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Western Story Magazine

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1927 No. 3 ★ WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE 15

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Western Story Magazine

EVERY WEEK

Vol. LXVII FEBRUARY 19, 1927 No. 3

Flaming Fortune

By George Owen Baxter

Author of "The Bells of San Filipo," etc.

CHAPTER I.

A FIGHT FOR PROSPERITY.

WHEN Henry Ireton went courting, he called on the father and the mother of his lady. Henry had always been a dutiful child, and he expected to find nothing but duty in others. So he sat in the parlor and talked to Mr. and Mrs. Corbett Lawes. In the meantime, Rosaline Lawes sat under the fig tree in the yard, admiring the black pattern of the leaf shadows on the moon-silver of the ground; admiring, also, the handsome, bold face of her sweetheart, Oliver Christy. Through the open windows, she and Oliver could hear the heavy voice of the youth her parents preferred.

"I paid five hundred and eighty dollars to the bank, to-day. That clears all the buildings."

There was an exclamation of pleasure from Mr. Lawes.

"How long has it taken you, Henry?"

"Five years, sir."

"A long time—the way you've worked."

"Well, I haven't rested none."

"But I'll bet that the bank was pretty surprised, the way you took hold of things!"

"Well, the president had me into his office."

"He did! Why didn't you tell us that right away at first?"

"It would of sounded like boasting maybe."

"Oh, not a bit!"

"Well, President van Zandt said that he'd been keeping an eye on me ever since I took over the place, when father died. He said that at that time the ranch was mortgaged for a lot more than it was worth. And the ground was wore out, and everything was falling to pieces, and the rolling stock was broken down. And everything was at wrong ends. And he wondered how I had made anything come around right."

"He well might wonder!" said the thin, sharp voice of Mrs. Lawes. "I hope you told him, Henry dear, that it wasn't owing to no help that you got from him!"

"That wouldn't be just," said Henry Ireton. "The bank could have closed down on me any day. But they let me go along and work the thing out my own way. They never pressed me. A couple of times they let the interest run over a whole six weeks."

"Stuff!" said Mrs. Lawes. "Mighty glad they were to see their investment secured. Go on, Henry. You've no idea how interested I am."

"Me too," said Corbett Lawes. "Dog-gone me if it ain't like a fairy tale, what you've done with the old place!"

"Well," said Henry Ireton, "I just explained things to Mr. van Zandt. That was all."

"Go on and explain the same things to us. I've never really understood just what you've done to make that ranch come to life!"

There was a little pause after this.

"Now listen to him blow, will you?" chuckled Oliver Christy.

"Well," said the girl, "it's better to hear him talk about something than it is not to hear him talk at all. He's always been like a wooden Indian, every other time! Just plain dumb!"

"Your old man likes him pretty well?"

"Dad says he's a safe man for any girl to marry, and ma, she agrees."

"In the beginning," said the heavy voice of young Henry Ireton, "everything was pretty much gone to pot, you know."

"Don't I know, though! The fences was all rotten, and the house and the barns and the sheds was all falling down!"

"Yes," broke in Mrs. Lawes, "and I had a peep at the kitchen, and such a place I never seen in my life! There was a hole rusted clean through the bottoms of all of those kitchen pans, I do declare!"

"There was a hole rusted clean through the bottom of the whole place!" said young Ireton with a heart-felt warmth. "It was all gone! Three sacks to the acre was about the best wheat crop we'd have in ten years. The barley wouldn't thrive none. Oats would do no good. And every bit of the tools and the rolling stock had been sold to pay the expenses of dad's funeral!"

There was another brief pause.

"It was really pretty bad for Henry to face a thing like that," said Rosaline, in the shadow of the fig tree.

"It's what he was made for—buckling down and pulling the plow. Why, he's *built* more like a plow horse, than a man! Ever watch him dancing?"

"No," sighed Rosaline, "but I've danced *with* him, and that's worse than watching him."

The voice within the house resumed:

"Well, I had to work the ground. I mortgaged my soul, sold off the cows, and got together enough money to go around and buy implements at sales all over the country. And I got the stuff together and brought it back and patched up the plows and the broken-down wagons and the rakes in my black-

smith shop. I even learned how to fix the insides of a mowing machine if it went wrong. Fact is, I think that I could pretty near make a whole mowing machine, folks, just with crude iron, and a forge and a hammer, with fire to help me out!"

He said it not boastfully, but seriously, soberly, after the fashion of one who is thinking back to the actual facts and stating them without exaggeration.

There was an exclamation, and then Corbett Lawes said: "I've seen you working in your blacksmith shop. I believe that you could make an *adding* machine there, if you set your mind to it!"

"Maybe," said serious Henry Ireton, "if I had to. But I'm awfully glad that I don't! Anyway, that winter I got the tools together, and I sold off the three good horses on the place and got eight ratty things in their place. But those eight rats did the work of eight real horses. I used to rub 'em down by hand, curry 'em deep and hard, feed 'em by hand too, pretty near. And I made them snake the plow along nearly as good as Charley Crosswitch's big eight!"

"Well, you got the work done, and that was the main thing!"

"Then I put in that potato crop that everybody laughed at so much."

"I remember smiling a bit myself, son! It did look queer to see a potato patch on a real ranch, where nothing but grain had ever been raised as far back as people could remember!"

