, I recognized that subtle, indefinable thing which is all that you seem to have discovered in him. Kind as he was to me, I feel that if I incurred his enmity the world would not be wide enough to let me escape from him—that he would be relentless. But my faith in him was so absolute that I trusted him and obeyed his instructions without question—and certainly I have no cause to regret it."

"Tell me about it; all of it, please," said Loftbury. "You accompanied him in a taxi from your hotel. Where did he take you?"

"Faith, and that's more than I can tell you—that is, I do not know the address, and the house looked like a thousand others in this monotonous town of brown stone. And when the cab stopped in front of it he gave me a pass-key. He was very simple and quiet in his manner, but very convincing. He told me that he had a special reason for wishing me to enter the house alone; that he would have the taxi wait for me. He said that inside I would find no one but the lady I had seen at the Metropolitan last night, that she was expecting me and that I would find her in the one room at the head of the stairs. Why did I trust him,

Loftbury? Why did a woman with my knowledge of the world, a woman so much in the public eye that she walks warily lest scandal should smirch her name, enter a house of mystery at the behest of a man she had known but an hour?"

Loftbury set down the wineglass which he had emptied while she spoke and shook his head.

"It was a foolish risk to run—why did you?" he countered.

"Because, until it was all over and I was back in my apartment at the hotel, I never for an instant doubted him nor questioned his good faith," she answered as she drew a small, flat key from her dainty vanity bag and held it out to him. He took it mechanically and, noting that it was an ordinary, flat latchkey, let it fall on the table between them.

"It's strange that I was not frightened," she continued. "When he gave me that key his hand touched mine and I was startled, for it was so cold that it seemed to send a chill through me, and the key which had rested in it but a moment after he took it from his pocket was like a piece of ice. But without question or hesitation I used it, the heavy door opened easily and noiselessly, and I stepped into a house far more tastefully and elegantly furnished than I had expected from the character of the neighborhood and the outward appearance.

"After the closing of the outer door behind me shut out the noises of the street, it was as silent as a tomb, and, in spite of the beauty of the furnishings and the elegance of the appointments, it had the atmosphere of a place which is not lived in. It was unreal, as if I had walked into a stage carefully set for the rehearsal of a formal drawing-room scene. I followed his directions implicitly and ascended a broad stairway, so heavily carpeted that my footsteps were noiseless, and on the broad landing at the top there was no chance of mistake, for but a single door opened from it. It opened at a touch of my fingers and, passing through, I stepped into another world—a *home*, cozy, intimate, and inviting, in spite of its unusual size. No ray of the bright sunshine which I had left entered it. Heavy curtains before the windows shut out the light of day and the noises of the great city's life. But it was softly lighted by carefully arranged electric bulbs, and in a broad fireplace the blazing logs crackled a cheery welcome, the only sound which cut the silence.

"For a moment, so still it was, I thought it deserted and that I was alone, and then slowly from a great couch before the fireplace there rose a vision—for so it seemed to me, so ethereal and unreal she looked to my startled eyes—the sweetest, most beautiful creature I had ever seen in the form of a woman!"

"The woman of the ruby?" exclaimed Loftbury eagerly.

Miss Tricastle had entered as thoroughly into the spirit of her curious recital as she did in the characters she was wont to depict in her professional monologues and had become as oblivious to Loftbury's personality as she was to the audiences she faced across the footlights. His exclamation startled and annoyed her, and she shook her head impatiently.

"No, no, no; I shall not permit you to call her that—it implies evil!" she protested. "The angel of the pearls she was and will ever be to me! Even so, for a moment I was frightened, for when she circled the couch and came toward me I saw in her hand a wicked-looking dagger. I realized that the closed windows and heavy hangings which shut out the noise of the streets would just as well drown a cry for help. And then, when she dropped it on the table, my fears vanished, for I saw 'twas but a jeweled toy which she had used to cut the leaves of a book she had been reading. And shamed I was for my fears and suspicions when I looked into the eyes of her, for never could evil have lain in them. I tried to speak to her, but I could not find words, and then when I looked again at her face I knew that if I had they would have but fallen on deaf ears, for the beautiful creature was possessed—*joy*—entranced.

"You were all kind enough to say flattering things of my performance last night, Loftbury, and it's well I know that it reached your hearts, but 'tis well for the professional reputation of Trixie Tricastle that only Trixie Tricastle saw what that angel of a woman did to-day. You say that with my trickery I made you see things vividly last night, but I had all the advantage of your emotions aroused by others who had appeared before me; the aid of every artifice of stagecraft. But without a word of warning to prepare me, that angel of a woman took up the story where my foolish fainting

cut it short and—mercy of God!—she made me see the glorious end of it. 'Twas not fraud, for well I know every trick of illusion, but the blessed hour of sight was hers; she was clairvoyant, she saw with her eyes and she made me see through them. Horrible it was at first, for again I saw that emerald green Spad crashing to earth like a fiery meteor, but then I saw the end, which last night I missed. Before it struck it righted, there was a miracle of a side-slip, and from that blazing ember of hell my Darcy was thrown clear—alive! Injured and stunned he was, and when he came to himself he was prisoner to the Hun, but while there is life there is hope, and, by the grace of God, one day he will come back to me!"

"And the price she demanded for this charmingly simple séance?" demanded Loftbury, a cynical, incredulous smile on his lips. In spite of her earnestness, her very evident complete faith, he read in the whole thing only a cleverly devised piece of trickery; perhaps an attempt to get at Regan and himself by imposing upon this Irish girl's credulity to make a tool of her. The tales of fake mediums and spiritualistic swindles make an interesting chapter of the history of the Street, and he knew them all by heart. If such it was, it had undoubtedly succeeded in making her a dupe and an enthusiastic one, for she was not even annoyed by his skepticism.

"Faith, what has a poor Irish actress that she could want? But you're wrong entirely, Loftbury!" she protested. "The pearls she wore in ropes were worth a king's ransom. A single one of them would have bought the few paltry acres of bog that make my estate, and the price of the white gown she wore would have paid my wardrobe bills for a year. And, listen to the end of it, you doubting man! It is never enough of good news we can get, and greedy one that I was, no sooner had I heard that much than I clamored for more. But hardly had my unlucky tongue spoken the words than I would have bitten it off, for they brought pain and bewilderment to the beautiful face of her. And a merciful darkness hid that from me; some unseen hand switched off the lights and I could see only her slender graceful outline against the firelight. From the open door behind me I heard a soft voice say, 'Come, please, quickly!' Soft it was, but one meant to be obeyed, and it's little more I remember until I found myself again riding in the blessed sunlight, a song of praise in the heart that had been breaking and that angel of a man smiling on the seat beside me. And that smile was fair all I could get in answer to my questions until we reached my hotel—and you may believe I asked many of them. 'Wait!' was all he would say and, stupid that I was, I believed that he would tell me everything when we reached my apartment.

"And now forget your doubts and your suspicions, Loftbury, and never again doubt the blessed hour of sight! For hardly had I passed the door of my apartment when the bell of the telephone went mad. I knew; I knew before I snatched the receiver from the hook. 'Twas the ambassador himself wishing to be the first to tell me of the cable he had just received—the news that made the whole British army rejoice with me. For with that last bit of chivalry which has survived this war of horrors, an enemy aviator had dropped a note from the clouds; word that 'The Wild Irishman' was alive, seriously but not fatally wounded, and a prisoner in their hands! And then I turned, Loftbury, to thank the man and, perhaps, to beg for more, but he had vanished as quietly and mysteriously as he came, leaving that key, which all the time I had held clutched in my hand, as the only tangible evidence that it was not all a wonderful dream from which I might awake to horrible reality."

Loftbury's smile was still incredulous as he picked up the key. Beating the official cables was nothing new in his experience. Regan often did it, and even without such a simple explanation it was credible that this man whom he believed to be a shrewd trickster had simply taken a chance and had the luck to have his guess confirmed. But suddenly the expression of his face changed; a suggestion of craft came to his smile, and he surreptitiously slipped the key in his pocket.

"Wonderful, incredible, but still it must be true—there must be something in it!" he agreed with an alacrity which would have been suspicious to her if she had not been so exalted by her own happiness. "And I can believe in such things without being frightened now, Miss Tricastle," he continued, pointing to the crimson wine stain upon his shirt front. "Regan was seeing things last night, too, hard-boiled old money getter that he is. He saw my manly bosom

stained crimson and read calamity approaching, but it's no worse than the waste of a glass of vintage wine."

There was a suggestion of reproof in her eyes as she rose from the table.

"It will be well missed from the lot that has been served here this night, Loftbury!" she exclaimed. "Come, please. I must be off to the theater, and you don't need that cordial!"

Otto watched them attentively and his relief was evident when they passed through the doorway. Nothing which went on in the colonial room escaped his vigilant eye, and almost with consternation he had watched the amount of wine which Loftbury, ordinarily abstemious, had consumed. But, whatever its inward effect may have been, there was nothing in his bearing nor walk to suggest overindulgence. He nodded and smiled to acquaintances as he passed their tables, he tipped the cloakroom attendants and carriage man with his customary lavishness, the hand with which he assisted Miss Tricastle to enter the limousine was steady, the voice with which he gave directions to the chauffeur was firm and clear.

Nor did the people with whom he talked after leaving Miss Tricastle at the stage door suspect that the man with whom they talked, who asked such connected and straightforward questions and paid so liberally for the information which they gave him, was in fact a drink-crazed maniac beneath a cold and self-possessed exterior. To an experienced man about town the whole thing was so simple that he carried it through almost mechanically. Generous tipping stimulated the memory of the porter and carriage starter at Miss Tricastle's hotel, a yellow-backed bill caused the speedy location of the chauffeur who had driven her, and barely an hour after he left her at the theater Loftbury stood alone on the sidewalk in front of the house which she had described to him, the key which would afford him entrance clutched in his fingers.

A swift glance about satisfied him that the street was deserted and, quickly ascending the steps, he entered the large vestibule. His last doubt vanished as the heavy inner door opened noiselessly to the pass-key and, stepping inside, he closed it softly behind him. Vividly he remembered every word of Miss Tricastle's description, and he nodded approvingly as he recognized its absolute accuracy. The first floor was only dimly lighted, but through the broad doorway at his left he saw a magnificently furnished double drawing-room. In front of him a broad staircase led to the floor above, and he smiled triumphantly as he noted the heavy, velvety covering of the treads and remembered what she had said of noiseless footsteps.

In his drink-crazed brain there was little of set purpose, but from the moment he had raised that inanimate key from the table in Fragonard's he had been obsessed by the desire to use it. Its touch had seemed to convey some subtle promise or suggestion that it would open for him the doors of desire and distorted the idealism of Trixie Tricastle's recital into a vision of a beautiful woman helpless before him in the sound-proof room of a deserted house. In some way, which he could hardly remember, that woman was connected with and responsible for unpleasant things which had happened to him. What they were he could not clearly remember, but that made small difference. She should answer for them—perhaps explain them—at any rate, pay for them.

With Trixie Tricastle, in gathering his information, he had instinctively controlled himself, but here alone and unobserved and on the very threshold of success it was no longer necessary. He lurched as he made his way to the broad stairway, without the support of the balustrade his stumbling, uncertain feet could hardly have negotiated it, but noiselessly he reached the top. The mask of sobriety had fallen from him, and when he roughly pushed open the door which confronted him and staggered into the room, he was a disheveled and repulsive figure.

Even had Loftbury been himself he would have found it difficult to recognize anything of the subtle atmosphere of which Trixie Tricastle had spoken. In the broad fireplace the logs had turned to dead white ashes and with the death of the blaze all suggestion of cheeriness and homeness seemed to have vanished. In the figure standing beside the table he found it difficult to recognize the glorious woman of the ruby, much less the angel of the pearls whom Trixie had described. Beautiful of face she was, but she seemed little more than a girl, and her slender figure was clothed in a plain gown which was almost shabby. Over the back of the couch was thrown a priceless

sable coat, heaped in front of her on the table was a wonderful collection of jewels; a great rope of pearls, diamonds, emeralds; on top of them all, gleaming red in the reflection of the lights, the great ruby. She was alone, and when he entered she was gazing wistfully and perhaps regretfully at them, but she looked up with a brave little smile on her lips and a determined set to her little chin. Her gasp of astonishment betrayed that he was not the visitor whom she had expected, and it was quickly followed by a cry which might have been either fear or protest as she caught sight of his face.

It was horrible—blotched and bloated and suddenly distorted with a loose-lipped, lascivious grin which might well have terrified any woman alone and at his mercy. He stood between her and the doorway. Flight was impossible, and he suddenly lurched toward her with outstretched arms. She gave a piercing scream for help, but quickly realizing that it would never penetrate the thick hangings and closed windows, her hand swiftly darted toward the dagger which lay on the table between them. Loftbury laughed harshly as he sprang clumsily forward to intercept her, but that laugh changed to curses and maledictions as the lights were suddenly switched off.

With a cry of relief Kathleen started for the doorway, but she drew back more terrified than ever when she came in contact with a swiftly moving human body which seemed clutching at her in the horrible darkness, and her hand grasped the edge of the table on which lay both the jewels and the dagger. She seemed to lose consciousness, for an instant which seemed an eternity; afterward she could remember nothing but a confused struggle in the darkness. Then the lights were switched on. She found herself standing rigid at one end of the mantel above the fireplace from which a bronze Buddha smiled benignantly. At the other end, startled and puzzled, stood Ware, and between them on the tiger-skin rug lay Loftbury prone on his back, his spraddling arms and legs twitching for a moment before they became ominously still and relaxed. On the left side of the broad shirt front the jewels in the handle of the dagger gleamed and twinkled, and slowly a stain of crimson spread from about it over the white linen, joining, overwhelming, and obliterating the stain of wine.

Kathleen gazed at the body with horror-distended eyes which she quickly covered with her hands to shut out the horrid vision. Ware, too, gazed at it for a moment, and then, stepping over it softly, he confronted her. With a quick movement he extended his hand, for just an instant Kathleen was conscious of an icy touch upon her forehead; she heard the one word "Sleep!" uttered in a familiar voice, kindly in spite of its stern imperiousness, and, letting her hands fall limply to her sides, she floated off into a blessed oblivion in which perplexities and horrors became a merciful blank.

CHAPTER XII.

Devereux arrived at the house on the heels of the police. Preliminary investigations of crimes of violence had already lost novelty for him, and entering the door guarded by a uniformed policeman, he ascended the broad staircase without premonition that ahead of him lay other than a disagreeable and perhaps gruesome task which was part of the day's work. In the large room, the scene of the tragedy, he found the usual assemblage of officials; the coroner's physician, the precinct captain, a couple of headquarters detectives and technical experts. Only their numbers and the unusually luxurious setting suggesting that the case was anything out of the ordinary. But one glance at the central figure of the group, a man with white hair *en brosse*, white mustache and imperial and a thin, aquiline nose which gave his sallow face a likeness to a predatory bird, suddenly warned him that the tragedy held for him an interest more personal than official.

Ware, who had evidently been the target for a machine-gun volley of questions, was the coolest and least perturbed man in the lot. The physician and a plain-clothes man were kneeling beside something in front of the fireplace, something which was screened from him by the intervening table and couch, and the color faded from Devereux's face as his fears whispered to him what it might be. Ware quickly rose from his chair and nodded to him.

"Mr. Devereux, I believe," he said quietly, and in the eyes which met his Devereux read slight suggestion of what he had seen the night before at the door of the Metropolitan; the hard, merciless, and menacing stare which seemed tacitly to warn

"At your peril!" Instead, they were coolly appraising, confident without being defiant. "My name is Ware," he continued. "Have you been told the name of the *man* whose body was found here?" The emphasis was just sufficient to be unmistakable, and noting it the color slowly returned to Devereux's face and he gave an audible sigh of relief.

"No; I was simply notified that there was a case, presumably a homicide, which required my attention," he answered; but Ware checked him with a gesture of warning when he started to walk around the end of the table.

"I'm afraid that you are in for a disagreeable shock, Mr. Devereux; that you will discover a disconcerting personal element in this!" he said. "You know——"

"But you said a man!" exclaimed Devereux.

"Certainly—but a friend of yours!" answered Ware sharply, and in his tone there was an unmistakable warning. "It is Loftbury."

The expression of blank amazement and incredulity on Devereux's face allayed the quick suspicions aroused in the minds of the others by the very evident undercurrent reflected in their voices and expressions.

"Loftbury! Can it be—dead—murdered?" exclaimed Devereux, and Ware shrugged his shoulders.

"Undoubtedly Loftbury, and just as undoubtedly dead, but for reasons which will be obvious to you when you know the circumstances, I cannot admit that he was murdered," he answered. "As I happened to be the only other person in the house at the time of his death, I can say that with certainty, for I did not kill him, in spite of the suspicions which these gentlemen have betrayed in their questioning. I am extremely glad that you have arrived to take official charge of this matter, for I can assure you that, aside from my part of it, the investigation up to now has been marked by a maximum of discourtesy and a minimum of intelligence."

"Don't let that worry you, Ware. Give the district attorney the same spiel you did us and he'll shoot it as full of holes as a Swiss cheese!" exclaimed the police captain in a tone which betrayed that something irritating had gotten under his skin and the irritation was not allayed when Ware pointedly ignored him, and watched Devereux as he stepped around the edge of the table. The physician was jotting down the result of his superficial examination in a notebook and the other man was just finishing taking the prints from the tips of the lifeless fingers. A hasty glance at the face confirmed the identification beyond peradventure; it was undoubtedly Loftbury, and the handle of the dagger, scintilating like a grim caricature of a decoration on the bloodstained shirt front, eloquently suggested the cause of death.

"This is your home, Mr. Ware?" asked Devereux after a quick glance about the room, finding a comforting reassurance in the absence of evidence of feminine occupancy.

"Yes, if a bachelor's diggings can be dignified with that name," answered Ware. "I have sleeping quarters on the floor above and a workroom on the ground floor."

"And this room?" Devereux glanced significantly and, perhaps, a bit enviously about it, the only one of the official intruders to recognize the value, both artistic and monetary, of its curious contents.

"As you probably surmise, the repository of the moss which, in spite of the proverb, sometimes clings to a rolling stone—the only tangible record of a wandering life," answered Ware. "My study, perhaps—if I ever studied anything; just now, unfortunately——" Again he shrugged his shoulders and nodded toward the body. "I'm rather fed up with questions, I've had so many stupid and impertinent ones fired at me in the last half hour," he continued. "So, if you don't mind, I'll just voluntarily tell you all that I know about this very disagreeable matter." He looked Devereux squarely and frankly in the eye. Strangely enough, although the attitude of the officials plainly indicated that they suspected him of murder, he seemed to dominate the situation. Immaculate in conventional evening dress, surrounded by every material evidence of wealth and refinement, completely self-possessed and master of himself, Devereux knew that the boldest of the police officials present would hesitate before taking the drastic action which lay within their power.

"That would be wise but, merely as a formality, I would suggest that anything you say may be used against you," said Devereux, for the suspicions of the officials were so plainly evident that he could not disregard them.

"Thank you; only a guilty man need fear the truth, so I'm not worrying," said Ware with a confident smile. "As I told you, Mr. Devereux, this house is a bachelor's establishment—a modest one in spite of its size, as I occupy it alone and only as sleeping and working quarters. As I do no housekeeping, the domestic arrangements are simple. A colored woman comes in the morning, takes care of it, and leaves when her work is finished; usually before noon, never later than six. The only other service is that of the furnace man, the usual Tony from sunny Italy who never comes above the basement. Consequently, except for an occasional visitor, I am always alone in the evening—when I am in, which is not often. This evening, contrary to my usual custom, I returned early after dining out. I came up here to get some papers and I remember distinctly that I left the lights on, intending to return after looking over the papers and placing them in my safe downstairs. Another incident, trivial in itself, but, perhaps, significant in view of what has happened, is that when I was taking the papers from that table I noticed that the handle of a dagger —an antique weapon which I picked up in a Constantinople bazaar and have used since as a paper cutter, was tarnished. I rubbed it bright with my handkerchief and replaced it on the table.

"*The* dagger?" queried Devereux, and Ware nodded assent.