"I know that it looked queer! But it was the raising of the grain that had killed the land. And that was why I put in potatoes and then sowed alfalfa. After I paid for the alfalfa seed, I was clean broke, and didn't have a penny for food!"

Another pause.

"Why, lad, how in the world did you live? Borrow more from the bank?"

"Borrow more? The bank would have had me arrested if I'd had the nerve to borrow more money! No, I couldn't borrow. But I had a gun. That old Colt that dad owned. And there was plenty of powder and lead."

"You mean that you hunted for a living? But you had never been any hand for a gun or for hunting, Henry!"

"No, I sure wasn't. But I had to, so I did."

"You didn't have the price of cartridges, though."

"I made my own cartridges at home. There was powder and lead. I've told you that. I nearly blew the gun to bits, toward the start. But I'd already learned how to repair things. And I fixed it up so that it would shoot."

"Well, but what could you get?"

"Squirrels and rabbits, all the year round."

"Hold on! Hold on! Squirrels and rabbits—with a Colt—and you not any practiced shot?"

"I'll tell you, Mr. Lawes, when you get hungry enough you *have* to shoot straight. And I learned quick. Before I had pulled up my belt three notches, I could knock over a squirrel nearly every time if I was within a decent distance of it! Anyway, it was a cheap meat market. And when I learned how to find the rabbits, I had them for a change. So I got through the year. The alfalfa didn't do well. Not the first year, you remember. But the potatoes, they saved my life. I had the crop ready before anything else was on the market, and I got all the real top-hole, fancy prices. It was wonderful the money that I took out of that ground from the potatoes. They carried me through to the second year and gave me seed money and a little extra after I'd paid off the interest at the bank. But the first year was the worst. After that, I began to make a little progress."

"Don't skip anything, Henry. We want it all, my boy!" called Lawes.

"Well, then, the second year we had the floods. They washed out a lot of the crops, but they made my alfalfa wonderful, and I cut four crops and got nearly six ton to the acre. The potatoes were good, too. But the alfalfa was the best. If I'd been able to seed the whole place, I would have cleaned off every cent of the whole mortgage, that year, y'understand? But I'd only been able to put in a bit. Well, I got more than twenty dollars a ton, for that hay. A hundred and twenty dollars an acre, and as for the expenses, there wasn't many, because I done most of the work myself. That crop was my big boost! It let me pay off the interest, that year, and a slice off the mortgage, and fix up some of the fences, and get some better horses, though I still kept the old broken-down string of eight. I worked 'em hard, but I never broke them down, and after that, I always had two men working on the place for me. Beans and potatoes and alfalfa was the trick for the third year. The alfalfa and the potatoes didn't amount to much, but the beans did amazingly well.

"The next year, I saw that alfalfa was too big a gamble. But those crops had done what I hoped for. They'd refreshed the soil and put the nitrates back into it—the nitrates that fifty years of grain farming had taken out. I learned all about them from a smart college man. And so I worked along till the fifth year, and now things are really pretty well fixed. And the mortgage is pared down to a reasonable size."

"Oh, you've wiped it almost out, Henry. It's not a third as big as it was!"

"No, it's about a half of what it was. But as the bank said, the place was away overmortgaged. But in another three years I'll have it wiped out. Because I've got what I need to work with, now!"

"Tell me what you've got, Henry," said Mr. Lawes. "Add up the list."

"I'll tell you, then. Every fence post is sound, and the wire is new. All the sheds is better than new, and the house is rebuilt from the cellar to the garret. And the barns are loaded to the gills with good first-class hay. And the stalls are holding three eight-horse teams not second to none in the county. And I have first-rate rolling stock. Plenty of plows and wagons. The house is furnished all through. And best of all, I've got first-rate credit at the bank! They'll trust me. They believe in me. And that's why, Mr. Lawes, I've come over special this evening, to ask you if my marriage with Rosaline could be set right soon!"

CHAPTER II.

AN EYE OF RED.

IN the darkness beneath the fig tree, Rosaline caught the hand of Oliver Christy and stood bolt upright, with a gasp.

And then they heard the voice of Mr. Lawes, strong and exultant:

"Lad, there ain't a man in the county that I'd rather have in the family than you. Furthermore, the day that you marry Rosaline, I'm gunna clear off the remainder of that mortgage!"

"Oh, Oliver!" breathed the girl. "What am I going to do?"

Said the voice of Ireton within: "Thanks. But I don't want no help. I've started this job, and I'm going to bulldog it through! I'd rather. It'll take a few years more, but I want the fun all for myself."

"I understand," said Lawes. "Well, let it rest that way! You know that my wife and me have always favored you for Rosaline. There's only one thing that we've set our hearts on: To have you get yourself clear of the woods."

"I remember," said Ireton. "You said that if I could ever go to the bank and get another five-thousand-dollar mortgage—then you'd know that I'd succeeded! Well, sir, I talked to Mr.

van Zandt to-day. All I have to do is to ride in to-morrow and sign the papers!"

"Henry, I congratulate you!"

"Thank you, sir. And what about Rosaline? How does she feel?"

"Leave me to handle Rosaline," said the father. "I've raised her right, and she won't dare to disobey me, no matter what ideas she may have!"

And Mrs. Lawes put in, a little timidly: "Only—you think that you could make my girl happy, Henry? You think that you could make her love you?"

There was another little pause.

"That clodhopper!" murmured Oliver Christy, beneath the fig tree, and he laughed silently, and briefly.

"I'll tell you," said Henry Ireton, "when I first met her, she was in the third grade, and I was out of school. I set my heart on her then. I ain't a flashy fellow, but I'm tolerable sure and steady. I set my heart on having her, and I'll never stop till I do. Is that straight? Or does it sound like bragging? Well, I never bothered trying to make love to her, because the words for that ain't handy to the tip of my tongue, you see?"

"I see, of course. Still——"

"Well, once I have her, I'll start in winning her, by showing her that I love her and that I value her. I think that I'll convince her. I've had lots of dogs, Mrs. Lawes. I never had one that didn't come to love me!"

Rosaline clapped her hands over her ears and bolted away from the tree, and Oliver Christy followed her.

"Hey, Rosie. Don't act like that. You ain't married to the dub yet!"

She stood wringing her hands, stamping, very pretty in the moonlight, which made the outer fluff of her yellow hair like a pale mist of fire.

"Then stop him, stop him!" cried she. "Oh, Oliver, if you love me, do something!"

"Well, I'll do something! I tell you, I will!"

"Oh, can I trust you?"

"Yes. But if I stop him——"

"Yes, then I'll marry you. I don't care when. I'll—I'll even run away and marry you. I won't care what father says!"

"You promise that?"

"I do!"

"Kiss me, Rosaline!"

"I—no, but after you've stopped Henry! Then I will, and marry you!"

"I'm going to do it!"

"But how? How?"

"There are ways of doing everything. I've got to think this here out."

"Then go think now—quickly, dear Oliver!"

When he was on his horse, Oliver Christy could not help wondering why it was that he felt more like a loser than like one who had been victorious.

But he rode up the moon-whitened way with increasingly high spirits until he came to the crossroads. Lights gleamed from the Ireton house, just up the fields. The barns and the sheds of the Ireton place loomed vast and dark before him. And from the dust there arose near by a slender, shadowy figure, and a rusty, croaking voice said:

"God bless you, Mr. Christy."

"Hello!" said Christy reining his horse aside. "Where the devil did you come from?"

"Not from the devil, Mr. Christy," said the beggar, his two canes wabbling back and forth under his weight. "Not from the devil. God keeps some of the poor and the afflicted wandering around this world of his so that the best people can have a chance to show their charity, dear Mr. Christy."

Mr. Christy was the smoothest of dancers, and the softest of whisperers in the ears of pretty girls. But among men, he could be as stern as the next one.

Now he pointed the butt of his quirt like a gun at the head of the beggar.

"Cut out that whining," he remarked. "It don't buy you anything from me. I'll tell you what. A beggar is no more to me than a weed. No more than the tar weed in the field, yonder."

For a puff of wind had brought the pungent, half-fragrant odor of the tar weed to their nostrils.

"Tar weed leaves a stain," said the beggar in his broken voice, his rusty, untuned voice. "It stains the cuffs of your trousers and it stains your hands."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Why, Mr. Christy, charity is the thing that washes the stains away, again."

"You're more than half crazy, old man."

"Not crazy. Only, I see the truth. And the truth always looks like madness to those who don't know it! I tell you, charity is the finest cleanser in the world. It launders things cleaner than soap powder ever could. It takes even a black soul, dear Mr. Christy, and makes it as fresh and crisp and white as a best Sunday shirt. Would you believe that?"

"I'd believe," said Mr. Christy, "that you're partly brass and partly a plain old fool. Now get out of my way."

"Oh, dear Mr. Christy," said the beggar, "I wouldn't ask you for much. You see, I never ask for much, and that's why I have to ask so often. Twenty-five cents would make me happy for the night and give me a meal."

"Twenty-five cents? Look here. You go to the poorhouse. That's the place for people like you. Keeps you from being a public nuisance! You hear?"

"Well, I hear you. But I hope that I shall forget what you say? I to the poorhouse?"

He shook his ancient head.

"What good are you, then? Tell me that—what good are you?"

"Well, sir, I'm around and see things. I tell them when the underproppings of the bridges are getting rotten and unsafe. I tell them when the fences are getting weak. And I tell them a lot of other things. I watch the whole countryside the way that a mother will watch her household, you understand?"

"Who asks for your watching? Who wants your watching? Have the supervisors of the county ever asked you to take on this sort of work for them? No, they haven't, and what's more, they never will. Now, you get out of my way, and keep out. I'm going to have a talk with the sheriff, and see if he'll let an old vagabond like you go about being a public nuisance the rest of your life!"

He turned the head of his horse and galloped up the road which led past the Ireton house. But when he came still closer, he stopped the horse again.

He looked back, but in the moonlight there was no sign of old Tom Elky, the beggar. Perhaps he had crawled back under some culvert, to sleep there until the sound of hoofs brought him out to stop some other traveler with his whining voice. Christy was glad that the old man was out of sight. Though why he should be glad, he hardly knew.

Glancing across the glistening field of wheat toward the Ireton house, he could not help shaking his head in wonder. He lighted a cigarette and smoked it with a frown. For he felt that the very outline of that house was, in a manner, a reproach to him. He could remember that, in other days, that outline had been no more than a low, broken-backed hulk shouldering at the sky, hardly to be seen on a rainy night. But in the last year it had risen high, and spread out its arms like a dead thing come to life.