"I had been in my workroom perhaps an hour when I believed that I heard footsteps on this floor. It seemed impossible that any one should have entered, as living alone and in a house with rather valuable contents, I have adopted rather unusual precautions against intrusion. Every window is wired to an alarm bell, and the front door, the only one which could be forced with anything less than a battering-ram, was protected by a specially made lock, warranted unpickable. I started to investigate and was puzzled to find this room, which I was sure I had left lighted, was in darkness. Even then, so sure I was that my safeguards were effective, I believed that I must have absent-mindedly switched them off, and I laughed at my own imagining when I turned them on and found the room silent, and, as I believed from a quick glance, absolutely deserted. A moment later I discovered what lies over there. One look satisfied me that the man was beyond human aid, and, leaving everything exactly as I found it, I telephoned for the police. I'll save you the trouble of asking many questions by stating pertinent facts, some of which have already been verified by the police. The alarm apparatus is in perfect order, so no one could have gained access or made an exit except through the front door without raising the alarm. The only other entrance to this room is a door behind that tapestry which opens on the service stairway. It was locked and bolted on the inside, just as the police found it, so it is manifestly impossible that any one could have escaped through it. The main stairway was lighted, no one could have passed me unobserved as I came up, and no one could have left this room after I heard the footsteps without my being aware of it. The dagger of which I spoke is the one in Loftbury's breast. That, Mr. Devereux, is the case as it stands."

"Unless you are mistaken in your belief that there was no one else in the house, there are but two possible solutions then," said Devereux. "Either Loftbury committed suicide, or you killed him. You, of course, appreciate that your positive statement implies that?"

"Naturally, and so far as I am concerned, it simplifies things immensely, for—equally, of course—I eliminate one solution and make the other a certainty."

"At what time did this happen?" asked Devereux.

Ware glanced at his watch.

"It's now one-thirty. I should judge shortly before midnight. I notified the police within a very few minutes."

Devereux turned to the doctor. "Can you tell how long this man has been dead?"

"Approximately, from one to three hours. Rigor mortis has not yet set in and the blood clot——"

"Never mind technicalities. Are there other injuries, anything to suggest a struggle?"

"Nothing that I have yet discovered. We haven't stripped the body, and there was a sufficiently obvious cause of death—the blade must have split the heart. I'm going to remove it now, and we'll know for sure." Carefully avoiding touching the handle, he looped a cord about the hilt, but it required a very considerable effort to withdraw the blade. "Gad! It took some force to drive that in; it has cut clean through a rib!" he exclaimed as he straightened up, and his as-

sistant carefully laid the weapon on a piece of white paper.

"Doesn't look much like suicide, eh, doc?" asked the police captain, a note of triumph in his voice as he edged closer to Ware. The physician shook his head.

"Only a very determined and a very powerful man could have driven that home in his own breast," answered the physician.

"Or a desperate or insane one," suggested Ware. "Mr. Devereux, you will appreciate that it is essential to me that that point be settled. It happens that I remember distinctly that I avoided touching the hilt of the weapon after cleaning it. In other words, I left a polished surface, free from finger prints, and I have noticed the precautions of the officials. Do you mind having the examination made here now, before there is a possibility of blundering or malice destroying the evidence?"

"Fair enough, but Thornton has already anticipated your request," answered Devereux, indicating the man who had taken Loftbury's finger prints and who was intently examining the weapon with a large magnifying glass. "He is the headquarters expert and his evidence has sent many a crook up the river."

"But I never had a more dead open-and-shut than this in all my experience!" said Thornton, looking up from his work. "Four fingers and a thumb as plain as the tracks of a rabbit in the fresh snow and without a single confusing mark. If the hand that made 'em is in our records, I'll give you the owner's name in two minutes after I reach the office."

Ware stepped forward and pointed to the ink pad and blanks which Thornton had used.

"As only Loftbury and I were in the house when that dagger was used, it would simplify matters to make your comparison here. I am quite willing to have my prints taken."

Thornton gave one glance at the black whorls and lines on the pad before him and made another hasty examination of the weapon with his glass.

"Mr. Devereux, I don't want to make this official until I go through the routine and make photographs, but there can't be any mistake," he said, ignoring the slender hand which Ware extended. "The only prints on this polished silver were made by the dead man's fingers!"

The police captain gave a grunt of disappointment and the hand which had half withdrawn the handcuffs from his pocket dropped empty to his side.

"That seems so fully to substantiate my statement that I trust we can at once terminate this disagreeable business," said Ware quietly.

The police captain smiled hopefully when Devereux shook his head in decided negative.

"I am sorry, but it must go a lot deeper than this," he said. "Partly for your own safety, too, Mr. Ware. You will appreciate that this will make a tremendous sensation and set the reporters on every possible trail. Under the circumstances, you will inevitably fall under suspicion. In fact, had it not been for the confirmation of your story which Thornton has just offered, I should not have felt justified in advising against the course which the police would have taken as a matter of routine. Your story alone does not explain things, granting that every statement that you made is correct. It does not explain Loftbury's presence here; only by exclusion it says that he must have come in through the front door."

"Mr. Devereux, if the reporters and detectives dug up convincing evidence that I hated Loftbury and had every reason to wish him dead, even if they could prove that I invited him here, you know as well as I do that lacking an actual eyewitness, you could never convict me of having killed him," said Ware quietly. "The strongest proven motive, the most carefully forged chain of circumstantial evidence, would be laughed out of court by the one admitted fact that the handle of the dagger bears only Loftbury's finger prints. Of course, it is within the power of the police to make it extremely disagreeable for me, but that is all."

"Perhaps; lacking, as you suggest, the finding of an actual eyewitness," answered Devereux.

Ware looked at him sharply and for just an instant there was in his dark eyes the suggestion of the expression which Devereux had seen the night before.

"And can you hope, after what I have told you, to find an eyewitness to the manner of Loftbury's death?" he demanded.

Devereux was conscious of a curious and sudden change in Ware's attitude. The hard, defiant look in his eyes had been but

a flash in the pan. It vanished almost instantly to be replaced by something closely akin to an appeal and entreaty. Not for mercy or consideration for himself; Devereux recognized instinctively in Ware the type which plays a lone hand, and in the last half hour he had amply demonstrated his ability to care for himself with the odds heavily against him. The disgruntled manner of the police captain and the detectives testified that in his terse summing up of the situation he had hit the nail squarely on the head, only the production of an eye-witness of the killing could contradict the mute evidence of the finger prints. Ware had absolutely insured his own safety from anything save annoyance; the peculiar form of his question and the expression in his eyes implied that he was after something more than that, and the suspicion of what it might be brought Devereux's heart to his mouth.

"It isn't a question of hope, but, as a matter of duty, I shall have to do my best to discover one," he answered. "You will, of course, hold yourself in readiness for examination when we call upon you." He checked the police captain before he could utter the suggestion which was obvious. "Of course, it is not my province to dictate to the police, but I have always found them open to suggestion," he continued hastily. "I do not think they will consider it necessary to take you into custody, but it is plainly their duty to make sure that a material witness will be on hand when wanted. Isn't that about right, captain?"

"I'll guarantee that he'll be on hand," answered the officer grimly. "There's a bunch of reporters outside; do you want to see them?"

As a matter of fact, the newspaper men were the last people on earth whom Devereux wished to see just then. He was conscious that the police officers were surprised and disappointed that he had not gone at Ware hammer and tongs, as they had done before his arrival. It was only his previous successes in getting evidence by subtler methods which induced them to remain passive. Probably from the same motives which had influenced Hemingway, other editors had killed references to the mystery box in their stories of the Benefit, but the reporters would at once identify Ware and the name of the woman who had accompanied him would be dragged into the mystery surrounding Loftbury's death. In spite of the evidence of the finger prints—evidence which he knew would absolutely destroy any circumstantial case which could be built up against Ware—he felt sure that Loftbury had not killed himself. Before a jury the story of the effort required to withdraw the weapon would be absolutely unconvincing; the expert testimony of the physician that Loftbury's arm could never have driven the dagger home would be simply a matter of opinion against the incontrovertable evidence that Loftbury's hand had grasped the hilt. But having seen that effort with his own eyes, Devereux found it absolutely convincing.

Ware, too, had seen it. He had undoubtedly realized the conviction of murder which it conveyed to the minds of every one present, but, in spite of that, he had persistently clung to the story which, if accepted, would save for the finger prints, inevitably brand him as the murderer. His volunteered statement that he was alone in the house with Loftbury had been fortified by every circumstance of guarded windows and locked doors which he had himself pointed out and emphasized. The few minutes intervening between his discovery of the tragedy and the arrival of the police would have sufficed to change all that; a guilty man could in far less time have established a presumptive alibi; the unlocking of a door and the opening of a window would have been enough. Devereux was guiltily conscious that he was derelict in his duties. He was morally certain that Loftbury had not killed himself. In spite of the alternative which he himself had announced the only possible one, he was equally certain that Ware had not killed him.

In his heart he knew why he had not followed the lead of the police and attempted to tear Ware's story to shreds with a merciless cross-examination. A dozen obvious questions had occurred to him, but he had failed to ask them, for each would have brought a woman's name into the case. Familiarity with traditions, the psychology and the mental processes of the police, had made him feel reasonably safe with them; their immediate effort would be to fasten the crime upon the obvious victim. Ware had so evidently stimulated them to just that effort by voluntarily eliminating every one else, by willfully irritating them, concentrating their attention upon himself, that he more than suspected an attempt to draw

a herring across the true scent. That attempt had—up to the moment of the saving discovery of the finger prints—so plainly meant fitting a noose to his own neck that Ware must have been influenced by a powerful motive, and Devereux's guess as to what it must be had made him hold his tongue, tacitly becoming his accomplice. He was determined to get at the truth, but fearing what it might be he shrank from bringing it out before the police.

It was evident that his consideration of Ware had irritated and angered the captain who, after the manner of his kind, looked upon a man to whom suspicion pointed as guilty until he had proved his innocence. Believing that he had plain sailing, the captain had taken a chance and excluded the reporters; expecting to make an arrest and cinch the case before they could claim the credit. Then a full story told by himself to his own glorification would appease their anger, but now that he had struck a snag he promptly passed the buck to Devereux. And Devereux, knowing how quickly the reporters' recognition of Ware as the occupant of the mystery box would render his desperate venture useless, hesitated, but he was relieved of the necessity for decision, for the door opened and Hemingway entered.

"Is this rumor true—is Loftbury dead?" he demanded, and Devereux nodded assent.

The police captain, recognizing a glorious opening for a sensational play before the most powerful of New York's newspaper men, stepped quickly forward.

"Dead as a doornail, Mr. Hemingway, and this gink's done the best he knew how with his mouth to force his way into the chair!" he exclaimed triumphantly, indicating Ware with a jerk of his thumb. "Tried to flim-flam us with a suicide theory, but the doctor knocked that out with a punch; he's ready to swear that no one but a lunatic could have driven that knife through his own slats, and we know that Loftbury wasn't that kind. Just one or two little points to clear up and we'll have this bird, Ware, dead to rights!"

Hemingway's answering stare, contemptuous and eloquent of disgust, banished the smug smile from the police officer's face.

"Captain, if your facts are no straighter than your deductions, you should be flat-footing a beat in rural Staten Island, instead of sporting that gold badge in an important metropolitan precinct!" he said harshly, and the officer, knowing that a word from Hemingway to the commissioner would insure for him that most undesirable change of status, quaked in his square-toed shoes. "*I* knew *Mr.* Loftbury intimately. I dined with Mr. Regan, who saw him late this afternoon. I called upon Miss Tricastle at her theater. She dined with him this evening at Fragonard's and later, while taking a bite of supper there, I talked with Otto, who served them. All three of them knew Mr. Loftbury well; all three of them —not suspecting that a tragedy impended or had happened—told me that he was not himself; that he was—as you so delicately put it—a lunatic." With a contemptuous gesture he tacitly eliminated the captain and turned to Devereux. "I assume that he was voicing only the suspicions of the police, not the conclusions of the district attorney's office?" he said interrogatively, and again Devereux nodded.

"I usually speak for myself. My examination has not gone deep enough to warrant a conclusion, but I had just informed Mr. Ware that as yet I regarded him only as a material witness."

"Would you mind telling me, not for publication, just what that examination has elicited?" asked Hemingway. "No, not here," he added quickly. "Perhaps this gentleman can take us to another room, for the police will be busy here with the removal of the body. By the way, captain, you will understand that the information I gave you was for your own protection, not to be transmitted to the reporters. I suggest that when you let them in you would be wise to suppress the suspicions you expressed to me and incline to the more plausible theory of suicide. I never go out of my way but once to prevent a man from making a fool of himself. Now, Mr. Ware, if you will be good enough to lead the way——"

It was, perhaps, by accident that, as he finished his warning, he stepped quickly between Ware and the officer. In spite of his fear of Hemingway, the captain's reluctance to let the man escape him was evident, and, arrogantly as Hemingway had ridden the high horse, his expression betrayed relief when the door closed behind him and he followed Devereux and Ware down the broad stairway.

TO BE CONCLUDED.

The Ship of Dreams

By Harry Kemp

SHIP drawing furrows of following foam, leaning down shoreward out of the sky,
What are the dreams you are carrying home, what are the wares that you bring us to buy?"
"You can purchase your fill, you may have what you will," the Great Ship, leaning, made her reply,

"For I bear all cargoes here in my hold as down the ways of the sky I dance,
Chests of ebony, plates of gold, the High Adventure, the Great Romance,
The One True Love that you've long dreamed of, the Single Throw of the Dice of Chance;

"The Riches you seek and the Fame you've pursued, the Joy of the Sweet Vine-Trellised Cot,
And every Dream wherewith you've endued the hopes of Man in his earthly lot,
But, in the end, my friend, my friend, you've got to pay for the Dream you've sought."

The Ship swept in like a moving cloud in tier on tier of heavenly white,
Singing with great winds, thunder-bowed, the joy of the ocean, the sky's delight,
While, climbing high in the rocking sky, her mariners went up, small, from sight.

Then the people came crowding from field and town to see the Ship of Their Dreams come in,
Through highway and byway pouring down, they made a noise like a market's din,
The Rich and the Poor, the Gentle and Boor, the Glad and the Sad, the Fat and the Thin:

For there's never a person but has his Dream or who has not sent his heart afar
Where the moving hills of the ocean gleam beyond the reach of the harbor bar
Whence the day is born, anew, each morn, preceded by the morning star.

The traffic of unlading began, from the hold's last depths the merchandise came:
They crowded closer, woman and man, each answering to his echoed name—
And they bore away, the Sad and the Gay, their bundles of woe and joy and shame.

The Poet got his fame and his crust; the Statesman achieved his empty height,
The Miser clutched his ignoble dust; the Conqueror's crown, it shone so bright
That his eyes were blind to the storm behind and the pit that yawned at his feet forthright.

Now rose a wailing that grew and grew, "Nay, this is not as our hope did seem:
We have gained a thing that we never knew!" Then answered a Voice, "Aye! So ye deem?
Yet to each *as he lives* the Captain gives—and for the Dream, the Reward of The Dream!"

And yet full many were jocund there and, singing, bore their burdens away.
For they knew that the Captain had trafficked fair, and they had no word of cavil to say—
As away from the rout the Ship drew out till it hung, like a star, on the edge of the day!

The Alcohalting Tragedy

By Hugh Kennedy

Author of "The Plute and Z-23," Etc.

Get acquainted with Herm who firmly believed that "don't mind if I do" was the perfect tense of the verb "to drink" and "make it another of the same" the pluperfect

UP to the finish of Pop's landslide story the silent stranger with the walrus type of countenance had contributed nothing to the proceedings but a flighty interest and a steady thirst. Then he began to paw at his tusklike mustache and hoarsely admitted that a landslide, once it was headed in your direction, was an awkward thing to side-step; but not more so than a coroner's inquest. Neither gave the least trouble so long as you did nothing to start it. As to stopping either of them after it got going—— At this point he paused to wish us happy days. Then he began to go into details:

The Chillikaleenians—meaning by that assault on the ear the denizens of the Chillikaleen, a valley which lies in that part of the interior of British Columbia where the landscape is most monotonous with mountains—the Chillikaleenians, take them by and large, was a forbearing bunch. They believed in letting every man play his own hand according as nature had dealt him cards. In particular they had a delicacy—natural in most cases, acquired, hastily, in others—about interfering with a man's right to regulate the size and number of his own drinks. They even forbore to fuss if he chose to drink water, though in the main they didn't hold with misusing the gifts of nature. This, you must understand, was in the days before prohibition was imported from Russia, and liquor flowed tolerable unconfined in those parts—if you had the two bits. The main outcome was that men drank when they was thirsty and mostly stopped reasonable soon after.

Forbearing they were, these Chillikaleen lads, but they had their limits, as Herm Hazenby had many a time been warned and at last came to realize. If Herm had only forbore to overstep those limits so far and so frequent Doc Overton would never have been called on to hold the inquest. But then, if the earthquake hadn't started that landslide Pop would have had no story.

This Herm didn't hold many views, on account of limited capacity for that class of cargo, but such as he did hold he held hard—went to extremes with, you might say. Take liquor, for instance. There was something he believed in taking or leaving alone. What he could get he took; the rest he left alone. If drinks was manuscripts, and Herm an editor, there would have been no unavailables. He firmly believed that "don't mind if I do" was the perfect tense of the verb "to drink" and "make it another of the same" the pluperfect.

That was Herm's way in all of what little he did. He went to extremes with everything, from drinking to cherishing his own opinions. He couldn't seem to strike a happy medium. Nature may have been to blame, for she had put him together on the same plan. A man of happy-medium height could have walked under his Adam's apple without stooping, and a happy-medium belt would have gone twice around him and left a tag end to tuck into the keeper. That's how tall he was and how thin.

It was the same with his distastes as with his tastes—he singled out one thing and put all his mind on it; so that just as he had no great appetite for anything but liquor, he harbored no special resentment against anything but work. If work had been whisky, and whisky work, he'd have headed both the Knights Templar and the Knights of Labor. As things stood, he was in no position to carry his aversion to work to the point of total abstinence, being no superman to live off the labor of others. Instead, as a natural-born wage slave, he was sometimes driven by the well-known and widely debated economic pressure to occasional indulgence—in moderation.

It was no different with his accomplishments. He had but one—swimming; but, like his infirmities, he had it hard. In the water, when not in liquor, he was a wonder. He could swim faster, dive easier, and stay under water longer than his feathered model, the loon. He could stay under so long that you'd begin to have hopes that he'd—er—stay under. But no; he was as disappointing there as elsewhere. Skill like his argued a youth misspent at the swimming hole; everything else, from time to money, he misspent at the bar.

To top his other excesses, Herm had an itch for argument that broke out just as often as he heard—or overheard—conversation. He was one of those windy coots that's always trying to prove the other fellow wrong and sometimes succeeds. Take him all in all, he was the most popular man in the valley—when he was asleep; and he was a light sleeper, too.

Forbearing they were, the Chillikaleenians, but an extremist like Herm was enough to stir up a spirit of reform in the House of Lords itself. There was no complaint about him getting stewed if he wanted to; and outside a tendency to eradicate the whole human race, commencing with the harmless and hard-worked barkeep, he was considered peaceable enough when lit up. It wasn't so much what he did when in liquor as the way he ignored the reasonable moment for coming out of it—there being, according to his theory and practice, no such point of time—that broke down at last the forbearance of the valley. For a case like Herm's there was but one remedy—the Siwash.

Thanks, old-timer, I don't mind if I do. Talking's dry work. Here's happy days!

Lemme see now, where was I? Oh, yes; at the Siwash. In some places they call it putting a man on the Indian list, an Indian's money not being legal tender over a bar. By any name it tastes the same. Soft drinks only—that's the central idea of it—soft drinks unmitigated by any human beverage.

It was very simple the way they handled it up there. They took regular legal steps to fix it so that the man that could neither leave it alone nor stop taking it found himself in a position where he could neither stop leaving it alone nor get it to take. They set him up as a candidate on the total prohibition ticket and elected him, one vote short of unanimous, to represent a constituency surrounded entirely by his own waistband. Then they posted the result of the election in all the wet precincts. They tacked up notices in every bar featuring the name of the Siwashee and reciting a few unpleasant things liable to happen to the man forgetful enough to serve him with liquor thereafter.

It's easy to understand that a remedy like future torment, was distasteful to the patient, forbearing, and hairy loggers, miners, and saw-millers of the Chillikaleen. They hated to put it in force; but Herm was driving them to it. Only Doc Overton, out of the kindness of his heart, thought he saw an easier way.

This doc was no real doctor, but let nobody think the less of him for that. From a Scotch collie with a sore paw to an Irish logger with a broken head, he was there with the healing art. He had everything the medical schools could give but a parchment and the right to overcharge that goes with it. As a medical student he had been a trial to the faculty, preferring his own fresh jokes to the musty ones in the text books. The final outcome had been that, in return for many favors, they had worked off their own narrow ideas of humor by rusticating, instead of graduating, him. Anyway, Doc was the nearest thing to a medical man in the whole Chillikaleen; and mining recorder, coroner, and all-round good fellow as well.

Doc first sprang his scheme of reforming Herm on his crony, Tip Somar, the boss of the up-mountain shingle-bolt camp, as they sat in the poker room off the Queen's bar.

"It's like this," said Doc, setting down his glass: "Herm ain't altogether to blame. He's self-deluded, auto-intoxicated. Get me? He's got a fixed idea that drink is the only thing needful to sustain what he takes to be life."

"Well?" grunted Tip, letting on he followed.

"Ain't it plain, then, that all you've got to do to change the man is to change his idea?"

"I get you, Doc." There was a hopeful light in Tip's eye. "You've only got to convince him that it ain't necessary to sustain life."

"Spoken from a hard heart, Tip, as well as a thick head. What I mean is that he has got to get hold of the idea that he doesn't need liquor, doesn't want liquor, won't have liquor."

"Only that!" Tip roared, like he'd struck a good one. "You'd only upset his ideas to that slight extent? Why, you simple, trusting, self-deluded old pipe-dreamer, that ain't an idea. It's a brain storm."

Doc wasn't to be discouraged. "Don't you fool yourself, Tip. There's ways—scientific ways—of getting new ideas into people's heads without their own knowledge or consent. For some—not meaning to be too personal—there's no other way."

"Meaning," guessed Tip, looking dense, "that the only hope for Herm is an operation?"

"Meaning nothing of the kind," retorted Doc. "Modern surgery hasn't advanced that far yet. The only surgical instrument for getting ideas into some heads is a corkscrew. We better open a fresh bottle. What I mean is suggestion—hypnotism."

"As easy as that?" jeered Tip.

"Sure. You hypnotize your man, then suggest your new idea to him. He accepts it as his own. You wake him up and he acts on it without knowing why. The thief becomes honest, the loafer industrious, the drunkard sober."

"And the dotard doped. Forget it, Doc. You mean well, but your ideas ain't practical. We know we can Siwash Herm, but how do we know we can hypnotize him? Who is to do that?"

"Me," said Doc.

"You old wonder-worker!" Tip gaped in admiration, "if you can buffalo him the way you kid yourself, he's reformed already."

Thanks, old-timer, I *could* do with another. Here's happy days!

Lemme see, now, where was I? Oh, yes, at Herm and hypnotism. Well, the upshot of the matter was that Doc read up some more on healing by suggestion. Then he tested his powers on Herm. The experiment took place one June morning when they had the bar of the Queen's all to themselves, except for Shorty Gale, the proprietor. Doc had dropped in for his mid-morning refresher and Herm was on hand for the same reason as a tout attends a race course. The saws of the shingle mill on the lake front was screeching shrill, the water pouring from the big flume into the lake purred like a warm cat, and the hum of the planes and bandsaws at the Curlew plant around the point was toned down by distance to the sound of busy bees humming in and out of flowers.

Doc began well. Herm turned out to be a natural-born hypnotic subject. One stroke of Doc's thumb over his eyebrow, one long, steady look into his watery eyes, and the thing was done. He draped his long figure over the back of his chair as still as if he'd been carved out of the same piece of wood.

"You are now," Doc began work on him, "leaning up against the bar in an expectant attitude, one foot on the rail."

Herm sat up and began to take a personal interest in current events.

"Take this glass," Doc went on, handing him the stove poker; "it's a stiff glass of the hardest stuff Shorty has got in the bar."

With eager fingers Herm closed on the iron and his features behind his scrubby beard gave an imitation of the welcome committee on the station platform when the train pulls in.

"Wait!" commanded Doc.

It was a most unnatural thing for Herm to do, but he did it. For the first time in his life he hesitated with his elbow crooked for action.

"That liquor," Doc suggested firmly, "is not fit to take into your stomach. It reminds you of lye."

Herm's eyes bulged. He looked like a man convinced against his will. This was no easy thing for him to believe, even when hypnotized.

"Not only does it look bad," Doc followed up, "but it smells bad. Smells nasty like—like coal gas."

Herm's nose now joined his eyes in condemning what his hand held, although he still clung to it as though it was all a dream and he was expecting to wake up any minute.

Doc's kind heart was touched. "It's a low-down advantage to take of him," he confided to the amazed Shortly. "I feel meaner than if I was sawing his arm off unbeknown to him."

"Go to it," Shorty encouraged. He had his own good reasons for wanting Herm reformed. "It's all coming to him, and more."

In even, convincing tones Doc went on: "Every time you see liquor, every time you think about it, you are going to feel that way. It will look bad, smell bad, be bad."

"Well, don't that beat the big drum!" gasped Shorty, as Herm extended the poker at arm's length, shut his eyes tight, and turned his nose away.

Doc went on firmly with the lesson. "That glass of liquor is the last you will ever hold in your hand. Throw it down on the floor."

Regretfully, but submissively, Herm obeyed. He slammed the poker down good and hard on Doc's toe.

It brought a yell from Doc, but he didn't forget himself. He turned the accident to instant account. "Now see what you went and done!" he complained. "You've spilled all that liquor over my boot. It ain't the liquor I'm thinking of; it's the boot. See what that hootch is doing to it. Look at it eating that cowhide up. If it does that to a boot think what it will do to your stomach."

The effect on Herm was severe. He pressed his hands to his middle section and writhed as though all the stuff he had swallowed in a busy life was just beginning to take corrosive effect on his innards.

"Wouldn't it beat a drum!" marveled Shorty. "He believes everything you say."

"Not only believes it," explained Doc, "but will act on it. That's because I believe it myself—that is—er—temporary. You've got to be in earnest to cure by hypnotism."

Here Doc ended his first treatment, repeating once more with emphasis: "It looks bad, smells bad, is bad. You will never taste it again. It would make you very sick. You are going to your bunk now and you will sleep until this time to-morrow. Then you will wake up feeling fine, but thirsty for a cup of tea."

Thanks, Pop. Just set the bottle at my elbow—saves time and signals of distress. Here's happy days!

Lemme see, where was I? Oh, yes; I remember. Well, was that experiment in mental healing a success? It was and it wasn't. Next morning, a little before his usual hour, Doc dropped in at the Queen's for his mid-morning nip. He had his own special brand that Shorty ordered for him by the case, and no verbal directions was needed when his vest buttons clicked against the mahogany—or Douglas fir, as the case might be, and was, at Shorty's.

"Fine morning, Doc," Shorty greeted him, setting up the glassware. "Feeling pretty good this morning, Doc?"

"Off, Shorty, a bit off. I took a notion to a cup of tea before breakfast—something I ain't done in years—and it has kind of upset me."

"Tea!" gasped Shorty. "Tea—at your time of life! You sure was out of luck. Don't do to change your habits that way. A snort of the regular stuff will soon set you up."

"So I figgered." Doc poured himself a stiff jolt. "What would life be without it in an out-of-the-way place like this?" He figured his glass a minute and sniffed the air suspiciously. "Ain't had the stove going, have you, Shorty?"

"Stove going? Not me—not in June. Why?"

"Oh, nothing—nothing at all. Only"—he sniffed again—"seems to me there might be an oder of escaping gas. You don't notice it?"

"Not me," said Shorty, "and my nose is as keen as a bird dog's. You'll feel better when you drink up."

Doc toyed some more with his glass, looking kind of foolish and unhappy. "You're sure this is the regular goods, Shorty?"

Shorty got miffed at that, as what bartender wouldn't? "What do you mean—regular goods? Ain't the label right? D'you think I'd switch on you?"

"No, no, no, Shorty!" Doc was out-and-out miserable. "I didn't mean anything like that. You're as good as they make them, Shorty. None better. We-eli, here's happy days!"

"Drink hearty." Shorty was a bit uneasy about Doc, the way he was acting. "That'll make you feel yourself again."

Doc set down his glass, only half emptied. "I—I ain't feeling so good, Shorty. I—I think I'll go get a breath of fresh air."

Shorty's temper broke loose at that. "Hear the man!" he raged, as Doc disappeared through the door. "Doors and windows all wide open and a June breeze blowing, and he kicks about the air!"

Thirsty work, talking. Sure. Here's happy days!

Lemme see, where was I? Oh, yes. Well, Doc never went back for the rest of that glass. Doubt and suspicion had taken hold on his mind and was preying on it; and his stomach was no more settled than his mind. He felt an urgent need to read up some more on the theory and practice of mental healing. That paragraph near the end of the chapter—he had a suspicion that he had slighted something there. He must

reread that. He hurried back to the shack which was his office and living quarters and got down his book, "Suggestive Therapeutics."

A half hour later he carried his book and his troubles back to the bar of the Queen's. "Looka here, Shorty," he pleaded, "I musta been acting kinda queer with you this morning?"

"Nothing out of the way," said Shorty, making light of it. "Musta been that tea you took on an empty stomach."

"Worse than that." Doc opened up his book where his thumb had been marking the place. "I want you to listen to this. Can't think how I come to overlook it before," and he read from his book:

> The hypnotist must ever be on his guard as to the nature of the suggestions he would implant in the passive mind of the subject. Nothing harmful, nothing contrary to the laws of health ought even to find a place in his own thoughts, much less be audibly suggested; for every suggestion tends to react on the suggester, producing in him—in weakened degree, perhaps, but nevertheless producing—the same effect as intended in the subject of the hypnosis. The repeated suggestion, if persisted in, will eventually control the hypnotist no less than the hypnotized.

Doc laid the book down with a groan. "Ain't that a judgment, now, on the whole race of meddlers? Ain't it? First tea, then gas and that sickish feeling—just like I ordered it for Herm! Another swallow of that good liquor and I'd have gagged on it. Ugh! That's a large price to pay for a small reform. Reform is all right in its way, but it oughtn't to begin at home. 'If persisted in,' it says. Me, I'm off reform for the rest of my days."

Shorty was prompt to administer first aid, spiritual and spirituous. "Your intentions was good, Doc, and you done your best. No harm's happened."

"Well, as to harm," said Doc, rather humble, "there may be more to follow. There's that perennial source of harm—old Tip, you know. You don't think you could manage to forget parts of the story so that that old mocker would never get the rights of it?"

"Right you are, Doc. Sure, Tip must never get to know just where you slipped up."

Doc began to cheer up with that. He leaned over toward Shorty very confidential. "It just kind of occurs to me that that old sinner's inclined to be too smart at times. His notion of humor is sometimes very trying to his best friends—needs toning down some. The time might come—see?—when I might want to teach him to reform Herm himself. Get me? By hypnosis. The treatment ought to do them both good, don't you think?"

"You know best, Doc." Shorty's business called for more suavity than subtlety. "The question is, what are you going to do with Herm? He ought to be along any minute now, raving for tea."

"Do with him? Easy. I'm going to put him under hypnotic influence so quick that he'll think it is still yesterday. Then I'll suggest him straight back to his own proper and depraved estate."

And that, without letting any one but Shorty know what he was about, is exactly what Doc did. So ended the last of the temperance efforts in Herm's direction. His twenty-four hours of drinkless slumber left him with a thirst that must have been a surprise and pleasure to himself. Before he got through ministering to it he had organized a jag that made all his previous efforts look like a learner's first faltering footsteps along the primrose path that leads to the jim-jams. Here's happy days!

Lemme see, where was I? Oh, yes, at the jim-jams. Well, that blow-out of Herm's marked the end. The patience and forbearance of the valley at last broke under the strain. Siwashed, Herm had to be, and Siwashed he duly was. For him the humidity of the Chillikaleen was reduced to a par with the Sahara.

Herm took to the new order of things like a millionaire takes to poverty. The cussedness that he used to blow off in his sprees now stewed in him till it spilled over every hour of the day. He became that ornery he would argue with a bandsaw. In all the world there was only one kind of liquor for him now—the kind he had to leave alone. He spent his days in smoking cigarettes, contradicting his betters, and scheming to beat the Siwash.

Once he got away with it. When Doc came in for his mid-morning nip, Herm made it a habit to line up alongside of him and call for ginger ale, till Shorty and Doc got so used to it that they paid no attention to him. If it satisfied his appetite to swallow the soft stuff while Doc got away with the real thing, he was entitled to that small comfort. But one morning, watching

his chance, he switched glasses and hastily gulped Doc's special brand. Then he watched Doc toss off the glass of ginger ale.

Doc was a mild man, but this was a liberty he could not overlook. In a minute he had Herm again draped over a chair back in a sound hypnotic trance. If ever punishment was made to fit the crime, the revenge he took on Herm was a perfect example.

"The drink you have just swallowed," he told him, "was milk—skim milk. It will have no effect but to make you sleepy. You will go to your bunk and sleep for five hours. When you wake you will feel like going to work. You will like work. You won't be happy till you get it. Tip Somar needs men at the up-mountain camp. You will walk up there and ask him for a job. You'll work for him longer than you've ever worked on a job before. Now go and sleep."

That's how Herm came to get on the pay roll of the shingle-bolt camp up Mount Revercop. Tip put him to work helping Rud Swanson to unload bolts from the two-horse sled Rud drove and to dump them into the pond up there at the head of the flume. Between loads his graft was to work the bolts through the water to the sluice-gate of the flume with a pike pole and start them on their long slide to the lake below.

That, at least, was Tip's theory. Herm's practice differed in numerous distressing details. Doc had told him he would like work, but that was a pretty hard thing for Herm to grasp in one telling. To expect him to work while there was a chance to borrow a fag or start an argument was leaning too heavy on the abnormal. It couldn't be said that Tip was blind to Herm's failings as a son of toil; but hands were scarce and he had perfect confidence that Herm wouldn't last long anyway. He was a self-firer, was Herm.

Herm and Rud Swanson agreed like half brothers courting the same heiress; and, barring Doc Overton, Rud was the best-natured man in the Chillikaleen. Besides borrowing Rud's matches and rolling cigarettes while Rud rolled shingle bolts, Herm out-argued him with every load he drove out of the bush down to the pond. Rud was too healthy and cow-minded to be easily moved to reprisals—that was why Tip had paired him off with Herm—but he was big and his hair was red. He no doubt had his limits, the same as Doc had.

Rud's simplest remark was bound to meet with "That's where you're wrong." That retort had come to be Herm's conversational stand-by. He would watch like a terrier at a rat hole till some poor harmless remark popped out. Then he'd pounce on it and go to the mat with it, shaking and worrying it till its own maker couldn't recognize it. He was as popular as an ex-kinglet in Central Europe.

I'll try to give you one sample of his style: "How long does it take one of them shingle bolts," he asked Rud, "to shoot the flume to the lake below?"

Rud scratched his head. "You may sairtch me. Lat me t'ink. Ta flume she bane t'ree miles long."

"That's where you're wrong. It's three miles, seventeen yards, two feet."

"Yah; yoost so. She drops twanty feet in the hondred."

"Twenty-two and a half," corrected Herm.

"Yoost so. Ta stream she bane go a mile in four minyutes. Four t'rees bane twalve. Yah; she take twalve minyutes."

"That's where you're wrong again." With that Herm was off to a good start. He dragged in the force of gravity to prove that the stream must gain in speed with every second till it reached the lake. Next he figured the friction of water against wood and made an allowance for that. After that he worked out the distance traveled for every separate second and took an average. After worrying at the thing for a whole morning he wound up with an estimate of eleven minutes and forty-two seconds, making a liar of Rud for a matter of eighteen seconds.

This sort of affliction kept up till Rud began to lose his naturally high color and his interest in victuals fell below the efficiency line. Tip saw his duty plain: to fire Herm or switch Rud to some job with less nervous strain. He meant to act, but took too long to get started. He procrastinated round till it looked like a case for a coroner and jury; and, take it from me, a coroner's verdict don't no more put things back where they started than a divorce does. Here's happy days!

Well, things kept on going without a break till the middle of July. Then one morning Calky Knutson, the boom-tender at the lake end of the flume, got a surprise. Calky was prodding bolts with his pike pole as usual and accusing the sun of standing in cahoots with the mill whistle to hold back

the noon grub hour. The stream from the flume kept pouring down steady into the lake with the bolts leaping out on it like sheep following the leader off a high bank into a corral—the corral in this case being the boom that herded the bolts inshore till their turn came to ride up the incline gangway to the mill to be ripped into shingles. That was Calky's job, to ease them through the water and feed them regular to the endless chain on the gangway.

Calky sometimes passed the time by figuring out from the way the bolts came down just what was going on up at the head of the flume. Plunk-splash! Plunk-splash! That's Herm up there putting them over regular—no one to argue with. Nothing doing for a whole minute—Herm taking time to roll a cigarette. Plunk-splash! He's at it again. Comes a spell of perhaps quarter of an hour without a sound but the steady purring of the stream and the screeching of the mill saws—Herm helping Rud to unload. If the time runs over fifteen minutes, it's a safe bet that he has got Rud into an argument while the load waits.

Just to fool his appetite and put in the time till noon, Calky made a bet with himself. He bet that the next spell without a bolt coming down would run to twenty minutes, figuring on the chances of Herm detaining Rud at least five minutes with some fool wrangle. He took the time of the last bolt by his watch, being pained in his most sensitive part to notice that it still lacked half an hour to the eats. Then for ten minutes he went on with his work, crunching up and down his boom log.

Plunk-splash! A bolt already!

He stared at the ripples where the bolt had gone under. "Well, scat my aunt's cats!" he cried. Something was bobbing there—something gray and soaked and battered looking. He got a better look at it. Of all things, in that place, it was a man's hat! Just as he reached for it with his pike pole a head and shoulders shot up out of the water near it. Calky waited to see no more. He dropped his pole. His spikes cut splinters out of the boom log as he dashed for the shore.

"B-r-r-r!" came after him from the water. "Ow! B-r-r-r! I say, Calky!"

Calky got safe to land before he turned. "Well, scat my aunt's tame tabbies!" He was breathing hard. "I—I thought it was a ghost."

"Tha—that's where you're wrong!" It was Herm, contradicting before he had the water out of his eyes.

Calky went back on his log and reached a helping hand. "Now, how the tarnation tear-ups, Herm Hazenby, do you come to be bobbing up here? This ain't no hot water. You'd ought to keep out of it."

For once Herm let a plain statement of fact go unchallenged. He pulled himself up on Calky's log and shivered there. "Dawg-gone him!" he growled, as well as he could for the chattering of his teeth. "Dawg-gone the brute! That ain't no way to conduct an argument." He could hardly speak for shivering. "Throwing a man into the water don't prove no p-p-proposition, nohow!"

"Haw, haw!" barked Calky. "He did that, did he? Throwed you into the pond like a shingle bolt!"

"That's where you're wrong." Herm had come to enough to contradict again. "I could have swum out of the pond. The flume—he chucked me into the flume, d-d-dawg-gone the b-big stiff!"

That set Calky haw-hawing again. He felt sorry for Herm dripping and shivering there like something the retriever had brought to shore; but the picture of Rud ending his well-known sufferings and the argument at the same stroke got the better of his sympathy till he almost fell into the lake with the joy of it.

Then he saw that things were not going right with Herm. The man's eyes had closed. His teeth chattered and spasms were shaking his whole body. It scared Calky. He got down on one knee. "Ain't you feeling good, Herm?" he asked anxiously.

"D-d-doc!" whispers Herm. "C-c-call D-d-doc."