Yes, and life was certainly here! On this nearest forty acres, long famous for the poverty of its soil and usually used as a pasture only, Henry Ireton had raised his celebrated crops of potatoes at which the whole county had laughed

so heartily. Now that field was put out in potatoes no longer, and such a crop of wheat as stood here, Christy had never seen before. He judged that it might run twenty-five sacks to the acre, or even more. The straw was long, and the heads were so closely crowded that it seemed that they had been packed in by hand, and arranged all at one level. And this crop from the old "pasture!" The broken-down forty acres!

The whole affair seemed to Oliver Christy like a living miracle. And in Henry Ireton he vaguely sensed a prodigious strength which would go on expanding, and expanding. Another two or three years, and all his mortgage would be swept away. He would be married to lovely Rosaline Lawes, and by that act he would cease to be partly ridiculous and partly horrible. For all of the Iretons had been unsocial, undesirable people—big-limbed, dark-faced people, loving fights, drinking much beer, throwing their money away, and totally inefficient and dangerous members of society. Half a dozen of the line had died with pistol bullets through their bodies, and others had been ended by drink and wild ways. Out of that muck the form of Henry Ireton had risen. A brutally powerful body was his, but a face more open, a forehead more expansive than theirs had been. More mind and less beast—and mind and beast-strength together had built the new big Ireton house and put up those vast barns, where, now, some thirty draft horses were housed, all with fine, new harness, and pullers of brightly painted wagons, so that the teams of Henry Ireton were show pieces, so to speak, admired by the entire county. There were other silhouettes to take the eye of Christy. He threw away his cigarette and scanned the great hump-backed stacks of straw and the higher stacks of hay.

What, after all, had Oliver Christy to show in all his life that would compare with this achievement? He sighed and bit his lip, and that moment, smelling smoke, he looked downward, and saw a growing eye of red opening upon the ground.

The cigarette which he had thrown so carelessly into the dead grass of the roadside!

CHAPTER III.

A CROOKED SHADOW.

HE swung down from his horse anxiously and snatched his slicker from behind the saddle. Then he saw that two or three blows would easily put out the blaze, and he rested easier.

It would be very odd, he thought, if such a fire should suddenly sweep away the five years of labor which young Ireton had invested in the place. What would Ireton do then? Begin over once more like a slave bending at a wheel?

His laugh was short and fierce; and suddenly he looked over his shoulder and down the road. There was no one in sight—not even the bent form of the beggar. And the wind—it was blowing softly but surely straight toward the house of Ireton! Straight toward five years of slavery and misery, and accomplishment!

And Oliver Christy, with an oath, flung himself back into the saddle. At the same instant, there was a loud crackling, and a long arm of yellow tossed twenty feet into the air beside the fence.

Christy, frightened and startled, leaped his horse aside into the deep ditch which ran along the other side of the road. From that point, only his head and shoulders were visible. He could not be seen, but he could very well watch. And, taking out his handkerchief, he mopped the cold beads from his forehead and studied this wave of destruction.

It was hardly a thing to be believed. First the flames ran like a creeping serpent, growing broader at the head, across the strip of short stubble which

had been cut in the spring to make a way for the harvester that autumn. The head of the serpent of fire reached the standing ranks of grain, thoroughly dried out and seasoned perfectly by the sun of many weeks. And there was a distinct crash, as though something had fallen.

The flames, exploding upward, cast a wide shower of sparks and flaming bits of wheat stalk, as far back as the place where Christy sat his saddle. And then, with the growing wind behind, cuffing them along, the flames raced across the field for the Ireton house, exactly as a sprinter leaps from the mark and then settles quickly into a driving stride.

Throwing out its arms on both sides and rushing forward, the fire threw its head a hundred feet in the air. And all the ground over which it hurled itself was left black, covered with slender snakes of dying crimson.

Before the blast, a loud shouting rose from the house of Ireton, and Christy saw forms of men, looking ridiculously small and stripped of strength, come out of the house and rush away toward the barn.

He had forgotten the barn and the horses in it. And now even the blood of Oliver Christy curdled.

But he set his teeth. Better wipe out the whole thing! For give such a fellow as this Henry Ireton his thirty fine draft horses, only, and he would use them as a seed out of which all of his fortunes would be swiftly rebuilt. Like the hundred-headed hydra, he would quickly be more formidable than ever.

He saw the mass of fire strike the house like so much volleyed musketry. Windows smashed. Every room was flooded with a living river of fire, and a cloud of smoke shot up above the stricken and doomed house of Ireton.

Past the house instantly ran the long arms of the flame. And at a stride it reached the barns. A freshly made stack of straw became in an instant a bright crimson pyramid against the night sky. And the whole side of the barn smoked the instant it was touched, and in another instant it was tufted and tasseled with flames.

The dwelling house, in the meantime, was belching fire and darkness from every window. The sheds were going up with a roar. And then from the barn Christy heard the human scream of a tortured horse.

He had steady nerves, had Oliver Christy. Being an only son of a wealthy man, he had spent most of his life thinking about himself and his personal comfort, but now he found that a new idea was foisted into his mind.

He shut it away.