Then Calky realized that it was a time for action. He gathered Herm up and carried him to the sunny side of the boathouse that was used to store the mill punts in winter. Herm gave no sign of coming to, but shivered and chattered and groaned like a man far gone. It put springs in Calky. As fast as his calked boots would let him he started off on a run. He was hampered by no doubts as to Doc's whereabouts at that hour. He made straight for the bar of the Queen's.

Doc finished what he had in hand while he listened to Calky's breathless story. "How'd he come to get in there?" he asked,

Calky explained about Rud.

"Sounds reasonable," admitted Doc. "A-hum! So now he's washed as well as Siwashed, eh?"

Then he took the bottle he had just opened and returned with Calky to the suffering Herm. He saw in a glance that it was no joking matter. Herm was plainly in a bad way. Without an instant of hesitation Doc gave him a dose of the same restorative he had himself been applying internally at the Queen's; which argued a confidence in his own prescriptions not general among regular practitioners.

Herm gulped hard and drew a sobbing breath when at last the bottle was removed from his lips. Then he fell back limp. When Doc reached for his pulse he was seized again with chills and spasms.

Having perfect confidence in his remedy, Doc repeated the dose. Herm was too far gone even to swallow. He just opened his throat and left the rest to gravity. It's no easy thing to do. Only an unconscious man can manage it; or a conscious one that's had much practice. Herm didn't flutter an eyelid.

Doc took the level of the bottle in some surprise, not unmixed with admiration. "He don't seem able to sit up," said he; "but he sure can obliterate nourishment."

Then he took Herm's pulse, looking him over all the while with a thoughtful eye. "A-hum!" he mused, snapping his watch shut. "Calky, you don't happen to smell anything like a rat about, do you?"

"A rat, Doc?" It was over Calky's head. "There's dozens about, but I'm no terrier to be smelling 'em."

"I was just wondering," said Doc, dismissing the matter. "Myself, I've got rather a keen nose."

Just here the half-conscious Herm was taken with another spell of chills and moaning. If July had been January his teeth couldn't have chattered worse.

Doc held the bottle up to the light again, gauging its contents. "Once bitten, twice leary," he said, quite distinct, but talking to himself.

Herm stopped his chattering and lay as still as the bark on a tree.

"Ice cold that water must be," went on Doc. "It's safe betting a man might need much stimulant after a bath in it. Eh, Calky? There's one more dose in this bottle—as Herm understands doses. He's no homeopath. Just for safety, he gets it." He stooped swiftly to Herm's ear. "You get it; but first, just to play safe against any of your skullduggery, I'm going to put you to sleep so that you won't waken for man or earthquake till I give you the word: 'Wake up, Herm!' You understand?"

Herm groaned; but his only move was to shape his lips for the neck of the bottle.

"It's a trade," said Doc; and he put him to sleep.

At Doc's orders Herm then emptied the bottle, but not even the mill whistle blowing twelve o'clock could wake him out of the trance Doc had put him into. The mill hands came tumbling out, brushing red cedar dust from their clothes and stampeding for the mill eating house. Doc got Calky to hail a couple of healthy shingle shifters and had them carry Herm to the Queen's, where they put him to bed in a room upstairs. Here's happy days!

Lemme see, where—— Oh, yes; put him to bed. Of course, Calky didn't put himself under any censorship restraints and his story of how Rud had got the better of Herm in argument made him the star of the dinner hour. The news spread to the sawmill hands at the Curlew plant and before one o'clock the Queen's bar had become as lively as a hop-growers' convention.

But before the men had got through chewing their toothpicks a man was seen coming down the trail in shirt sleeves and a cloud of dust. It was Tip Somar and he didn't take long after his arrival to reveal what was on his mind.

"Where is that long lunkhead of a Herm Hazenby?" was his first word.

"Hush! Not so loud, Tip," begged Calky. "He's asleep and under the doctor's care. Darndest yarn you ever heard. Listen here till I tellya."

Tip had no time for any side-splitting yarns from Calky. He headed straight for Doc.

"Where is he at, Doc?" There was a feverish light in Tip's eye. "That long-legged, Siwashed, brain-busted, bean-burner of a Herm Hazenby—where is he at?"

It was plain that no man in his het-up state was fit for any sick room. Doc held him off. "What do you want him for, Tip?"

"Want him for? I'm his boss, aint' I? I want my rights as such. I want to fire him." His tone left no room for doubt that he wanted it bad. "It's a pleasure I've

been promising myself every foot of the five miles down the trail. Don't stand between me and a little hard-earned diversion, Doc. Produce him and watch me enjoy myself?"

Doc stood him off. "Afraid you'll have to wait, Tip. He's not exactly—er—that is, he's asleep."

Tip groaned like the news was a heavy blow to his hopes. "The wrangling, loafing, tricky, scheming son of a gun! You don't mean to say that you've gone and give him liquor, Doc?"

"I prescribed some spirits for him." Doc was a little on his high horse to have a mere bushwhacker like Tip call his treatment in question. "For chills and shock, distilled liquor is a specific."

"Lead me to him," pleaded Tip, "and I bet I give him some chills and shock you can't cure with all the distilled liquor in the Chillikaleen. I was looking forward to firing him so hard he'd think he had dreamed his job, and here you go and elate him up so he won't care two whoops if I hold out his back pay, too." Sore, Tip was. "Do you know what that galoot of a bean-waster went and done? Listen here till I tellya."

He dragged Doc into the poker room off the bar and began to harangue him there as earnest as a suffragette canvassing the bachelor vote. "Now, looka here, Doc. Let me get this thing straight. Are you admitting that you've gone and give a Siwashed man whisky? Is that right?"

"Quite right," agreed Doc, "right, always. What's more, I'm going to prescribe some this minute for you. I'll get it myself, Shorty being too busy to wait on us."

Preliminaries arranged, "How many already know what you've done?" asked Tip.

"Calky, for one."

Tip groaned. "Then the whole world knows it. You've been a mark. Herm played you for a sucker, and you bit."

Doc only grinned. "Say on, Tip," he advised, "it'll ease you."

Tip was in need of ease. "I'll say a bookful," he threatened. "You know me, Doc, for one mild, steady-tempered man that's hard to drive to extremes."

"I know you," said Doc; "but say on."

Tip couldn't be shook in his own good opinion of himself. "That's me, whether you admit it or not. Any boss that can stand three weeks of Herm Hazenby on one job don't need a certificate of good temper from no source. That man's the champion wrangler of the universe. This morning, thinking things over, I came to the end of my patience. Thinks I, I'll fire him. I'll spy on him till I get the goods on him—goods enough to make me so mad that I can do a bang-up job of firing.

"Well, hiding behind a cedar stump, here's the goods I got on Herm: For a spell he worked steady, putting the bolts over slow but reg'lar, watching each one down the flume as far as he could see it. Then he loafed long enough to smoke two cigarettes. That was goods enough. I was mad enough for an A-1 job of firing; but just as I was going to step out and call him he chucked away his stub, took one look around, dived headfirst into the pond, and slipped out of sight down the flume."

Doc slapped his leg. "Did he?" he chuckled. "The nerve of him! I wouldn't have done it—not for a million drinks. Just when you wanted to fire him, too! It's one on you, Tip. I must get it circulated round some. It's too good to keep, that one."

Tip got sore. "There's no hee-haw coming from you, Doc Overton. Who's the real goat here, anyhow? Who give him liquor, just what he was playing for? Huh? What you got to say for yourself, giving a Siwashed man hootch?"

"Medical prescriptions is allowed," defended Doc.

"Oh, hang the law of it," argued Tip. "Think of that bunch in the bar there. What are you going to say to them when they get the rights of the story? Tell me that. If it's one on me I guess it's sixteen on you."

It made Doc thoughtful, getting the wrong end of the ratio like that.

Tip kept boring in: "Just glance your eye over that hairy, hilarious, hee-hawing bunch out there. You savvy what kind of a sense of humor them sawdust-eaters has got?"

"Wry," admitted Doc, mournful—"when it ain't Scotch."

"Identical so." Tip's voice was hoarse with feeling. "They're too ignorant to take their humor in moderation like you or me, but have to make beasts of theirselves with it. You and me's in the same boat. We pull together or go down together. If you go giving them my story, I'll give them yours."

The mill whistle blowing one o'clock cleared the bar at this point and gave Doc a minute to fill his glass and turn the thing

over in his mind. "I ain't the goat you think I am, Tip. I've got a good defense. Still, I admit that history is made up mostly of the tales that people want to believe. They might prefer your version to mine."

"I'll say they would," said Tip, refilling his glass.

"Well, if you think—remember, I don't admit it; but if you think—that Herm has put one over on both of us, some action ought to be taken. What do you want to do about it?"

"Do? I'll do a-plenty, if only I can do it right now." Tip's voice was eager, pleading. "Can't you sober him up quick, Doc, so that none of what I'm going to do to him won't be lost on him?"

Doc shook his head slow and thoughtful. "No, Tip, no. You are strong and willing; but the worst you could do would be over too soon. Something more lingering is called for here. There was a fellow once at college—— Say! Drink up and we'll go upstairs and look that scoundrel over. I have a glimmering of an idea."

He led the way up the stairs. "The main thing," he explained over his shoulders, "which is not to allow that souse to wake up and realize that's he is full of rye and triumph—that I've attended to already."

"Believe me, he wouldn't realize it for long." Tip hated to tear himself away from his own pet ideas about handling a convalescent.

"Forget all that," ordered Doc as he led the way into the room where Herm lay; "there's more ways of killing a bear than choking him with honey. There he is. Take a look at him. Overhangs the bed considerable, don't he? They should have folded him up like a jackknife to make him fit."

"Or shortened him by a head." Tip was still vindictive. He took a closer look. "Heavens! He don't seem to be breathing. Nothing wrong, is there?"

"Right as rain," said Doc, his finger on Herm's pulse. "You recollect what I once tried to tell you about hypnotizing him?"

"I do; but what I don't seem able to recollect is that you ever made good any of your brags."

Doc waved a self-satisfied hand at the figure on the bed. "My work speaks for itself. You see it before you. Herm may have tricked a few drinks out of me, but he got no chance to do any advertising. As you see him he is in a state of coma. Nothing can wake him till I say the word."

Tip's eye lit up. "You think so? Can I try a word or two of mine?"

"Barring all scratching, biting, and strangle holds, go as far as you like."

After some minutes of whole-hearted shaking Tip gave up. The exercise restored his good humor even if it had no visible effect on Herm.

"Why," he panted, "the man's as good as dead. You're positive sure——"

"Positive *and* sure. He'll never wake till I give the word."

"Doc, you're the last and loftiest wonder of the world. I'll admit it. Herm didn't get such a much on you. I wonder now—er——"

"What's on your mind?"

"He looks dead, acts dead, as far as a greenhorn can see *is* dead. Couldn't we—er——"

"We could," said Doc. "The same thought's been running in my own mind. We pulled off a stunt like that once at college. You're thinking of an old-fashioned wake, eh?"

"I am just that." Tip was keen for it. "That would be lingering enough to suit you. You could wake him up in time to attend the finish of it. That ought to teach the beggar to stay Siwashed. What say?"

"It could be made a memorable occasion," agreed Doc, warming up to the idea. "At the worst, it will keep him out of all arguments for a couple of days. There's no time to be lost in taking action. The first thing to do is to blun Shorty. You better stay here while I go and prepare his mind."

When he had descended to the bar his face was as long and cheerless as the flume. "Shorty," he began, and Shorty recognized at once his sick-room manner, "that unfortunate upstairs is not progressing favorable. He's had an unexpected bad turn. There's regular cardiac oscillations and exorbitant cranial ossification."

"Geegorry!" gasped Shorty. "As bad as that? Can't something be done for him, Doc?"

"What science can do," Doc assured him earnestly, "will sure be done. I'm just slipping over to my office to fetch needed restoratives." Here's happy days!

Lemme see, where was I? Oh, yes; fetching restoratives. Pure bluff on Doc's part, of course. When he got back, him and Tip

spent some more time with the unconscious Herm. Shorty, of course, couldn't leave his bar. Then they came down, Doc in the lead, Tip following. Without a word they went up to the bar. Both were downcast, but of the two Tip was the hardest hit. You'd say the old hypocrite had lost a donkey engine and not less than a mile of cable in a landslide.

"How d'ye find him now, Doc?" Shorty inquired. "Resting easier?"

"Resting easier it is, Shorty," said Doc in an undertaker's voice. "We'll take a bracer of the usual, me and Tip. We're needing it." He poured out a heavy sigh and three fingers of consolation. "Herm has gone and croaked on us, Shorty." He lifted his glass. "Yes, Shorty, gone and croaked."

"G'wan, Doc, you ain't serious?"

"Serious as doom, Shorty. Tough luck. I ain't lost a case in this valley since Abe Zinc got involved with that circular saw three seasons ago. Where death is due to natural causes like that I can't be held responsible. But this——" He shook his head as he choked on his last sip of liquor. "I didn't think it of Herm. My reputation is liable to suffer."

"Not none, Doc; not while I'm above ground," Tip tried to comfort him. "I was there and I'll say that you certainly done all to Herm that skill and science could do." And Tip put his nose in his glass like his feelings, too, was needing relief.

"What seemed to be the matter?" asked Shorty, remembering his place to be sympathetic. "No kind of a ducking ought to hurt Herm. He's a fish in the water."

"Shock, Shorty, shock." Doc turned away to hide his feelings. "Cigarette heart. Couldn't stand the exposure. That flume water might as well run straight out of a glacier."

"Colder'n hell," supported Tip, all gloom. "It's nothing but melted snow. Poor old Herm!"

Shorty wiped at his bar and got to thinking things over. "Bad, ain't it, any way you look at it. There's Rud, now—where does he get off? It may go hard with that boy. Didn't he throw—er—didn't Calky say they had some sort of a row—him and Herm?"

"Huh? What's that?" It was plain that Doc hadn't given a thought to that side of the question.

"Why," explained Shorty, "you musta heard Calky's story. He says that Herm's last words before he went to sleep was about Rud throwing him into the flume. Some argument between them, he says."

"You don't tell!" This was from Tip, who was plain intrigued by the news. "First I heard of that."

Doc brushed it away with a wave of his hand. "Nothing in that, nothing in that. Rud's got the best name in the valley for patience and forbearance. Nobody'd pay any attention to a charge like that."

"Don't you bank too far on that," Tip warned him, not knowing where it was all leading, but willing to help it along. "Rud's only human, and red-headed besides. Herm was powerful provoking."

"Soused or sober, he was all of that," agreed Shorty with deep feeling. "Rud's a decent boy—never takes a drink nor hells around like the ruck of these bushwhackers. All the same, unless he's got a witness it may go hard with him at the inquest."

"Hey? What's that—inquest?" It was plain that Doc hadn't looked so far ahead as that. He gaped on it a second time: "Inquest?"

"Sure thing. An inquest, sure." This was from Tip, pricking up his ears and backing Shorty up. "By every manner of means, an inquest."

"No, but Tip, looka here now," Doc was making wry faces behind his hand for Tip's benefit, "didn't you tell me yourself——"

"Listen here to me, Doc." Tip got his man by the elbow and began canvassing again. "Ain't you just said your reputation is liable to suffer. Didn't you? And ain't it? Course it is. Rud *may* get blamed, but you sure will. The only way to wipe the slate is by an inquest. Inquests! What would life be without them? Besides"—he looked Doc straight in the eye—"it's more —lingering."

"More what?" asked Shorty, butting in.

"'It's more lingering,' is what I said, Shorty. You ought to decide, Doc, and decide quick, before——"

"Now look here, you double-dealing old hypocrite, didn't you just tell me yourself that——"

"Hearsay, Doc, hearsay," broke in Tip, not letting his man get a word in edgewise. "What comes out at the inquest'll come out legal and straight and according to the rules of evidence. What say, Shorty?"

"You got the rights of it," agreed Shorty. "There's no other way. We don't want no stains on the repetation of this valley for law-abiding. Settle everything legal and regular, say I. That means an inquest, in this case, if ever it did. When's it to be, Doc?"

"You can't refuse," put in Tip, clinching the matter, "not when two demands it. How soon's it to be?"

Outflanked, Doc stood back and gave one long look at his treacherous ally. His lips moved like he was naming over to himself all the slow poisons in the drug book. "You slippery, untrustworthy, double-dealing old trouble-brewer, you've got me in a corner. I'll—I'll think it over and give you my answer. This here has been a busy day. I'm just a leetle—I gotta take a little time to think it out—got to get my head clear. But if I do hold that inquest you'll be under oath, Tip Somar, and Heaven be your help if you don't stick to a straight story then." Here's happy days!

Lemme shee, where was I? Eh, whassay? Oh, yes, I 'member—ol' Doc and the inquest. Some fix the ol' boy was in. Willing to hold a wake. In fac', keen for a wake—lo's of fun. But an inques'—he drew the line at an inques'. Had to stand 'em off somehow. Faking an inques' a ticklish business—likely lose him his job. Had to decide. What could he do? Whassay? Man to man, I ask you, *what* could he do? I pause for a—hic—supply. Here sha—shabby days!

Lem' shee, where was I? Whassay? Oh, yes, I sabby—'bout Doc. Not reg'lar doc, y'un'erstan', only near doc. Good ol' scout, all same. Loved his li'l' joke, loved his li'l' glass; but had his-s-slimits both ways. Hadda give his answer. Hadda get his head clear. Tha's it—get his head clear. Then give 'cision. Inques' or no inques'—tha's quesh'n. 'Cides take nozzer drink to make's head clear. Good idea. Perf'ly good idea.

He trailed off into feebler and feebler inanities ending in a snore. He slept—slept even as Herm himself had slept, not to be wakened till the morrow. The next night he was again the glum and silent walrus. No; we never again got him going on the inquest; never again even got him up to talking pitch—it took too much inducement. The following morning he departed.

BEHIND THE WASHINGTON SCENES

POLITICIANS are fond of declaring that personal relations and the vague political asset known as "pull" no longer affect appointments and "deals" in Washington. "Civil service," they say, "has put things on the high level of merit and efficiency." All this has the ring of fine truths in fine language. But it is far from true. Take for example the work of newspaper correspondents. Up to a short time ago there was a well-known writer who invariably took the side of the administration. Nothing wrong was ever done by anybody elevated to office by the president.

Suddenly the journalist's attitude changed. Wilson and the followers of Wilson were always wrong! They were running the United States into the gutters of ruin! Efficiency had decamped from the national capital! To the ordinary reader it seemed that contemporary officialdom was strangely cursed with inability. The real explanation, however, was that the correspondent, having been refused a favor which would have benefited him and injured other writers, had "cut loose" on a journalistic anger jag.

Appointments to "soft jobs" are always decided by the personal element. A senator says: "I'll be at Mrs. Blank's dinner this evening; and he'll be there. I think I can make him see the thing in the right light." Another observes: "Great Scott! Hasn't the man any gratitude? You carried the district for him! Why shouldn't he come across when you want something?"

Here is an oft-repeated cry from a "big man back home" to a congressman: "Get my son out of the army—or into the diplomatic service—or something else—right away, will you? Oh, yes; I know all that: the difficulty, and so on. But that's why I'm talking to you—you're the man who can turn the trick!"

So it goes. If you sit back in Dark Hollow and think ability will outweigh the personal pull of a competitor for this, that, or the other job, you are vastly mistaken. In Washington, as elsewhere, acquaintanceship is a big factor.

Drive Your Eyes and Ideas Tandem

By James Hay, Jr.

Author of "Don't Pull a Xerxes," Etc.

Practical advice Mr. Hay hands us in this little man-to-man talk, and some of us need it.

EVERYBODY thinks. Outside of a lunatic asylum or a race-track grand stand when the favorite is losing by a sixteenth of a nose, it is a rare and difficult performance to dig up one individual who does not think. For high-speed, brilliant, and beautiful thought, the laziest man I ever knew was a wonder. Thinking is the universal preoccupation.

And right there you put your finger on the far-famed, tongue-worn "secret of success!"

If you are not making good on your job, if you adorn the shelves assigned to life's Back Numbers, if your future looms ahead of you as a thing already dead, there is only one possible explanation of the tragedy: too many of your thoughts are blank cartridges. You lack bullets, the thoughts that lead to actions, achievements, deeds. You lose because you cannot think effectively.