"To him that hath, it shall be given; from him that hath not shall be taken away——"

That phrase leaped through his mind, and he smiled grimly. Fire on the ranch of Ireton, fire in his sheds, his hay stacks, his house, and fire in the soul of Ireton himself. What would come of it?

The entire side of the barn which faced that way was now writhing red with fire, but he could see the southern face of the building, and through that face men began to break, working fiercely with axes, cleaving a pass out from inside the barn.

Now a man struggled out, and led behind him a horse. But the wild confusion outside maddened the poor beast. It reared, turned, and neighing wildly it ran back into the doomed barn.

Another horse was led out, but now the stubble around the barn was a living sheet of flame, and the poor beast could not be saved.

And all the rest were lost, unless, perhaps, a way could be found through another part of the barn to freedom.

No, it was far too late! All around the barn, sheds and shocks of hay, and

rubbish were aflame, and now the fire had curled around all four walls of the big building where most of the wealth of Henry Ireton was concentrated.

Mr. Christy had seen enough.

It was too bad. He told himself that he was very sorry for poor Ireton, but after all, is not all fair in love? And he, Oliver Christy, a son of the old and honorable Christy family, had chosen lovely Rosaline Lawes for his wife. What right, therefore, had a clodhopper to come between him and his will?

So thought Mr. Christy, and galloping his horse up the big ditch, he was soon away from danger—danger of being spotted in that neighborhood—and so he came on to his home.

He found that the whole neighborhood had become alarmed, by his time. He himself joined the volunteers rushing to the fire, and he arrived there in time to see the smoldering heaps of ruins of barn, and house, and smoking stacks, with now and then a long hand of fire shooting up from a jumble of wreckage.

It made an oddly interesting picture. It made him feel that he had looked at a scene of war. And he himself had worked this magnificent destruction!

But, most interesting of all, as he was walking along, his father caught his arm very suddenly and checked him.

"Not that way, Oliver," he said. "The poor fellow is there. We mustn't bother him!"

It was Henry Ireton, standing with folded arms, viewing the red-hot ashes which remained to him out of five years of hard labor and mighty hopes.

"Has he said anything?" asked Oliver Christy of some one near by.

"It was a funny thing," said he who was asked. "When Ireton seen what had happened, he walked around as calm as you please. Telling people not to work, because everything was too far gone. I thought sure that he had everything more than covered by insurance, the way that he was acting. But he didn't. Seems that his thrifty nature didn't want to pay out good hard cash for insurance, and the result of it was that he is cleaned out. He ain't even got timber left to make the fence posts!"

"And he made no complaints?"

"Only one. 'I wish that they could have saved the gray gelding,' says Ireton.

"That was his best near leader, you know. The first good horse that he ever bought, and a Jim dandy, you can bet!"

And, afterward, Oliver Christy rode slowly home with his father.

"I hope that doesn't break the spirit of young Ireton," said the elder Christy. "That fellow has steel in him, but a disaster like this would take the temper out of the best sort of steel, you know."

"He'll go to the devil," said Oliver sharply. "I know that fellow. I knew him long ago. And besides, the bad blood has to break out in him some of these days!"

"Do you think so? I used to think so, too. But perhaps he used up all the devil in him fighting his way through poverty and misery. He put his strength into his plow and his blacksmith's hammer. And perhaps you'll see him starting again. For my part, I intend to advance that boy some money. I have faith in him!"

"In Ireton?"

"Yes."

"Why, sir, I think that you'd be throwing your money away! I'd never risk a red cent on people of bad blood."

"Well, perhaps you're right; I remember seeing old Champ Ireton run amuck with a pick, one day, and nearly kill three men. I've seen other Iretons go wrong. Perhaps this lad would go

the same way sooner or later. But still—what a stroke of bad luck!"

"I've heard you say, sir, that the right sort of a man compels the right sort of luck to follow him."

"Well, that's true, too. You seem to have a head on your shoulders to-night, my boy. Perhaps you're getting out of your foolish ways. I wonder, Oliver, if you're actually coming into your manhood at last!"

Oliver said nothing, but he could have laughed to himself. After all, it was the first really important act of his life, and what quick results it was bringing to him!

For he knew that his father had always looked down upon him as a sort of weakling—not weak in the fist or slow with the gun, but weak in heart and character. And now the elder Christy was talking to him as to an equal.

To an equal! And perhaps, before long, he would be able to see those rare and wonderful qualities which Oliver Christy had always sensed in himself.

It was like the dawning of a new and a better life!

They rode into the yard of the house, gave the horses to the negro stableboy, and as they were sauntering toward the dwelling, a crooked shadow walked out from beneath the chestnut tree.

"God bless you, Mr. Christy, father and son! Is there any charity for an old man, to-night?"

It was old Tom, the beggar, leaning upon his two crutches.

"Here's ten cents!" said the elder Christy. "Send the old pest away, my boy."

"Get out!" thundered Oliver Christy.

"Oh, Mr. Oliver," said the beggar, "ain't you going to let me talk to you a minute—alone—about something special, important?"

"What!"

"Something, Mr. Oliver, that I seen this very night!"

CHAPTER IV.

A BEGGAR BARGAINS.

THEN Oliver Christy twitched the quirt between his fingers. He was not one of those who allow a foolishly romantic respect for years to influence him in his actions. Rather, he felt that an old fool was infinitely worse than a young fool, and should be treated with an according contempt. But now he hesitated. There was a certain amount of meaning in the words and in the attitude of the old vagrant.

"Go ahead, sir," said he to his father. "I'll see what's on the mind of this old scoundrel."

Mr. Christy went on into his house, and his son remained behind.

"I knew you were an obliging gentleman," said the beggar. "I knew that you'd finally stop and talk with me!"

"You knew nothing of the kind," said the other. "And as a matter of fact, I haven't three words for you. If you can tell me something of real interest, do it at once. Otherwise, you get this quirt right across your infernal shoulders!"

Tom Elky swayed back and forth upon his canes, shaking his head.

"Well, well," said he, "I suppose that you would hardly take the time to consider that remark of yours—you're so hasty, Mr. Christy."

"Look here, Tom, I won't waste time on you. Have you anything to say or not?"

The beggar shrugged his shoulders.

"No, sir, I haven't a thing to say."

The quirt whirled up in the hand of the youth.

"By fury!" said he. "I've a great mind to thrash you for your impertinence! But I think that you're a little mad!"

"No, sir, not a bit. Besides, speech isn't the best thing in the world."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Speech at the best, sir, is only sil-

ver. But you know the old saying, that silence is golden?"

Mr. Christy dropped the hand that held the quirt.

"Silence is golden?" he repeated with a snarl. "Silence is golden?"

"Exactly, sir! I knew that you'd understand."

The young rancher remained a moment, stiffly attentive.

"Come over here away from the house," said he, and he led the way to a bridge that spanned the creek near by, a foaming, dashing little stream that poured out its hoarse voice continually in the ear of the ranch house.

"Now tell me what you mean—silence about what?" asked Christy.

"I don't like to say, sir, even here!"

"You don't? Come, you'll have to talk out—to me!"

"Well, sir, fires don't start from no cause at all!"

Oliver Christy bowed his head a little, and waited. Then he controlled himself and said: "I don't understand what you mean by that."

"I'll tell you, then," answered the cripple. "I mean the fire that wiped out young Henry Ireton to-night! Just after you passed that way!"

The quirt shuddered under the convulsive grip of the youth.

"Now I begin to follow you," he said. "You'd accuse me of that?"

"No accusing, Mr. Christy."

"Will you stop whining? We're alone here. Say what's in your mind."

"Well, sir, after you passed, the fire began."

"Tell me this, Tom. Do you think that a single soul in the county would believe that I burned out Henry Ireton?"

"Why, sir, the fact is that I think they would."

"Tell me how you make that out?"

"Why, I'm an observer, sir, as I told you earlier in the evening——"

"Confound you and your observations. What have they to do with the case?"

"I mean, sir, that I pick up trifles that other folks don't pay much attention to. And so I've come to know that both you and Henry Ireton like the same girl—like her a good deal!"

Christy recoiled a little and set his teeth.

"But how could Ireton, burned out and penniless, marry her?"

Oliver Christy cast a glance down at the boiling face of the creek. He cast another glance over his shoulder at the house. And then he made a stealthy, long stride forward.

"Come closer, Tom," said he, "and we'll talk this over in a friendly fashion——"

He reached out his hand to the shoulder of the cripple. He advanced the other hand. And then stopped convulsively, for old Tom had shifted both his canes into one hand, and with the right he now jerked a short-barreled, old-fashioned derringer from his coat pocket.

"It don't look much, but it shoots straight, sir," said he. "I wouldn't take any chances with it, if I were you."

"You'd murder me!" cried Oliver Christy springing back.

"And if I did, sir, the creek would soon roll your body away. And there'd be nobody the wiser, for a long time. And when they were wiser, who would ever think of suspecting poor old Tom Elky? Who in the whole county, sir?"

They remained for a moment staring at each other. There was still a bright moonlight from the western part of the sky, and by that moon they studied one another.

Said Christy, at length: "I think that we'd better be amicable, Tom."

"There's nothing that I want more, sir. I can't be hostile to Mr. Christy's son. I can't afford to be!"

"I understand that."

"Thank you, Mr. Oliver."

"You want money."

"I haven't any great expenses, sir, but a man needs something to hold body and soul together."

"Well, tell me what you want?"

"You have a rich father, Mr. Oliver."

"My father is rich, but I'm not."

"He trusts you, though. He's very fond of you. What's his is yours, in the long run, I suppose?"

"As a matter of fact, you're wrong. He's tight as the devil with me."

"Too bad! Too bad! I was going to suggest ten thousand dollars——"

"You old scoundrel! Ten thousand dollars?"

Tom Elky hastened to add: "But I'm not grasping, and now that you've explained the way that things are, I'll cut the claim way down. I'll make it only five thousand."

"Five thousand diamonds! You might as well ask for them! How can I get you five thousand?"

"Well, sir, I wouldn't press you for the whole thing at once. I'd just take your note. Payable on demand. That's the way to write it out. Say—five hundred down, and the rest payable on demand. That would do very nicely!"

"Why, you idiot, that's a small fortune!"

"Very small! Very small to a rich man like you, sir! I know that you handle greater sums than that every month!"

"Tom," said the other, "if you turned in my check for that amount, I'd simply be disowned. And there would be an end of me, and of your claim, too!"

"Well, sir, perhaps you're right. So you could make out say ten checks, for five hundred apiece. And then I'd turn them in one at a time. Money lasts me for a long while. You wouldn't be rushed any!"