Your thinking is a knock-out when it compels you to do what you think. You make good when you take hold of your work in the way dictated by your intelligence.

Failures are those who have been cut down by their emotions. They do what they "feel like" doing.

"All right!" says the Back Number. "True enough! Anybody can sit down in the calm and quiet of his home and figure out what he has to do in order to land. But can he get away from the domination of his feelings? Can he learn to steer according to what he thinks?"

He can. Every one of the winners has done it. He has discovered the golden fact that his intelligence grows as demands are made upon it. And every time he thinks of an efficient way to put something over, he turns up his collar, rushes into the cold night of opposition and indulges himself in an act, an attempt to do what he thinks—he takes a shot with a real bullet. Moreover, every time he fires, his marksmanship is better than it was the time before.

When he trains himself into the habit of this sharp-shooting, he is successful, a mighty hunter of opportunity. He has arrived.

Charles Darwin laid all his success to his ability—an acquired ability—to keep a subject in mind for a great number of years without ever losing sight of it. Arkwright, the barber, inventor of the spinning-jenny and founder of the cotton manufactures of Great Britain, turned his double-barreled trick by keeping in mind the idea that he could improve spinning. Sturgeon, the electrician, built his wonders on ideas he thought over while working as a shoemaker.

They kept their eyes in the same direction as their ideas. The tandem team put them down in front of their fields.

Moreover, they knew what to run from. Your business king, your genius, your leader, is a successful fugitive. He has escaped the Great Conspiracy to keep him down. For the world is organized in one stupendous plot to make a man do what he "feels like" doing. He is deafened by the clamorous chorus, the mighty uproar: "Take it easy! Follow your feelings!"

The average citizen wants to quit work at the end of eight hours, and he makes laws to let him do so. Laws are made for everything. The clothing manufacturers lay down the law of what to wear and how to wear it. The health authorities decide what must be done to cure a disease, and when, and where. The religionists say what is right, and why. The newspapers announce the political candidates and demand support for one, destruction for another.

The biggest angle of this conspiracy is the incessant, efficient, and highly organized movement to make you feel that work is

hard, that weariness is inevitable, that the struggle is terrific, and that, if you fail to take off all the time possible, you will wake up some fine morning and find yourself in the shattering grip of a shivering collapse.

You get it from every direction. If you fall a victim to it, you begin to feel a little "done up" by eleven o'clock each morning; by noon you need "absolute relaxation;" by two p. m. you try to hypnotize the hands of the clock into swifter motion; by five you yearn for a stretcher on which you may be borne, recumbent, flat, and finished, to your long-neglected bed!

That's why there is too much blank-cartridge thinking. Most men tempt each man to live according to his feelings. His prehistoric ancestors drifted along that way. All his fathers have done it, in greater or less degree. He tries it. And he finds that it means going to pieces in muscle and mind. It means fear of experiment, fear of initiative, slackness of system, absence of force.

The winners in life have looked the Great Conspiracy over and snapped their fingers at it.

They have learned that nobody has ever attained greatness by working a mere eight hours a day, that getting tired is usually nothing but feeling lazy—and liking it! They have refused to be hobbled by the limitations which their less able brothers have tried to wrap around the world.

They have found that keen thought and action transform dreams into reality—the reality of a bank account, happiness at home, and the respect and admiration of the community.

If you are slipping, if you are afraid of failure, it is because some impulse, an emotion, is taking up so much of your strength that you cannot hold a serviceable idea in your mind long enough to let it guide you. Your ideas are good, but ghostly. They look one way, your eyes the other. The only system to bring results is to drive eye and idea one after the other—tandem.

When you ask me why John Jones, who at twenty-five showed great promise of a brilliant future, is a failure at fifty, I know of only one possible explanation: Jones fell a victim to an emotion. This must be true. Isn't his brain as good now as it was, his muscles as serviceable?

He fails because his intelligence is benumbed by his feelings—the desire for liquor, for gambling, for taking things easy; or sorrow because of unhappiness at home, or lack of confidence, or a grudge long cherished.

Terrible enemies, these feelings—this hatred of hardship, these desires for ease, for pleasant sensations, for escape from the high tension of concentrated thought and uttermost endeavor. They interrupt thought, throttle hope, burn up energy. They make you a house divided against itself. Their impossible demand is: "Succeed without exertion!"

But they can be beaten. The thought which they attack can drive them in disgraceful rout. Think for a moment exactly what you want to do. That idea, once put into your mind, will gather to itself other ideas. No matter how many times your attention may be distracted from it, no matter how you may surrender at first to desires for idleness, uninspiring companions, destructive habits, this fact remains: if you persist in driving your thoughts back to the original idea, it will grow to majestic stature, will develop imperial powers.

Every fine achievement is the result of a man's persisting, like Darwin, in forcing his attention again and again to the thought of what he wants to do. Nature puts on the finishing touches. The idea grows, adorns itself, creates within you a kingdom of its own, and at last presents itself, a marvel, for your possession and use.

The steamboat exists because somebody once had the fleeting thought that steam had motive power. A novel delights you because the author began with the idea: "I'll write a fine story." A gigantic corporation piles up millions of dollars because a business man once thought: "There's a lot of money in that product if it's handled on a big scale."

Neither boat, book, nor business would ever have become a finished thing if the originator's mind had not driven his attention again and again to that first, fleeting, small thought.

He thought of it twice, three times, many times; next, his attention forged a chain of thought; then, his imagination ornamented the hazy scheme with pictures of the great-

ness of the final achievement. From that was born enthusiasm, resolution, power.

If he had said: "Funny thought, that—like fairyland! Where's the gang? I'm going fishing!" a feeling, the lazy man's love of sitting idle on a river bank, would have killed the idea and robbed the world.

Think! Cling to the thought; work on it; hammer it hard. Drive out of your mind the longing for dissipation or idleness as you would drive a burglar from your home. Resist the attacks of feelings. Put yourself in command of your own existence. Escape the Great Conspiracy.

There is no credit in folding your hands on your chest and drifting, effortless, down the stream of events. Dead fish float with the current; live ones flash up-stream.

Get yourself into shape to obey always the commands of your mind, never the persuasion of your feelings.

You are your own star. "Whatsoever," declared the shrewd old Seneca, "whatsoever the mind has ordained for itself it has achieved."

Think! Consider an idea until you see its beauty, its power. The time will come, and soon, when action will be a necessity to you. The ardor of hope will fire all your being. Flaming enthusiasm will blaze your path to achievement. Intense, continued thought forges the weapons that conquer difficulty and beat down discouragement.

Idleness is the zero of human affairs. With thought, you get a grip on Destiny and fashion Fate anew.

LITT MALLORY ON WAR

LITT MALLORY, the Virginia philosopher, had listened, sad, solemn, and sinister, to an hour's hubbub from the loafers who believed everlasting peace was about to enfold the earth.

"Every time I hear talk of this sort," he finally forced words of weight past a ponderous quid of tobacco, "I remember the only trip I ever made to Washington. The only evening I ever spent there was at the National Press Club, hearing an address by General Leonard Wood. That was a good while ago, some eight or ten years, I reckon; but I've never forgotten this observation by the general:

"'Men fight. They always have fought. They always will. And the people who believe fighting has ceased among men or among nations are simply crazy. As long as human beings are human beings war will be a possibility. The country blind to that fact is an idiot among nations.'"

"GOOD-BY, BOOZE!"

THE time has come when no bottle is a safe retreat for booze, and no drug store can be regarded as a city of refuge for the gentry whose tongues turn with longing toward any beverage alcoholic or whose twitching nerves seek to twine themselves around the supporting consolation of any liquid containing the cheering "jolt" or the encouraging "kick."

Doctor A. B. Adams is the man who, with a relentlessness as pronounced as his professional skill, has brought this about. Working for the bureau of internal revenue and in an office at the top of the treasury building in Washington, he has discovered that there are now sold in the country's drug stores one hundred thousand mixtures containing at least from fourteen to sixteen per cent alcohol. Some of them run as high as ninety-odd per cent alcohol. In the last year the doctor has analyzed nearly two thousand medicines suspected of containing more booze than drugs.

And here is the conclusion he has reached: twenty-five per cent of these "curative conglomerations" fail to come to the standard which makes them really medicine. Failing to meet the standard, they are classed as "booze," and the manufacturers have to improve them or quit making them or pay fines or go to jail. The standard is: "Each fluid ounce must contain a true dose of one or more compatible drugs of recognized therapeutic value."

All of which means that the medicines must be medicines; and the day of "eighty per cent alcohol and twenty per cent water" is gone, done for, vanished away.

Barney of the World Police

By Arthur Tuckerman

Author of "The Kid Pilot," Etc.

I—CAPE TO CAIRO

THEY had added ten stories to the International Sky Traffic Tower in 1930; it was only the timely invention of Dufaux's cantilever frame which made this mid-air feat of building possible. Cliff Barney paused a moment to gaze at its graceful, spirelike outline with keen appreciation. It presented an imposing and familiar sight to all New Yorkers. You could see it anywhere from Newark, New Jersey, to Yonkers up the Hudson, for it towered above all other buildings on the river bank just about a mile above the Transoceanic Airpark, where the bulky triplane liners crept up the harbor on the five-thousand-foot level three times a week at sunset and disgorged their passengers from London and Paris.

Barney entered one of the electric elevators that scaled the outside of the building in a smoothly oiled shaft and called his floor.

"Pilot's Bureau, World Police."

A moment later he stepped out at the forty-first floor and hastened down the tesselated corridor to the last door.

Major Roth greeted his entrance with a shout of welcome. Since his fall into the Panama Canal from a burning seaplane, three months previously, Barney had been recovering in a New York hospital from severe injuries. Roth was Barney's commanding officer and the head of the New York division of the World Police Air Division, that brilliantly efficient organization devised as the outcome for the world revolutions of 1925-6. It was an international affair this world police and the air division alone had a membership of over two thousand, comprising the most intrepid aviators of the world, men who besides being masters of flying were possessed of exceptional mental and physical qualifications that made them feared by evildoers in every land.

"Glad to see you, Barney," said Roth, extending his hand. "Fully recovered and ready for work?"

Barney laughed and showed his smooth white teeth.

"Yes, but it took a long time. Think what I missed, Barcelona robberies and that Hudson Bay trouble. Well, what's the news to-day?"

"Oh, nothing very much." Roth was turning over the pages of the *Morning Syndicate*. "Wait a moment, here's something that might interest you. Do you remember what a howl was raised when the British government refused to employ native pilots on the Capetown-Cairo air mail? The natives sought to control that mail route but the British suspected trouble. Read that."

Barney took up the paper and read the column Roth indicated:

ANOTHER PLANEMAN KILLED ON CAPE-TO-CAIRO ROUTE.

CAIRO, June 13.—For the second time this month a Cape-to-Cairo mail plane has met with disaster. Yesterday afternoon Plane 44-AK, piloted by Cecil Stracer, crashed to earth a few kilometers south of Luxor. It is a curious coincidence that the accident happened within ten kilometers of the spot where Pilot Matthews fell to his death on the same route last week. The authorities, however, state they do not suspect any foul play.

"You note that last sentence," observed Barney with a slight smile. "That's an obvious blind inserted by the Cairo W. P. men. It probably means that they do suspect foul play and they're on the track of it. I know the British colonial's methods, they're clever."

Roth listened to him with interest. Anything Barney had to say—he was a man of few words—was always worth hearing. Of the fifty-odd pilots that formed the personnel of the New York squadron, none was more justly famed than Cliff Barney. Barely twenty-seven years old, he was recognized as the crack world-police pilot of America as well as being one of the shrewdest investigators of crime that New York had ever

known. It was this that gave him the unique distinction of wearing two of the most envied world police badges, master aviator and captain of secret service.

"Barney, do you want me to look you up a job?"

"You bet, major. I'm sick of doing nothing but reading about other fellows' work."

Roth pressed a glazed button on his desk and raised the radiophone transmitter from its hook. Barney listened intently; there was barely a minute's wait before Roth began to speak.

"Radio Central? This is Major Roth, New York W. P. Air Division. Give me chief's office, Washington. Hello, chief's office? Report Captain Cliff Barney, New York Squadron, for duty from hospital; and, by the way, ask news bureau to transmit to-day's general orders, will you?"

He hung up the receiver and pressed another button on the woodwork of the wall. A panel slid back revealing a telegraphic typewriter. As they watched, it began to write, operated by Hertzian waves from Washington headquarters.

W. P. AIR DIVISION. RESUME GENERAL ORDERS JUNE 14. CONFIDENTIAL.

British Section. Captain Chas. Hoxton and Lieutenant Louis Cromer report to W. P. A. D. headquarters Cairo, Egypt, subject to attend Cape-to-Cairo mail investigation.

Major Henry Rawlins, S. E. Naval Squadron, report to Dover Harbor before 17th inst. to convoy H. M. S. *Admiral Beaty* and H. M. S. *Jutland* to Gibraltar.

French Section. Capitaine Gerard Lornier, Adjutant Fanssetele, de Caen à Toulon-Maritime par la voie de l'air.

American Section, United States Headquarters, Washington, D. C. Aviator Students Shafer Redbank and Chas. D. Cumnor, Buffalo Airpark, report to Houston, Texas, Airpark, W. P. A. D., for traffic duty.

Any headquarters having an officer with rank of aviator and secret-service rank also will report if available for duty to chief of W. P. A. D., Washington, for assignment to attend Cape-to-Cairo investigation. Only one will be chosen.

Roth switched off the current and closed the panel. "There's your job cut out for you," he remarked. "If I send your name in to the chief now, you can get it without a doubt." Barney shrugged his shoulders.

"Do you think there's anything to it?"

"Surely. The British have detailed Hoxton, one of their best men."

"I'll take it," said Barney. "But I'd like to fly my own plane over there instead of traveling on the Mediterranean dirigible."

Roth answered with a military curtness.

"Orders are orders. You ought to know by this time that you can't waste time and money and government planes when you've got an air liner direct leaving New York to-morrow night."

"All right, sir, I'll be ready."

II.

Two days later Barney walked into the world police headquarters at Cairo, the offices of which were located on the ground floor of a tiny villa whose white walls, half-hidden by a thick mantle of purple bugin-villæa, faced the dusty Boulevard Abdin.

He was greeted by the chief of the Egyptian air division, a fat little Englishman who smoked cigarettes incessantly and seemed to be very much worried about everything in general. Gavin was his name.

"Sit down, captain," he said. "There's more trouble to-day about this Cape-to-Cairo mail. Have you heard?"

Barney told him that he had heard nothing since leaving New York.

"Ah, then you don't know the worst of it. Yesterday afternoon another chap fell on the same route, and what's more, he fell within five miles of where the other two did! It's foul play. It couldn't be coincidence. Think of it, three of 'em, one after another, all in the same place, and every one so smashed up that you can't make head or tail of the cause of it." Barney drew up a chair.

"It looks as if it were a put-up job," he admitted. "Still, there isn't the slightest bit of evidence so far, is there?"

Gavin ignored the question; his manner became suddenly alert.

"Look here, Captain Barney. You're intelligent enough to know that this is a systematic form of murder; there's been trouble ever since the ruling against native pilots went into effect. Now, I want you to get to work on this business in your own way; act independently and do what you think best. And remember that you're the only man at work on this matter, because Captain Hoxton has been delayed on his way here by an accident. One point I might add, namely, that each of the dead pilots stopped at the refilling station at Assouan, some five hundred miles south of Cairo, which is their last way-stop on the northbound trip, and the commandant there reports that each

of the three left Assouan in good health with their planes in first-class shape."

Barney nodded good morning and strolled out of the office, lost in thought. There seemed to be no outstanding fact to commence upon, but if this were crime the motive was not hard to see; the pay of the first-class air-mail pilot is high, indeed, and the natives were enraged at the ruling against them; on the other hand, it might be argued that the government's insistence on British pilots for the most important air-mail service in Africa was natural and justifiable.

He sat down on a bench under the leafy lebbek trees in the Esbekieh Gardens for a few moments, and then walked back to his hotel.

At two o'clock Barney hailed a cab and directed the driver to the air station, situated on the Nile bank a mile below the white walls of Gezireh Palace. The car swerved at breakneck speed along the wide Boulevard of Abdul Aziz, dodging through a maze of traffic, creaking wooden carts drawn by patient, red-tasseled donkeys and loaded down with shrieking Arabs, slim, brown native girls with red clay goulahs balanced miraculously on their heads strolling by, oblivious to the traffic on all sides; rich Greek merchants driving at ease in handsome French automobiles, pathetically obedient camels picking their way in cautious single file along the edge of the road, all mingled together in a strange bedlam of Oriental sound and smell. The taxi presently shot across the Nile on the ponderous ramp of the Kasr-el-Nil bridge and turned south past the clustered palms of the Gezireh, and finally halted with a groan outside the air station.

A greasy mechanic touched his cap as he caught a glimpse of Barney's uniform.

"Has the Cape mail arrived yet?" questioned Barney. "I want to talk with the pilot."

"He's due at any moment now, sir, just been signaled ten miles south of here."

Captain Roderick, jovial, red-faced commandant of the air station, approached, then with outstretched hand:

"Gavin just telephoned you'd be over to interview the Cape pilot, Captain Barney. Maybe you can learn something from him; he's the first man to get through in three weeks, all the rest have been killed."

A black speck was reeling in the sky just above the lazy yellow current of the Nile.

"Here he comes now, he's on time to the minute; evidently there's been no trouble this trip."

Barney started across the hot sand with Broderick toward the concrete runway where a half dozen planes were parked on the two-hundred-yard ramp that sloped gently up from the subterranean hangars. Even as they watched, a tiny scarlet biplane shot forth from the bowels of the earth and leaped into the air."

"Jaffa mail," remarked Roderick. "Half an hour late starting, motor trouble."

The speck in the south had by this time taken the shape of a biplane, making for the air station at a great speed. Even now they could hear the shrill scream of her twin motors.

"Funny," said the Englishman, stroking his chin thoughtfully.

"What's funny?"

"He's flying at less than five hundred feet; our regulations require a thousand-foot minimum north of Khartum for all mail planes."

"He's a very poor flier anyway," said Barney decisively. "Look how he's wabbling in that air pocket."

The plane, a heavy biplane of the type perfected by the French Laporte brothers after the World War, was roaring toward them at a hundred-mile-an-hour clip; it became only too evident that the pilot had no intention of making a landing. Two minutes later it flew over their heads swaying violently. Roderick clutched Barney's arm.

"Great heavens, man, did you see the pilot?"

Barney nodded. He, too, was staring after the swiftly retreating plane, aware of the horrible fact that the aviator's head and shoulders were hanging down, lifelessly grotesque, from the side of the fuselage; helmet and goggles had dropped from him.

"Dead or unconscious!" Barney shouted. "Have you got a fast plane available? I'll go after him!"

Roderick stared at this impulsive young American with something akin to admiration on his features.

"I've got a six-hundred Sopwith Tiger. Ever flown one?"

"No, but it'll do. No plane ever got the best of me yet."

The next moment he was off, running hatless across the sand to a group of me-

chanics whom he galvanized into swift action by the dynamic force of his words. It took them barely three minutes to wheel a tiny biplane from the underground hangar and fill her tanks. Barney leaped into the cockpit and tried the controls.

"Contact?" shouted the man at the propeller.

"Contact!" Barney yelled.

The healthy roar of twelve cylinders shattered the peacefulness of the afternoon and the plane shot across the sand for a bare thirty yards before it rose. Mechanics paused in their blistering work to gaze at Barney's superb handling of his craft; not one dreamed the fact that he had never flown that type of plane before. Flying was more intuition than skill with him, he handled the controls caressingly as if they were the reins of some slim-legged little broncho of which he was inordinately proud. He gained altitude by pointing her blunt copper nose almost vertically in the air and swooping upward in a series of joyful leaps by clever manipulation of his elevator and wing tips.

At seven hundred feet he straightened out and veered northward with a stupendous bank on his left wing that held the hardened mechanics spellbound.

"Blime me, if that Yank don't 'alf know 'ow to 'andle 's plane!" said one.

" 'E's a bit of orl right, 'e is," replied his mate.

Barney, seated in the narrow cockpit of the Tiger, gave his motor full power and went roaring over the white minarets of Cairo; the uncontrolled mail plane was about a mile ahead, but he knew he was gaining rapidly. After six months without flying, the contented drone of the motor and the song of the wind past the interplane struts were to him the sweetest music in the world.

III.

At ten o'clock that night Captain Roderick and Gavin, anxiously waiting at the W. P. headquarters near the Esbekieh Gardens, heard a peremptory knock at the door. Even the knock was typical of Barney, keen and incisive, and brooked no delay. He entered hatless, looking very tired.

"Tell us all about it," said Roderick as he sat down.

"I'll tell you in as few words as possible," Barney began. "When I left the air station the derelict plane was heading almost due east at about ninety miles an hour. I was making a much higher speed and overtook her just beyond the suburbs of Heliopolis—where that big white hotel is at the edge of the desert. I was in a quandary as to how to bring her down, but the problem solved itself after I'd flown about twenty miles beyond Heliopolis. She hit a bad air pocket and side-slipped; she fell dead to the ground, but luckily she landed on a pretty soft spot, and I found the pilot just as he was when he flew over Cairo—hanging out of the cockpit."

"Dead?"

"Dead as a doornail."

"What do you think caused it?"

Barney smiled as he lighted a cigarette.

"You've got me there, captain. There wasn't a sign of a wound on him; looked perfectly healthy and normal except for the expression on his face—that was horrible. All twisted——"

"Did you bring the body back?" inquired Gavin anxiously.

"I couldn't very well; there was no room in my plane for that. However, if you'll order a two-seater out there with me to-morrow morning I can easily locate the spot. There was no sign of habitation for miles around where he fell so the body's all right—although I do remember noticing a plane passing by at about ten thousand feet."

"Ten thousand," murmured Roderick. "That's the Arabian freight level."

Barney rose to his feet.

"Good night, gentlemen. I'll be at the air station at eight o'clock to-morrow morning."

They flew out to the scene of the wreck the next morning, an air ambulance preceded by Barney in the little Tiger. When they reached an oasis in the desert about twenty miles from Heliopolis Barney switched off his motor and spiraled down to where the broken mail plane lay on its side in the burning sands. He slid from the cockpit and approached the machine. But a glance showed him that the body of the pilot had disappeared during the night!

When he returned to the W. P. office Gavin and Roderick were much disturbed at the news.

"I suppose," remarked Gavin, "that this puts a temporary end to the investigation; there can't be any autopsy as we'd planned, to show the cause of death, but the fact

that the body was stolen seems to prove that he was murdered and the criminals fear an investigation."

"I think you're right except in one particular. The investigation to my mind is not even temporarily halted, and if you'll radio to Washington for permission for me to stay here, say eight days more, I think I can promise you some very interesting news. A little trick like carrying away that body makes things harder, but it also gives me more incentive."

Captain Roderick took him by the hand warmly.

"By Jove, I like your spirit!" he said. "But I must say I don't see that you've got much to work on."

"You must be from Missouri," answered Barney, and smiled at the Englishman's puzzled look.

Late that night, back in his little white-walled bedroom at the hotel, Barney locked the door carefully; then he drew from his hip pocket a tiny piece of khaki cloth, about two inches square. It was torn from the uniform of an air-mail pilot. He held it up to his nose and sniffed gently. The odor was very peculiar and very pungent. His blue eyes gleamed almost triumphantly.

"Barney," he said to himself—it was a little trick of his to talk to himself when he was alone and wanted to think—"you did well when you took away that torn piece of the dead man's uniform that was caught on the edge of the cockpit; without it the natives might have put one over on you."

He laid the cloth carefully away in his suit case and went to bed to sleep the sleep of a healthy young child.

IV.

When Barney stepped out of the pale-blue sleeping car of the Egyptian night express, six days later, at the pleasant little Nile town of Assouan he was not in uniform, and no one was aware of his identity except Lieutenant Cowle, the commandant of Assouan air station, who had received a code radio from Gavin, and to whom Barney immediately reported. The French detective working on the case in Cairo could not understand what had taken Barney to Assouan, and he said as much, but Barney only said he preferred to work nearer the scene of action; "whatever that meant," commented the Frenchman as he told his friends.

He found Cowle in a little white hut at the edge of the Nile where native feluccas with brown lateen sails moved lazily up and down on the soft currents. He learned that the next mail plane from Capetown was due in at three o'clock that afternoon.

"When this plane arrives," said Barney, "I want you to do me a favor."

"Certainly."

"While the pilot is reporting to you, I understand it is the custom to leave the plane in charge of the Arab mechanics who wheel it into the hangar yonder and refill the tanks; this usually takes about fifteen minutes, I understand, during which time the pilot is in your office here very busy with reports and mail matters. Am I right?"

"Absolutely."

"To-day at a quarter to three a new native will present himself to you and seek employment." Barney winked. "Just assign him along with the rest to refill the mail plane's tanks."

Cowle raised his eyebrows.

"Extraordinary! How do you connect my station with the recent murders, if they were murders?"

"The last three mailmen were murdered by your mechanics here," answered Barney gravely.

"Good God!" cried Cowle. "But how can that be, when I saw each man myself leave this station alive and in good health?"

"Right again. But they were, nevertheless, murdered by your mechanics."

Lieutenant Cowle possessed that admirable British quality of being able to size up his man at a glance.

"I'll put my faith in you," he replied simply.

Promptly at a quarter to three that afternoon Achmed Hassan, native mechanic, attired in overalls with a red tarboosh upon his head, presented himself at Cowle's office. A close observer might have noticed an un-Arabic cast of features, but he would have passed scrutiny as a Copt, a member of the older Egyptian race and not a follower of the Mohammedan creed; he spoke Arabic with a trace of accent. Lieutenant Cowle assigned him to the refilling station without any ado whatever.

It was more than fortunate for Barney that he had seen fit to add a smattering of Arabic to his already comprehensive study of languages, and he was well disguised even

to the walnut staining of his face and arms which had been carried out with meticulous care. He joined the group of natives who were lying about the ground lazily in front of the hangar. Although they greeted him with the usual Moslem words of welcome "Essâlmu 'aleikum"—peace be with you, instead of the "Naharak said" used to a Christian, he had a feeling that they were eying him with distrust.

"Peace and God's mercy," he replied politely, as he sat down with them. After a few moments' staring at him one of them said:

"Thou workest with us and yet thou speakest a strange kind of Arabic."

"I am aware of that, oh, my brother," replied Barney. "I am not proficient in your language, being the native of a country beyond the white sands of the Libyan desert."

A country which lay beyond the desert was almost too far for them to understand, but they lapsed into a secretive conversation between themselves which soon developed, as it invariably does among Arabs, into an argument. Finally one of them, urged on by the others, crept up to him and whispered in his ear:

"What dost thou know, oh, my brother?"

Barney showed his teeth in a cunning smile.

"The white dog shall not crush the brown," he answered.

Still the native was not quite satisfied.

"What dost thou know?" he repeated.

Barney held up three fingers of his hand.

"Three are gone, but there shall be a fourth."

"It is good," said the native, and grunted with satisfaction. He went back to assure his companions of the newcomer's trustworthiness.

Four o'clock came and went. At ten minutes past four all eyes were turned southward at the sound of a low humming over the Nile. The Cape-to-Cairo mail plane flying steadily at three thousand feet, with her red planes defined sharply against the vivid sky, circled over them once or twice and then planed gracefully to earth. Barney and the natives ambled somnolently across the sand to meet the pilot, a lean, tanned young South African with a genial smile. He jumped down and ran across the open space to the commandant's hut with the Assouan mail bag in his hand. The five natives pushed the biplane slowly into the hangar, chattering among themselves.

One of them swung the nozzle from the gasoline reservoir over the fuel tank while another switched on the flow. Barney joined a colossal blue-black Nubian who was busy inspecting the motor with rapid appraising glances. Although ostensibly interested in the mechanism of the motor, which he proceeded to clean off with a piece of waste in a highly professional manner, Barney's keen eyes were fixed on the eldest of the natives, a disreputable-looking fellow whom the others called Mahmoud; this man had climbed into the pilot's seat with the apparent intention of examining the controls; it seemed perfectly legitimate, for government regulations required that every part of each mail plane be carefully examined at each halt.

In five minutes the natives had filled the oil and gas tanks. They beckoned to Barney.

"Come, Achmed," they said. "Biddîna nâkul."

And Barney, knowing enough of their language to interpret this as an invitation to supper with them, followed. As he passed Mahmoud working in the fuselage he could see nothing but the man's broad back stooping low over the control wires, but his quick ear detected the sound of a fine drill at work. His eyes lit with excitement as he followed the others out into the sunlight.

He walked down to the little café on the Nile bank with them, and, after a few moments, found his opportunity to slip away while they sat together gossiping and smoking pungent tumbak tobacco. He hastened back to the hangar and crept stealthily into the doorway.

Mahmoud, still stooping and intent upon his work, did not hear his carpet slippers on the sandy floor. So sure of his plans was Barney that he did not hesitate even for a moment; from his overalls he drew forth a revolver and swinging it by the muzzle brought the butt of it down on the native's head. Mahmoud crumpled up without a word and lay still on the floor of the cockpit.

Then Barney commenced his investigation. He picked up the drill Mahmoud had been using and beneath it found half a dozen fine holes drilled in the wooden flooring of the cockpit just beneath the pilot's seat; then he climbed down and peered underneath the plane. He noticed that the twin exhaust

pipes running from the motor curved beneath the fuselage, so that one section of them came directly beneath the pilot's seat. With the aid of a screw driver he detached these sections of the piping from the rest; sure enough, there were six holes drilled, three in each pipe in a corresponding position to those drilled in the flooring of the cockpit.

Everything was turning out as he had expected. He next ran forward to the gasoline tank and unscrewed the cap. An overpowering odor emanated from it, and in order to find out what he wanted he was obliged to tie a handkerchief over his nose and mouth; then he looked into the tank. At the left side of the resevoir, bracketed by a hasty piece of soldering work to the metal wall, he found a copper cylinder about ten inches long and an inch in diameter: from the cylinder a narrow copper tube led to the exhaust pipes.

Barney stopped up the tubing with a piece of waste, when he had detached it from the exhaust, and wrenched the cylinder from its fastening. He started forth from the hangar with the cylinder in his hand.

He had hardly reached the sliding door, which he had carefully closed when he entered, when the Nubian mechanic leaped upon him from a dark corner, a lean, curved knife in his hand. In a moment they were rolling together on the dirty oil-patched floor of the hangar in a fierce elemental struggle. First one was on top and then the other, panting and clawing for each other's life. The Nubian nearly had his knife in Barney's stomach when he felt a stabbing pain in the back of his neck; as he was unused to the fine art of jujutsu Barney soon had him stretched incapable on the floor. Barney arose and brushed off his overalls, then strode across to Lieutenant Cowle's office.

"Here you are!" he cried. "The mystery's solved. Before I tell you the story you'd better send down a couple of good men to that café on the river bank and have every one of your mechanics arrested; they're all implicated in this business."

Lieutenant Cowle turned to his telephone and had a brief conversation with the local police headquarters.

"What's that thing you have in your hand?" he asked when he had finished.

"A little tube containing a combination of phosgene and certain other poisonous gases. They placed it in the plane's gasoline tank with a tube leading from it to the exhaust pipe. When the pilot started his motor the exhaust fumes would have blown a perpetual stream of this gas through the exhaust and out of some holes in the floor of his cockpit; it seems to me that this mixture is so cleverly made that the smell of it is almost too weak to be noticed above the fumes of the exhaust, but one hour of it blowing constantly in the pilot's face would slowly kill him without his knowing it. It's devilish in its ingenuity."

"Good heavens!" cried the pilot, speaking for the first time. "What put you on to it?"

"That's simply told. When I landed beside the last dead pilot near Heliopolis and was searching the body for some trace of injury, I noticed a faint scent of phosgene about him—I learned that smell in the war, and I won't forget it soon—unfortunately, I couldn't wait to investigate as it was growing dark, and I didn't know the lay of the land to find my way back after sunset. I figured on returning in the morning, but just out of curiosity I took with me a piece of his coat that had been torn."

"What did you do with the cloth?" interrupted Cowle.

"I used to dabble in analytical chemistry at school and so I had a little knowledge of it. I took the cloth over to a chemist and experimented in his laboratory all Sunday night; it took some time to get any results, but I finally discovered that it had been subject to a strong influence of poisonous gases; there was quite a lot of residue on the cloth. As far as I could make out, the gas had neogene IV. as a basis, and phosgene, too, besides a lot of others which had the effect of lessening the odor. I figured out, naturally, that the pilots were being slowly doped by gas on each trip, and when I learned that Assouan was their last stop before they fell, and that they had all left this station in good shape, I came to the conclusion that the job was being done here. That's about all there is to it."

"And now," said Cowle with enthusiasm, "as I hear the States are still dry, I propose you join us in a bracer at the hotel bar. You must need one after your tussle with the black laddie."

"In Rome do as the Romans do," Barney murmured. "I couldn't be so rude as to refuse."

A Chat With You

EVERYWHERE we turn we are confronted with things disturbing and alarming. Every issue of the paper brings new cause for pessimism. We turn away from Europe in despair only to find our own country a land of unrest, uncertainty, and foreboding. Capital and labor range themselves in opposite camps. The profiteer has preached a lesson of greed, the politician one of intolerance. Wages and prices mean nothing now as judged by the old standards. Society as a whole is being held up and the value of the dollar is being pumped out of it by greed and inflation. Icemen get more than college professors, and in another generation we may have no teachers for our colleges. The profiteers and the extravagant spenders have caught us between the upper and nether millstones and we wonder what the end will be. The upper classes, the substantial men of business, have lost the confidence of many of the workers. If a man believes the laws are unfairly administered he will disdain the law. If he has lost faith in the integrity of other men, his own integrity is doomed.

AMERICA is the hope of the world to-day, not because of its wealth and bursting granaries, but because of the spirit that made us a great people—the spirit of idealism, of charity, of equal opportunity, of generosity. We here have the cure in our hands. It is simple. Too simple, perhaps, for too often, wrong-headed humanity has found its way to progress through the long and difficult, rather than the short and easy path. No system of organization, no political scheme can give us our salvation. The scheme, the organization, is only the mechanism. The motive power lies in the spirit of man himself. What we need are the solid, underlying human virtues, the foundation on which every successful nation, every successful business organization must be built. The broad human and social virtues. Honesty, thoughtful consideration and charity for the other man, and sense of reverence for the shining virtues that are hidden somewhere in every one, a wish to give in service as well as to get in gain. All labor, whether it be driving a truck or directing a factory, is service. It is dishonest if it receives more than it is worth either in service returned or in money—for all that money buys is service of some sort. In the sheerest democracy imaginable not all work is of equal value. Some men are worth more to the community than others. Some give more of themselves. But all work, all service is dignified and valuable. They are all stars, although they differ in magnitude. What we need is the lesson of humanity, the tolerance and sympathy and consideration for the other man whether he is a millionaire or a bootblack. We will learn it neither from anarchists nor narrow reactionaries. We have had too much of the teachings of distrust and hate and destruction. What we need to learn is that the greatest reward of life is

the ability to love our fellow man, and the greatest privilege is the chance to build up and create for others as well as for ourselves.

THERE is a pride in good workmanship and service that is the most solid and enduring of all human satisfactions. There is a contentment in the knowledge that a man is pulling a little more than his own weight in the boat, that never satiates, that always satisfies. There is a wonder and romance in reverence that never palls. If men are taught to give real service, whether in labor, in finance, in art and literature, we need have no fear of social unrest. All this was offered to the Western world in its simplest form some nineteen centuries ago, and since then it has been perverted and twisted and misread until history has become a chronicle of greed and misunderstanding and all the gains that civilization has made, all the triumphs of art and science seem powerless to give any of us that simple contentment that should be the birthright of every honest man.

THE principle of the common bond of humanity is so plain that a man need know nothing of social science or politics to have the key to the riddle safe in his hands. There are plenty of men who are still holding up the light of this only, ultimate, human faith. We can learn the lesson of optimism and hope from them. Some of them are laborers who are worthy of their hire, some of them are bankers who are conscientiously serving the business and prosperity of the community, some of them are inventors and mechanics who are giving more in comfort and help than they ever receive, some of them are scholars, editors, teachers. They are not organized. They have no party. Their only bond is a sense of humanity and duty. And yet they ultimately are the greatest of all parties. They can give you no formula, all formulas break down and are twisted out of their meanings, but their faith is the only thing that can bind together in harmonious union the opposite poles of human life. How long it will take the great inarticulate majority to grasp their creed and see its utility, no one can tell, but the sooner the better for the United States and the world.

ALL honest and productive work has its value. Sometimes we are sure, always we hope, that a fiction magazine like THE POPULAR may be something more than the diversion of an idle hour. If it were not, reading and art, save for the keener enjoyment and the higher æsthetic pleasure, would be little better than a game of cards. But stories can mean more than this, and they do. They can bring an awakening of sympathy and laughter and affection, an admiration for the really high in character, an elevation of all the standards of life. They can help you to have more reverence and respect and consideration for the other man, whether he is your employer or your chauffeur. It is with the hope of accomplishing something in this regard that the next POPULAR goes to you. Henry C. Rowland, Clarence Cullen, B. M. Bower, Frank Condon, Gilbert Frankau, and a lot of others have helped to make it a really *human* magazine.

HEINZ

OVEN BAKED BEANS

Only heating is required for this delicious, wholesome dish, welcome at any meal.

Delicious, because they have that rich nutty flavor that only baking can bring out, and Heinz Beans are baked thoroughly in real dry heat ovens.

Wholesome, because real *baking* makes beans digestible.

Flavored and made richer with Heinz famous tomato sauce, and pork of prime breakfast bacon cut.

One of the **57**

Four kinds to suit any taste

Heinz Baked Beans with Pork and Tomato Sauce
Heinz Baked Pork and Beans (without Tomato Sauce) Boston style
Heinz Baked Beans in Tomato Sauce without Meat (Vegetarian)
Heinz Baked Red Kidney Beans

$95 An Hour!

"Every hour I spent on my I. C. S. Course has been worth $95 to me! My position, my $5,000 a year income, my home, my family's happiness—I owe it all to my spare time training with the International Correspondence Schools!"

Every mail brings letters such as this from some of the two million I. C. S. students. For 27 years men in offices, stores, shops, factories, mines, railroads—in every line of technical and commercial work—have been winning promotion and increased salaries through spare time study with the I. C. S. Over 100,000 men are getting ready *right now* in the I. C. S. way for the bigger jobs ahead.

What are *you* doing with the hours after supper? Can you afford to let them slip by unimproved when you can easily make them mean so much?

No matter where you live, the I. C. S. will come to *you*. No matter what your handicaps, or how small your means, we have a plan to meet your circumstances. No matter how limited your previous education, the simply written, wonderfully illustrated I. C. S. text-books make it easy to learn. No matter what career you may choose, some one of the 280 I. C. S. Courses will surely suit your needs.

One hour a day spent with the I. C. S. will prepare you for the position you want in the work you like best. Yes, it will! Put it up to *us* to prove it. Mark and mail this coupon *now!*

TEAR OUT HERE

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

BOX 3350 SCRANTON, PA.

Explain, without obligating me, how I can qualify for the position, or in the subject, *before* which I mark X.