"Oh, Tom, I curse the day that I ever saw your ugly face!"

"I'm very sorry, sir. But a body has to pick up a living. And what can an old man do except to stay about and observe matters—pick up little things, here and there?"

"You hypocrite! You whining old dog!"

"Six thousand, sir, will be about the right amount."

"You're putting your claim up higher? Let me tell you in plain common sense that I'll give you five hundred dollars, and not a penny more. Not a penny! You can make up your mind to that, or to nothing."

"Sorry, sir. Good night, then."

He began to back clumsily away.

And Oliver Christy followed, in great anxiety, so that his face glistened in the moonlight with cold moisture as though it were covered with grease.

"Wait a minute, Tom."

"Well, sir?"

"We'll split the difference. We'll call it twenty-five hundred. Heaven knows where I'll get it. But we'll put the sum at that, eh? Be a good fellow and see reason, will you?"

"I've stood here and been insulted, and called a dog and a scoundrel and a hypocrite," said Tom Elky, "and I don't mind having those names thrown at me, except that after they've been called they have to be paid for. I only asked you five thousand, but now the price has gone up to six thousand, and there it sticks!"

"Tom, Tom, it'll simply ruin me, and be no good to you! For mercy's sake give me a chance, on this!"

"I'm giving you your chance. You've got more than six thousand dollars in the bank, in bonds."

"The devil! How do you know that?"

"An old man has got to go around observing the trifles, and remembering what he sees and what he hears. And putting the information away in his mind. I have shelves and shelves filled with information tucked away in my mind, sir. I ruffle up the whole lot and

get out the name of Oliver Christy, and you'd be surprised at what I know about you, sir."

"You've surprised me enough, already. I don't want to know any more. But suppose that my father asks to have a look at those bonds—as he does every month or so?"

"Why, sir, you'd have to find a new plan, I suppose. There are ways for a rich young man to get money!"

"Tell me how?"

"Why, you could go to old man Sackstein. He lends money."

"Yes, at twenty per cent."

"That's only a fifth. And he would give you money, I'm sure. He knows that the whole great estate of Mr. Christy will come to you, some day. Why, he'd be glad to lend you money, I'm sure! So let me have your notes, Mr. Christy."

"Oh," groaned Oliver Christy, "this thing is just beginning to take me by the throat!"

CHAPTER V.

A MAN OF RUBBER.

THE worse the medicine, the sooner it should be taken. So thought Oliver Christy, and after he had brooded for a few days, he went straight to the office of Israel Sackstein, the money lender. In the hands of the beggar, Tom Elky, there were twelve notes for five hundred dollars. To be sure, there was a verbal understanding that Tom Elky was not to present those notes for collection before the lapse of a year. That is, they were not to come in faster than once a month. But, in the meantime, who could tell what freak might take the fancy of the old man? Or who might wheedle the notes away from him and suddenly present them?

It would be ruin. The elder Mr. Christy had stood a good deal from the fancies of his boy. Many a thousand he had spent, and he had declared that he had had enough. Thereafter, if Oliver could not demonstrate that he was capable of acting like a sensible, grown-up man, he could get out in the world and shift for himself.

And that prospect Oliver hated. Not that he was too stupid or too weak to work, but he felt that work would degrade him utterly. Work was for slaves and for slavish spirits, not for masters of men, like himself.

There was, more than this, a vein of bitter sternness in the soul of the elder Christy, and if the older man were to learn the nature of the hold which Tom Elky possessed over his son, nothing could prevent Mr. Christy from disowning and disinheriting the boy.

Of this, Oliver was shrewdly aware, for all of his life he had made a study of his father—a study which was of infinite value to him in teaching him just how far he could go.

He knew that he was now walking along the dizzy edge of the precipice, and one false step would ruin him. The Christy fortune would go entirely into the hands of charity, and Oliver would be left destitute, with a great number of expensive habits, and no means of gratifying them.

He was very irritated by this affair. And he cast the blame upon two people —Rosaline Lawes and big Henry Ireton. He was very fond of the girl, of course, but certainly he had never contemplated such a danger as this for her sake. To crush Ireton with the butt of a cigarette was a pleasant idea. But to be pauperized for the sake of Rosaline was simply ridiculous.

So, as his bosom swelled, he remembered that for the past year and a half he had been watching himself with a scrupulous care, taking heed that his expenditures should not pass a definite mark. He had gained much in this manner. He had made sure of the inheritance unless some accursed freak of chance should throw him off the

track. And in the meantime, there had been the growing hope that the elder Christy would die. He was afflicted with a mortal disease. The doctor had thrice told Oliver that the sad day was rapidly approaching. And if only what must happen, would happen soon!

Devoutly Oliver Christy turned up his eyes and breathed forth what was almost the first truly ardent prayer of his life. Let the days of his father end. For what good could the man do now? He had labored, lived, loved, been happy. It was high time that he should step aside and permit a gentleman to take the reins of the fortune in hand.

"The generation which makes the money rarely has the slightest idea how it should be handled!" Oliver was fond of saying.

At least, no doubt as to how money should be spent troubled the broad bosom of Oliver.

So he mounted his best horse, on this day, and swept off down the road for town. He was in somewhat of a hurry, but he did not mind swinging to the side so as to pass the black face of the ruined farm of big Henry Ireton.