☐ ELECTRICAL ENGINEER	☐ SALESMANSHIP
☐ Electric Lighting and Railways	☐ ADVERTISING
☐ Electric Wiring	☐ Window Trimmer
☐ Telegraph Engineer	☐ Show Card Writer
☐ Telephone Work	☐ Sign Painter
☐ MECHANICAL ENGINEER	☐ Railroad Trainman
☐ Mechanical Draftsman	☐ ILLUSTRATING
☐ Machine Shop Practice	☐ Cartooning
☐ Toolmaker	☐ BUSINESS MANAGEMENT
☐ Gas Engine Operating	☐ Private Secretary
☐ CIVIL ENGINEER	☐ BOOKKEEPER
☐ Surveying and Mapping	☐ Stenographer and Typist
☐ MINE FOREMAN OR ENGINEER	☐ Cert. Public Accountant
☐ STATIONARY ENGINEER	☐ TRAFFIC MANAGER
☐ Marine Engineer	☐ Railway Accountant
☐ Ship Draftsman	☐ Commercial Law
☐ ARCHITECT	☐ GOOD ENGLISH
☐ Contractor and Builder	☐ Teacher
☐ Architectural Draftsman	☐ Common School Subjects
☐ Concrete Builder	☐ CIVIL SERVICE
☐ Structural Engineer	☐ Railway Mail Clerk
☐ PLUMBING AND HEATING	☐ AUTOMOBILE OPERATING
☐ Sheet Metal Worker	☐ Auto Repairing
☐ Textile Overseer or Supt.	☐ Navigation ☐ Spanish
☐ CHEMIST	☐ AGRICULTURE ☐ French
☐ Mathematics	☐ Poultry Raising ☐ Italian

Name _____

Present Occupation _____

Street and No. _____

City _____ State _____

Canadians may send this coupon to Y-26-19
International Correspondence Schools, Montreal, Canada

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING

Agents and Help Wanted

GOVERNMENT POSITIONS are desirable. Let our expert former Government Examiner prepare you. Write today for free booklet giving full information. Patterson Civil Service School, Box Y, Rochester, N. Y.

HOW MUCH GASOLINE CAN YOU SELL AT 2c. PER GALLON? World tests for four years to prove it. Secure exclusive rights for your county. "Carbonvoid," Box "2," Bradley Beach, N. J.

RAILWAY TRAFFIC INSPECTORS: $110.00 a month to start and expenses; travel if desired; unlimited advancement. No age limit. Three months' home study. Situation arranged. Prepare for permanent position. Write for booklet CM 28. Standard Business Training Institute, Buffalo, N. Y.

WE START YOU IN BUSINESS, furnishing everything; men and women $30 to $100 weekly operating our "Specialty Candy Factories" anywhere. Booklet free. Ragsdale Co., Box 98, East Orange, N. J.

BE A DETECTIVE. Excellent opportunity, good pay, travel. Write C. T. Ludwig, 436 Westover Building, Kansas City, Mo.

SIDE-LINE SALESMEN—We have an attractive line of premium assortments for live salesmen. Commission from $5.00 to $20.00 per order. If you want an up-to-date line, write today. Canfield Mfg. Co., 4003 Broadway St., Chicago, Ill.

DETECTIVES EARN BIG MONEY. Travel. Great demand. We train you. Particulars free. Write. American Detective System, 1968 Broadway, New York.

MEXICAN DIAMONDS flash like genuine, fool experts, stand tests, yet sell for 1-50th the price. Few live agents wanted to sell from handsome sample case; big profits, pleasant work. Write today. Mexican Diamond Imptg. Co., Box C D 3, Las Cruces, New Mexico.

SELL our hosiery and underwear direct to consumer. Large line—good profits—prompt deliveries guaranteed. Samples ready. Write. The C & D Co., Dept. 15, Grand Rapids, Mich.

158 GENUINE FOREIGN STAMPS—Mexico War issues, Venezuela, Salvador and India Service, Guatemala, China, etc. Only 10c. Finest approval sheets 50% to 60%. Agents wanted. Big 72-page lists free. We buy stamps. Established 25 years. Hussman Stamp Co., Dept. 65, St. Louis, Mo.

WE pay $100 monthly salary and furnish rig and expenses to introduce guaranteed poultry and stock powders. Bigler Company X369, Springfield, Illinois.

MEN: Age 17 to 55. Experience unnecessary. Travel; make secret investigations, reports. Salaries; expenses. American Foreign Detective Agency, 114, St. Louis.

DO YOU WANT TO EARN $3,000 to $5,000 a year? You can do it easily. See Advertisement Anderson Steam Vulcanizer in this issue.

SALES AGENTS WANTED in every county to give all or spare time. Positions worth $750 to $1,500 yearly. We train the inexperienced. Novelty Cutlery Company, 14 Bar St., Canton, Ohio.

WILL start you in the cleaning and dyeing business. Little capital needed, big profits. Write for booklet. The Ben-Vonde System, Dept. B-E, Charlotte, N. C.

MONEY IN LIST COMPILING. Complete course on compiling and selling names by mail to advertisers. Description free. Globe Publishing Co., 145, Syracuse, N. Y.

Agents and Help Wanted—Continued

BECOME DETECTIVE.—Big pay; easy work; great demand everywhere; we show you; write, Wagner, 186 East 79th St., New York, Dept. 501.

AGENTS: Waterproof Kitchen Apron. Needs no laundering. Every housewife buys. Dainty, durable, economical. Big money. Sample free. Thomas Co., 2160 North St., Dayton, Ohio.

AGENTS TO TRAVEL by automobile to introduce our fast selling popular-priced household necessities. The greatest line on earth. Make $10 a day. Complete outfit and automobile Furnished Free to workers. Write to-day for exclusive territory. American Products Co., 1458 American Bldg., Cincinnati, Ohio.

WANTED Stories, Articles, Poems, for new magazine. Cash paid on acceptance, typed or handwritten MSS acceptable. Send MSS National Story Magazine, 51 Vanderbilt Bldg., New York.

MEN—WOMEN, 18 up, wanted. $100-$150 month. Hundreds government jobs open. Write for list. Franklin Institute, Dept. N-2, Rochester, N. Y.

WANTED—5 bright, capable ladies to travel, demonstrate and sell dealers. $25.00 to $50.00 per week. Railroad fare paid. Write at once. Goodrich Drug Co., Dept. 70, Omaha, Nebr.

Patents and Lawyers

INVENTORS desiring to secure patents should write for our guide-book "How To Get Your Patent." Send sketch or description for our opinion of its patentable nature. Randolph & Co., Dept. 412, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS. Write for Evidence of Conception Blank and free guide book. Send model or sketch and description for free opinion of its patentable nature. Highest references. Prompt Attention. Reasonable Terms. Victor J. Evans & Co., 767 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS. Highest references. Rates reasonable. Best results. Promptness assured. Booklet free. Watson E. Coleman, Patent Lawyer, 624 F Street, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS PROMPTLY PROCURED. Personal. Careful and Efficient service. Highest references. Moderate fees. Send sketch or model for actual search and advice. George P. Kimmel, Master of Patent Law, 18 D Loan & Trust Bldg., Washington, D. C.

PATENTS. Trademark, Copyright—foremost word free. Long experience as patent solicitor. Prompt advice, charges very reasonable. Correspondence solicited. Results procured. Metzger, Washington, D. C.

Short Stories and Photoplays

$50 to $150 A WEEK, writing stories. Previous acceptance not essential. Send for Special Free Offer. Department "S." New York Literary Bureau, 145 West 36th St., New York City.

WRITE NEWS ITEMS and Short Stories for pay in spare time. Copyright Book and plans free. Press Reporting Syndicate (406), St. Louis, Mo.

LEARN TO WRITE PHOTOPLAYS. My book tells how, where to send, gives model, copyright and pointers for 50c. Lester deFrates, P. O. B. 1461, Boston.

WRITE PHOTOPLAYS: $25—$300 paid any one for suitable ideas. Experience unnecessary; complete outline Free. Producers League, 439 St. Louis.

HOW TO WRITE PHOTOPLAYS. Our book tells how; also where to sell. Contains model scenario, list of 50 buyers, and all information necessary; price 25c. Photoplay Book Company, Dept. 2—4838 Champlain Ave., Chicago.

Songs, Poems, etc.

WRITE A SONG—Love, mother, home, childhood, patriotic or any subject. I compose music and guarantee publication. Send words today. Thomas Merlin, 222 Reaper Block, Chicago.

WRITE the Words for a Song. We write music and guarantee to secure publication. Submit poems on any subject. Broadway Studios, 159C Fitzgerald Building, New York.

WRITE words for a song. We write music, guarantee publisher's acceptance. Submit poems on patriotism, love or any subject. Chester Music Co., 920 S. Michigan Av., Room 323, Chicago.

WRITE WORDS FOR A SONG.—We write music, publish and secure copyright. Submit poems on any subject. The Metropolitan Studios, 914 S. Michigan Avenue, Room 120, Chicago.

SONG-WRITERS' GUIDE SENT FREE! Contains valuable instructions and advice. Submit song-poems for examination. We will furnish music, copyright and facilitate publication or sale. Knickerbocker Studios, 301 Gaiety Bldg., New York.

ATTENTION—SONG WRITERS. If you have a song poem send it to us for examination. If good we will write the music for it, exploit your song and publish it. Several well-known popular song writers are on our staff. Write to-day. Superior Song Studio, 1545 Broadway, N. Y.

SONG WRITERS—Have you song poems? I have best proposition. Write me immediately. Ray Hibbeler, D102, 4040 Dickens Av., Chicago.

Motion-Picture Plays

PHOTOPLAYS wanted. Big prices paid. Great demand. We show you how. Get free particulars. Rex Publishers, Box 175—P-5, Chicago.

$50—$100 weekly writing Moving Picture Plays. Get free book; valuable information; prize offer. Photo Playwright College, Box 278 X Y 8, Chicago.

FREE to writers—A wonderful little book of money-making hints, suggestions, ideas; the A B C of successful Story and Movie writing. Absolutely Free. Just address Authors' Press, Dept. 89, Auburn, N. Y.

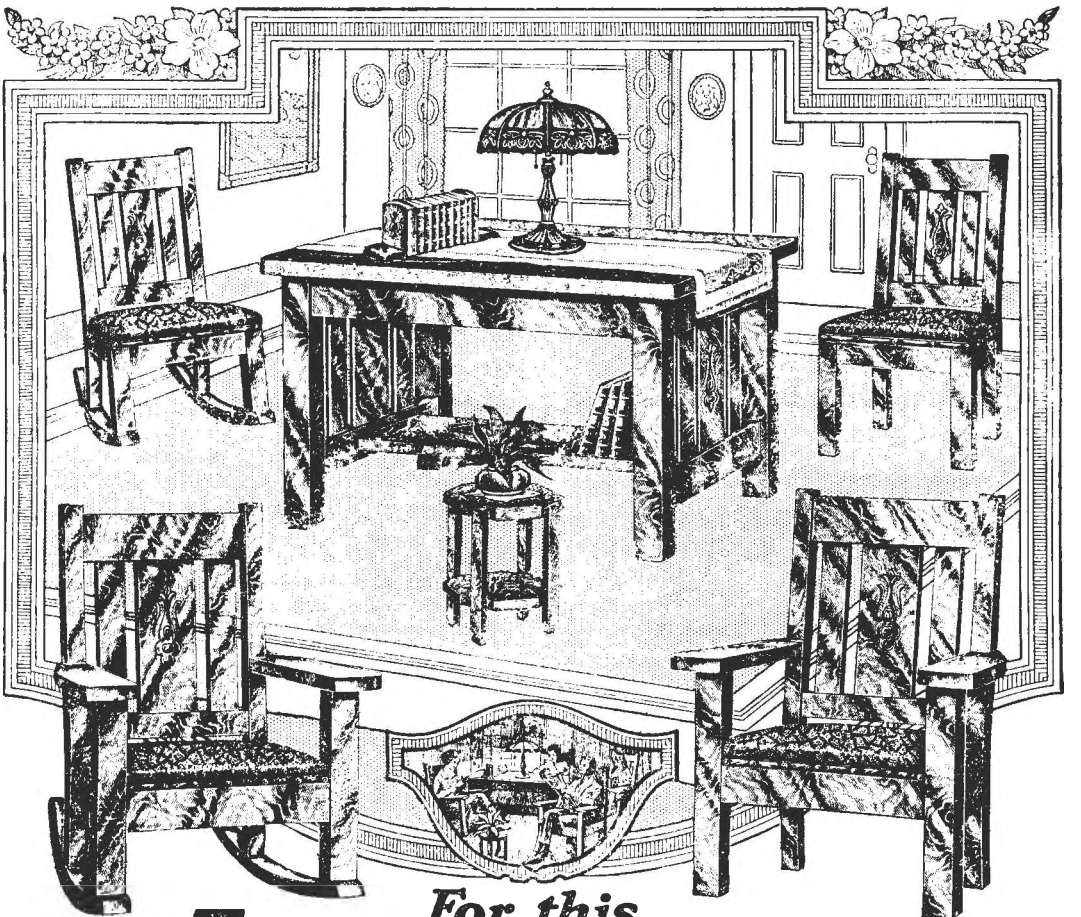
Shorthand

SHORTHAND. Best practical system K. I. Shorthand, learn in 5 hours; speed with easy practice. Proof lessons, brochure free. King Institute, EA-26, Station F, New York.

Farm Lands

GOOD LAND ON CREDIT. Big opportunities for you in Kalkaska and Antrim Co's, Mich. Make a home on hardwood land growing big crops of clover, alfalfa, grains, potatoes, fruit, etc. $15 to $30 per A. Easy terms. 10 to 160 A. Schools, churches, R. R., markets. Own your own home. Booklet free. Swigart Land Co., X1265 First Nat'l Bk. Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

FREE BOOK OF FLORIDA FACTS. Own your own orange grove in beautiful Fruitland Park. A few cents a day you now waste will buy it for you. A few dollars a month may provide you with a life income. Schnitzler sold his twenty acre grove here for $40,000—two thousand an acre. He saw the same opportunity that's offered you and planted a grove. Result—he reaped a small fortune. You have the same chance but you must act now. Write TODAY for Free Book of Actual Photographs, Florida Facts and the interesting story of a Fruitland Park Farm. Learn of crops that help you buy it. Address today, Lake County Land Owners' Association, 321 Sunset Way, Fruitland Park, Florida.



For this

Send Only $1

7-Piece Living Room Suite

Seven wonderful pieces of well-seasoned solid oak living-room furniture at an amazingly low bargain price and on such easy terms that you will never feel the cost. Genuine Mission design with rich brown finish that brings out the grain of the wood in all its natural beauty. Chairs upholstered in handsome imitation Spanish brown leather. Will give years of satisfactory service.

IMPORTANT

This set is guaranteed not "knock down" furniture. In other words, the four chairs, tabourette and book ends come to you set up ready for use complete in every detail and guaranteed made with solid glue block construction. The sectional table you set up in five minutes. Ordinarily a "knock down" 7-piece set of furniture would come to you in many pieces for you to set together.

Full Year to Pay

You run no risk. Send only $1.00 with coupon today. Judge the wonderful value of this suite when you see it. Use it 30 days. If not satisfied, return it and we will pay transportation both ways. If you keep it, pay balance in easy monthly payments, which give you a full year to pay (see coupon). We guarantee your complete satisfaction. Our guarantee is backed by our $12,000,000 capital.

Complete suite consists of large arm rocker, large arm chair, center table, sewing rocker, desk or side chair, tabourette and book ends. Ornamented with richly embossed carved design on panels of chairs, rockers and table, giving a wonderfully pleasing rich effect. The chair and rocker seats are constructed in a strong, durable manner. Most comfortable, lasting and beautiful. Large arm chair and large rocker stand 36 inches high over all from floor, are 25½ inches wide over all and have seats 21x18 inches. Other rocker and chair have seats 17x16½ inches. Handsome table is 24x36 inches and the tabourette has octagon shaped top about 12 inches wide, standing 17 inches high. Book ends just the right size and weight to easily support large books. Shipped from factory in central Indiana or factory in western New York state.

Shipping weight about 140 pounds.

Order by No. 110BMA8. Price $33.95. Pay $1 down. Balance $3.00 monthly.

Hartman Furniture and Carpet Co.
3998 Wentworth Ave., Dept. 2431 Chicago

Enclosed find $1. Send the 7-piece Living-Room Suite No. 110BMA8 as described. Guaranteed not "knock down." I am to have 30 days' trial. If not satisfied will ship it back and you will refund my $1 and pay freight both ways. If I keep it I will pay $3.00 per month until the price, $33.95, is paid.

Name.....

Address.....

Occupation.....

FREE Bargain Catalog

Even if you don't send for the suite, mail a postal for this great book. Filled from cover to cover with stunning bargains in furniture, carpets, rugs, stoves, ranges, watches, silverware, dishes, washing machines, sewing machines, aluminum ware, phonographs, farm equipment, etc. See how you can save money on anything you buy—and get it on Hartman's easy credit terms, too. Catalog is free. Postal brings it. Send for it.

HARTMAN FURNITURE & CARPET CO.
3998 Wentworth Ave., Dept. 2431 Chicago

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING—Continued

Duplicating Devices

"MODERN" DUPLICATOR. A Business Getter, $1.50 up. 50 to 75 copies from pen, pencil, typewriter; no glue or gelatine. 10,000 from one. 30 days' trial. You need one. Booklet free. L. T. Durkin, Reeves & Co., Pittsburgh, Pa.

Personal

DO YOU WISH TO KNOW whether you are to gain success, win friends, be happy, or the reverse? Scientific, convincing information. Wonderful results attained by patrons. "Key to Success" and personality sketch for 10 cents and birthdate. Thomson-Heywood Co., Dept. 300, Chronicle Bldg., San Francisco.

CRYSTAL GAZING THE CRAZE; SEND self-addressed stamped envelope for free instructions. Zanzig's Studio, Dept. 7, Asbury Park, N. J.

Candy

CHERI Super-Chocolates Assorted lb. box $1.25 P. P. prepaid, insured. Best you ever tasted or the box with our compliments. Cheri, 142 S. 15th, Phila.

Wanted to Buy

CASH FOR OLD FALSE TEETH.—We pay up to $35.00 per set (broken or not). Also buy discarded gold jewelry, gold crowns, bridges, platinum, diamonds, watches, and silver. Send now. Cash by return mail. Package held 5 to 10 days for sender's approval of our offer. U. S. Smelting Works, Dept. 64, Chicago, Ill.

IT'S LIKE FINDING MONEY when you mail us false teeth (with or without gold fillings), old or broken jewelry, diamonds, watches, old gold, silver, platinum, magneto points, gold or silver ores and nuggets. War Bonds and Stamps. Highest prices paid. Cash by return mail. Goods returned in 10 days if you're not satisfied. The Ohio Smelting & Refining Co., 253 Lennox Bldg., Cleveland, Ohio.

Coins, Stamps, etc.

WE BUY OLD MONEY. Hundreds of dates worth $2 to $500 each. Keep all old money, you may have valuable coins. Get posted, send 10c for New Illustrated Buying Price List, size 4x6. Clarke Coin Co., Box 33, Le Roy, N. Y.

OLD Coins, Large Spring Selling Catalogue of Coins for Sale, free. Catalogue quoting prices paid for coins, ten cents. William Hesslein, 101 Tremont St., Dept. O, Boston, Mass.

Miscellaneous

ELECTRICIANS, Wiremen, Linemen, and all others interested in electrical work. Send name for descriptive literature of our Modern Blue Print Chart Method of electrical wiring. Electrical Wiring Diagram Co., Box E.173, Altoona, Pa.

ST-STU-T-T-TERING And Stammering Cured At Home. Instructive booklet free. Walter McDonnell, 80 Potomac Bank Building, Washington, D. C.

Train for a Bigger Job

The man who can direct the work of others is the man who draws the big salary. The only difference between him and the small salaried routine worker is training. The demand is for men who have special knowledge and who understand the fundamentals of modern business management. Learn how LaSalle training has helped thousands of men to better positions. Under the LaSalle plan you can get this special training at home by mail. No interference whatever with your present duties. Low cost, convenient terms. Mark with an "X" below the "better job" in which you are interested. We will send full information, also our valuable book for ambitious men, "Ten Years' Promotion in One," free and postpaid. Take the first step towards a bigger position by marking and mailing the coupon now.

Coupon

- ☐ **HIGHER ACCOUNTANCY:** Training for positions as Auditors, Comptrollers, Certified Public Accountants, Cost Accountants, etc.
- ☐ **BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION:** Training for Official, Managerial, Sales and Executive Positions.
- ☐ **TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT—FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC:** Training for positions as Railroad and Industrial Traffic Managers, etc.
- ☐ **LAW:** Training for Bar; LL. B. Degree.
- ☐ **COMMERCIAL LAW:** Reading, Reference and Consultation Service for Business Men.
- ☐ **INDUSTRIAL MANAGEMENT EFFICIENCY:** Training for Production Managers, Department Heads, and all those desiring training in the 48 factors of industrial efficiency.
- ☐ **BUSINESS LETTER WRITING:** Training for positions as Correspondents, Mail Sales Directors, and all executive letter-writing positions.
- ☐ **BANKING AND FINANCE:** Training for Executive positions in Banks and Financial Institutions.
- ☐ **BUSINESS ENGLISH:** Training for positions as Business Correspondents and Copy Writers.
- ☐ **COMMERCIAL SPANISH:** Training for positions as Foreign Correspondent with Spanish-speaking Countries.
- ☐ **EXPERT BOOKKEEPING:** Training for position of Head Bookkeeper.
- ☐ **EFFECTIVE PUBLIC SPEAKING:** Training in the art of forceful, effective speech for Ministers, Salesmen, Fraternal Leaders, Politicians, Clubmen, etc.

LaSalle Extension University

"The Largest Business Training Institution in the World"

Dept. 265-R Chicago, Ill.

.....
(Name)

.....
(Present Position)

.....
(Address)

Indoors or out

Got the Drop on that Cough

RIGOROUS exercise, indoors or out, is doubly beneficial when the slightest tendency to cough is prevented by Dean's Metholated Cough Drops. Get them anywhere.

Dean Medicine Company
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

DEANS MENTHOLATED COUGH DROPS

COPY THIS SKETCH

and let me see what you can do with it. Many newspaper artists earning $30.00 to $125.00 or more per week were trained by my course of personal individual lessons by mail. PICTURE CHARTS make original drawings easy to learn. Send sketch of Uncle Sam with 6c in stamps for sample Picture Chart, list of successful students, examples of their work and evidence of what YOU can accomplish. *Please state your age.*

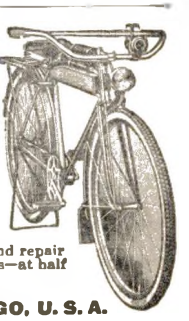
The Landon School of Cartooning and Illustrating
1444 SCHOFIELD BLDG., CLEVELAND, OHIO

FREE DIAMOND RING OFFER

Just to advertise our famous Hawaiian im. diamonds—the greatest discovery the world has ever known. We will send absolutely free this 14k gold f ring, set with a 1-2k Hawaiian im. diamond—in beautiful ring box postage paid. Pay postmaster $1.98 C. O. D. charges to cover postage, boxing, advertising, handling, etc. If you can tell it from a real diamond return and money refunded. Only 10,000 given away. Send no money. Answer quick. Send size of finger.

KRAUTH & REED, Dept. 41
MASONIC TEMPLE CHICAGO

Rider Agents Wanted



Everywhere to ride and exhibit the new **Ranger "Motorbike"** completely equipped with electric light and horn, carrier, stand, tool tank, coaster-brake, mud guards and anti-skid tires. **Choice of 44 other styles,** colors and sizes in the famous **"Ranger"** line. **DELIVERED FREE** on approval and **30 DAYS TRIAL.** Send for big **free** catalog and particulars of our *Thirty Days Free Trial* offer. **Factory-to-Rider** prices and terms.

Easy Payments if desired, at a small advance over our special **Factory-to-Rider cash prices.**

TIRES Lamps, Horns, Wheels, Sundries, and repair parts and supplies for all bicycles—at half usual prices.

MEAD CYCLE COMPANY
DEPT. L38 CHICAGO, U. S. A.

TWENTY ACRES AND PLENTY

Now is the day of the dissolving dollar and the diminishing dinner. Each month we pay more for what we eat, and eat less for what we pay. Normal conditions will come back *when more of us get back to the land.* Our furrows of care will disappear when we begin to turn more furrows in the soil.

The dollar of today is worth just about half as much as in 1914. While inflation and other effects of the war have greatly reduced the purchasing power of the dollar, this condition will not endure. If you buy good land now with depreciated dollars your principal will be repaid later in dollars having a normal purchasing power, and in addition you will profit by increased land values. Thus, you will gain, both by the prevailing low prices of land, and the temporary low purchasing power of the dollar.

In this day of unrest, what is the safest investment? LAND. It is the best savings bank in the world. It cannot burn up or blow away, and panics cannot destroy it. Agricultural land is the foundation of all lasting prosperity. Good land is a safe anchor to the windward against the day when old age approaches. Get an income-producing home while your earning capacity is at a high productive stage. You can save enough each month to do this by taking advantage of our liberal terms. Let us improve your land for you on our fair and equitable *ten-per-cent-above-cost-plan.*

Florida is the oldest and yet newest state in the Union. St. Augustine was the first white settlement made on this continent, and yet less than ten per cent of the good productive lands in Florida are under cultivation. The reasons are plain to those who know the facts. The mistaken idea that Florida is very hot in summer has had much to do with keeping desirable settlers away from the state.

But, believe me, they are coming—thousands strong. Settlers—farmers, stock men, fruit growers, truck gardeners, home-seekers, from every state in the Union—and Canada—are coming to Florida to buy land while it can yet be had at reasonable prices. Those who wait too long will wish they had purchased when they find land quoted at from $200 to $500 an acre within the next few years. California passed through just such an era of progression, and today wild lands there, available for citrus culture, are being sold at from $500 to $700 an acre, and not much of it to be had at those figures.

Thaw out and think things over. Get away from coal strikes and fuel bills. Come to Florida and make hay while the sun shines. It shines here all the year. Don't believe all the wild tales you've heard about the land of flowers. If you start right here—your battle is half won. Don't come here with a couple of hundred dollars and no knowledge of how to work the land. That kind will fail anywhere.

Gardeners in Orange and adjoining counties cleared over a thousand dollars an acre on truck crops last year. Orange and Grapefruit groves were sold here last Fall at as high as $1,000 to $3,000 an acre. Individual grove owners cleared as high as $1,000 and $1,500 an acre on the sale of their fruit within the last twelve months. These are facts our Big Free Book will substantiate.

Send for the Big Free Book—"TWENTY ACRES AND PLENTY." It tells about our easy monthly payments, sick and out-of-work clauses, and free insurance features.

Address, Sylvester E. Wilson, Dept. "R" Orlando, Florida.

He Earns $50 a Week

Repairing Autos

THOUSANDS of men everywhere are doing the same. Many are getting more than this. Some are opening garages of their own. Why don't you get into the auto game too? Men in other lines with a little mechanical ability have doubled their earnings after getting into the fascinating field of auto construction and repairing. Ten times the number of men now engaged in the business are needed. Fine, big paying jobs are waiting for men who "know" to fill them. Read below and find out how you can fit yourself to hold one of these big, man's size jobs in your spare time, without going away from home at a cost of only 7c a day.

Learn at Home

No need to pay for an expensive course that will take you away from home. You can learn the auto game at a cost of one tenth the expense of going away to school. You don't have to serve an apprenticeship either. Use spare time only and keep right on with your present work. This Library of Automobile Engineering and Tractor Information will make an expert out of you and fit you for the biggest kind of job. It is in six thick volumes, with 2600 pages and 2300 pictures, plans, diagrams and blueprints, etc. Every part of every well known car is explained. They teach you everything the best auto schools teach.

Fifteen great auto engineers prepared these money-making books for men like you. You don't have to know a thing about cars to understand them. Every page is written in plain, everyday language and they begin right at the beginning. With every set we give FREE a consulting membership in our society. You can write our engineers any time and get their help on any proposition on which you get stuck.

FREE Examination!

Mail the coupon for free examination. Don't send any money. We will ship the books (all 6 volumes) by express collect and you can have a whole week to use them as if they were your own. Give them every test you can think of. Take them to your shop. Show them to your friends and ship them back at our expense if you don't want to keep them. If you do keep the books to help you earn more, send us only $2.00. You can send the balance of the $21.80 price the same way—$2.00 each month. Only 7 cents a day. This is your chance to double your earnings—earn two dollars in the same time it takes to get one now. The coupon is your start. MAIL IT TODAY

Everything About Autos

Automobile Motors; Welding; Motor Construction and Repair; Carburetors and Settings; Valves; Cooling; Lubrication; Fly-Wheels; Clutch; Transmission; Final Drive; Steering; Frames; Tires; Vulcanizing Information; Starting and Lighting Systems; Shop Kinks; Commercial Garage Design and Equipment; Electrics; Storage Batteries; Care and Repair of Motorcycles; Commercial Trucks; Gasoline Tractors

128 Blueprints of Electric Wiring Diagrams

Don't Send Money— Just Mail This Coupon

American Technical Society :: Chicago

AMERICAN TECHNICAL SOCIETY
Dept. A 582 CHICAGO, U. S. A.

Please send me the 6-volume set of Automobile Engineering for 7 days examination, shipping charges collect. If I decide to buy I will send $2.00 within 7 days and balance at the rate of $2.00 a month until $21.80 has been paid. Then you will send me a receipt showing that the set of books and the Consulting Membership are mine and fully paid for. If I want to get along without the books, I will notify you after 7 days to send for them at your expense.

Name.....

Address.....

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

Reference.....

Please Fill Out All Lines

The Dollar Value of High School Training

HAVE you ever thought *why* so many employers demand a High School training of their employees—why the lack of it bars you from the best positions? Take English and Mathematics, for example. What high-grade position—such as accounting, engineering or executive work—can be handled *rightly* without a knowledge of mathematics? How can costs, operating expenses and overhead be accurately computed without it? How can you write good business letters and reports or sell goods without a command of English? There is a positive cash value to having a High School training. It means many more dollars to you, because it throws open to you high-grade positions from which you are now barred.

Don't Be Handicapped

Thousands like YOU—who were laboring under the handicap of not having had a High School training—have taken advantage of the American School course and REMOVED THEIR HANDICAPS. This course has been specially prepared for home study by noted professors. It is complete, covers all requirements, and will remove the biggest obstacle between you and success.

If you have already had some part of a High School Training, you can start in exactly where you left off. We'll credit you with what you have taken and make the tuition fee in proportion with the special course you require.

Read this Guarantee—then Act

"We guarantee at any time during the first year of your enrollment to refund the entire amount paid. If, immediately upon the completion of ten examinations, you notify the School that you are not satisfied with your course."

AMERICAN SCHOOL of Correspondence
Dept. H 42
CHICAGO

TRAINING—THE KEY TO SUCCESS

Please send me booklet and tell me how I can fit myself for the position marked X

ASC

.....High School Graduate	.....Steam Engineer
.....Western Union Courses	.....Lawyer
.....Telephone Engineer	.....Business Manager
.....Draftsman and Designer	.....Cert. Public Accountant
.....Automobile Engineer	.....Accountant and Auditor
.....Automobile Repairman	.....Bookkeeper
.....Airplane Mechanic	.....Stenographer
.....Fire Insurance Expert	.....Gen'l Education Course
.....Sanitary Engineer	.....Com. School Branches
.....Heating and Ventilating Engineer	.....Electrical Engineer
.....Master Plumber	.....Electric Light and Power Superintendent
.....Civil Engineer	.....Hydroelectric Engine
.....Structural Engineer	.....Wireless Operator
.....Mechanical Engineer	.....Architect
.....Shop Superintendent	.....Building Contractor

Name .....

Address .....

As good as winter clothing

Because, like winter clothing, Piso's protects young and old from the effects of winter weather. It relieves coughs and soothes inflamed throats and hoarseness. Always keep it in the house—its use often prevents little ills from developing into real sickness.

30c at your druggist's. Contains no opiate. Good for young and old

PISO'S
for Coughs & Colds

Cuticura Stops Itching and Saves the Hair

All druggists: Soap 25, Ointment 25 & 50, Talcum 25. Sample each free of "Cuticura, Dept. B, Boston."

DRIVER AGENTS WANTED

116-inch Wheel Base

158-inch Spring Suspension

5-Pass. Touring

To drive and demonstrate 1920, 4-cyl., 37 H. P. BUSH Car—Timken Bearings—Willard Batteries—2-Unit Stg. & Ltg.—Full Floating Axel. Write at once for the best Automobile Offer in existence—don't wait—prompt shipments. Money-back guarantee.

BUSH Address J. M. Bush, President, Dept. B 180 MOTOR CO., Bush Temple, Chicago, Illinois

Send Your Name and We'll Send You a Lachnite

DON'T send a penny. Just send your name and say: "Send me a Lachnite mounted in a solid gold ring on 10 days' free trial." We will send it prepaid right to your home. When it comes merely deposit $1.75 with the postman and then wear the ring for 10 full days. If you, or if any of your friends can tell it from a diamond, send it back. But if you decide to buy it—send us $2.50 a month until $18.75 has been paid.

Write Today Send your name now. Tell us which of the solid gold rings illustrated above you wish (ladies' or men's). Be sure to send your finger size.

HAROLD LACHMAN CO., Dept. 1702
12 No. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Our 21 Jewel SMASHES PRICES

Look!

- 21 Ruby and Sapphire Jewels—
- Adjusted to the second—
- Adjusted to temperature—
- Adjusted to isochronism—
- Adjusted to positions—
- 25-year gold strata case—
- Genuine Montgomery Railroad Dial—
- New Ideas in Thin Cases.

Only $3.50 A Month

And all of this for $3.50—only $3.50 per month—a great reduction in watch prices -direct to you—positively the exact prices the wholesale dealer would have to pay. Think of the high-grade, guaranteed watch we offer here at such a remarkable price. And, if you wish, you may pay this price at the rate of $3.50 a month. Indeed, the days of exorbitant watch prices have passed.

See It First

You don't pay a cent to anybody until you see the watch. You don't buy a Burlington Watch without seeing it. Look at the splendid beauty of the watch itself. Thin model, handsomely shaped—aristocratic in every line. Then look at the works! There you will see the masterpiece of the watch makers' skill. A perfect timepiece adjusted to positions, temperature and isochronism.

Practically every vessel in the U. S. Navy has many Burlington watches aboard. Some have over 100 Burlingtons. The victory of the Burlington among the men in the U. S. Navy is testimony to Burlington superiority.

Send Your Name on This Free Coupon

Get the Burlington Watch Book by sending this coupon now. You will know a lot more about watch buying when you read it. You will be able to "steer clear" of the over-priced watches which are no better. Send the coupon today for the watch book and our offer.

Burlington Watch Co.
19th Street and Marshall Blvd., Dept. 1432 Chicago, Illinois
Canadian Office: 355 Portage Ave., Winnipeg, Manitoba

Burlington Watch Co.
19th Street and Marshall Blvd.
Dept. 1432 Chicago, Ill.

Please send me (without obligation and prepaid) your free book on watches with full explanation of your cash or $3.50 a month offer on the Burlington Watch.

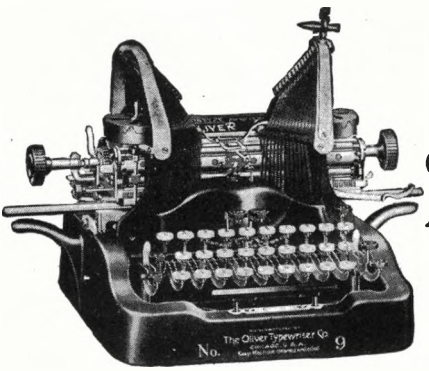
Name _____

Address _____

_____

FREE TRIAL

Keep It
for $3.00 per Month



Or Return It
At Our Expense

The Oliver Typewriter—Was $100—Now $57

The Guarantee of a $2,000,000 Concern that it is the Identical Model

Be your own salesman and save $43. You get the identical typewriter formerly priced $100—not a cent's alteration in value. The finest, the most expensive, the latest Oliver Model. Old methods were wasteful. During the war we learned that it was unnecessary to have great numbers of traveling salesmen and numerous, expensive branch houses throughout the country. We were also able to discontinue many other superfluous, costly sales methods. You benefit by these savings.

Brand New—Never Used

Do not confuse this with offers of earlier models, rebuilt or second-hand. Note the signature of this advertisement. This is a $2,000,000 concern.

We offer new Olivers at nearly half price because we have put typewriter selling on an efficient, scientific basis.

You now deal direct—sell to yourself, with no one to influence you. This puts the Oliver on a merit test.

The entire facilities of this Company are devoted exclusively to the production and distribution of Oliver Typewriters.

You Save $43

This is the first time in history that a new standard $100 typewriter has been offered for $57. Remember, we do not offer a substitute model, cheaper nor different. But the same splendid Oliver used by the big concerns. Over 800,000 Olivers have been sold.

We ship direct from the factory to you. No money down—no red tape. Try the Oliver Nine at our expense. If you decide to keep it, send us $3.00 per month. If you return it, we even refund the outgoing shipping charges. You are not placed under the slightest obligation. That's our whole plan. We rely on your judgment. We know you don't want to pay double, and who wants a lesser typewriter? You may have an Oliver for free trial by checking the coupon below. Or you may ask for further information.

Mail This Coupon Now!

An Amazing Book

All the secrets of the typewriter world are revealed in our startling book entitled "The High Cost of Typewriters—The Reason and the Remedy"—sent free if you mail the coupon now. Also our catalog. Order your free trial Oliver or ask for further information at once.

Canadian Price, $72

THE OLIVER TYPEWRITER CO.
732 Oliver Typewriter Bldg., Chicago

NOTE CAREFULLY—This coupon will bring you either the Oliver Nine for free trial or further information. Check carefully which you wish.

(91.03)

THE OLIVER TYPEWRITER CO.
732 Oliver Typewriter Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

☐ Ship me a new Oliver Nine for five days free inspection. If I keep it, I will pay $57 at the rate of $3 per month. The title to remain in you until fully paid for.

My shipping point is.....

This does not place me under any obligation to buy. If I choose to return the Oliver, I will ship it back at your expense at the end of five days.

☐ Do not send a machine until I order it. Mail me your book—"The High Cost of Typewriters—The Reason and the Remedy," your de luxe catalog and further information.

Name .....

Street Address .....

City ..... **State**.....

Occupation or Business .....

COLGATE'S "HANDY GRIP" SHAVING STICK

PATENTED 1917

*Mr. Jones writes a letter

—and his communication is interesting to every man who shaves himself—and wishes comfort in so doing.

"My children chanced to give me a stick of your shaving soap," says Mr. Jones. If you do not have one given you—give yourself a "Handy Grip."

"In the directions was an admonition not to rub. I thought this extremely silly," says Mr. Jones. But he found true the original Colgate phrase used since 1897—"*needs no mussy rubbing in with the fingers.*"

"I am, from now on, a firm champion of Colgate's Shaving Stick. It beats anything I have ever used," says Mr. Jones. You will think so after you have tried Colgate's "Handy Grip."

New York, April 6, 1918.

Colgate & Co., New York City.

Gentlemen:

Some months ago my children chanced to give me a stick of your shaving soap, and I am writing to you to tell you what a delight shaving now is with it, instead of the nightmare I formerly experienced whenever I shaved. The lather is wonderful, smooth as velvet, leaves the skin without any irritation, and in short, your shaving stick is ideal for the purpose.

In the directions that came with the shaving stick was an admonition not to rub the beard with the hand after applying the lather. I thought this extremely silly, but on trying it I found that your experts had solved another important element in successful shaving and I shall never again do anything but follow the advice given. The brush, applying the lather with the proper degree of moisture in it, is sufficient. The new method is vastly superior to the old.

I am, from now on, a firm champion of Colgate's Shaving Stick. It beats anything I have ever used, and I've been shaving myself for 35 years.

None of your agents have solicited this testimonial from me but I send it merely as a deserved recognition of the makers of the best shaving soap in the world.

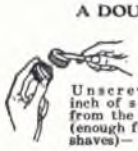
Very truly yours,

(Signed) EDWIN J. JONES*

**Mr. Jones is Associate Editor of The Financial World.*

The "HANDY GRIP" is the thrifty Shaving Stick. It saves you 50 shaves below the "Waste Line," and more: you can buy a Refill Stick for the original metal Grip.

A DOUBLE ECONOMY WITH COLGATE'S



Unscrew ½ inch of soap from the Grip (enough for 50 shaves)—

and press it, wet, to a new Stick. It adheres, to be *all* used.

And the Refill Stick costs less than the complete Grip, and *screws* in.