For one thing, it had become a sort of gathering place for gossip. For people came from far and near to see the wreckage of the brightly promising farm. And a score of insurance representatives had come out to take pictures and hear the story told of all that the farm had once been. It was just such a tale as brought them business.

Henry Ireton was ruined, beaten into the ground, and his heart broken. Mr. Oliver Christy was very sure of that, and he was not sorry. The wretched business had cost him so much peril and mental discomfort that it would have been a fine state of affairs if Ireton had not, in fact, been utterly destroyed.

On the way, he met none other than Mr. Lawes, and the heartiness of the latter's greeting was a story in itself.

"Why, Oliver, you haven't been to see us for a long time. What keeps you away?"

Very different from the old days, when Oliver was the unwelcome suitor, and Henry Ireton the favored fellow. Christy smiled to himself. He understood very well what the change meant.

"I'm going to see the remains of poor Ireton's place," he told Mr. Lawes.

"Poor lad!" said Mr. Lawes a little shortly. "But, after all, when a young man knows too much to take the advice of his elders, and will go ahead on his way in spite of everything that can be said—the punishment be on his own head." He added, looking dourly upward: "The punishment be on his own head!"

"I've often thought that there might be something in that very idea," admitted Oliver Christy.

"There is! There is!" said Lawes growing more excited. "Fine a fellow as ever lived—but would a man want to trust too much to such a headstrong young chap who is always risking everything on one throw of the dice? I hope not!"

Said Oliver pointedly: "Does Mrs. Lawes agree with you, sir?"

"She does," said Lawes growing a little red. "She absolutely agrees with me, you may be surprised to know. But there's nothing to keep people from changing their minds when the truth is offered to them, is there?"

But even this was not enough for Oliver. He wanted an unconditional surrender.

So he said: "I wonder if you exactly mean that the engagement of Rosie has been broken off?"

"I mean exactly that and nothing else!" declared Lawes. "Why, sir, I shudder when I think of what might have happened, if she'd been committed to the hands of a headlong, headstrong man such as Ireton. And, besides, he's below her! You realize that?"

It was perfectly obvious that he wished to draw on his roadside companion to commit himself still further. But Oliver merely said: "There's no credit left to him, I suppose?"

"Not a cent's worth!" declared Mr. Lawes. "What happened to him in the bank—well, I'll repeat it to you in his own words. He told me about it. I must say that the poor boy is honest! He went to Mr. van Zandt, and told him what had happened, and that the face of the farm was swept as bare as his hand, and he wanted to know if Van Zandt would advance him money on a fresh mortgage. What answer did Van Zandt make, do you think?"

"What was it?"

"He simply said: 'My boy, Stonewall Jackson was a good man and a religious man, but when he found an officer who failed, he didn't much care whether the officer was foolish or simply unlucky. He changed the officer for another. Now, I know that you have worked hard for five years, and you've done very well up to this time. I'm glad to see that you don't want to surrender even now. But, from my point of view, I'm no longer interested. You can't force fortune to change her ways. She has her favorites, and she has those that she doesn't care to favor. You understand me? I don't want to put more money into your hands!' "

"That's rather straight talk," said Mr. Oliver Christy, "but though I'm sorry for Henry, I can't help agreeing with Mr. van Zandt."

"He's a sound man, is Van Zandt," said Lawes. "Very sound. Knows business and knows men. I'm sorry for Ireton, too. Very sorry. I want in the worst way to see him succeed. But I'm afraid that he's nothing but a bulldog. A plain bulldog. And bulldogs can't win the greatest prizes. Not in this world of ours, constituted as it is!"

"Humph!" said Oliver Christy. "I should say not!"

"You'd think that the poor boy would give up, though, wouldn't you?"

"What?" cried young Christy. "Hasn't he?"

"Not a bit! Wait till you see!"

Oliver was stricken with amazement —and a sort of perverse fury. And a chill went through him. Was it possible that this fellow could still win out?

Then he added: "Well, perhaps he'll pull through, after all."

"Not a chance in the world, unless he can get a loan of money right away. Not a chance in the world. And who'll loan him money?"

"The same people who would try to carry water in a sieve, I suppose."

"Exactly! You have a penetration, Oliver. I'm glad to see that you understand these matters so well!"

"Thank you!"

They turned onto the last lane.

"Look, Oliver! There's a crowd yonder. What's happened?"

They galloped hastily ahead and found some half dozen buggies gathered along the fence, where men and women going to and from town were staring across the fields of Henry Ireton.

Where the black heaps of the house lay there was now a little ragged tent standing, and an open-air fireplace just outside. And farther on, there was a hayrack, a broken-down affair, with some remains of hay in it, at which four rattle-boned horses were eating, and a few bales of hay lay upon the ground. A red-rusted gang plow was not far off, and in the distance was what was left of the blacksmith shop, and particularly the anvil and the forge, which had remained intact.

More than all that, to show that the place was under control, a fence was being run down on one side of the burned wheat field.

"What in the world is it all about?"

"Don't you see, Oliver? The queer man is going to sink in his teeth and

not let go. He's worse off than ever—well, really not worse off than he was five years ago. People can hardly believe their eyes. And no wonder! There's no heart in that man, otherwise it would certainly be broken!"

They made hurried inquiries, and soon the story was told; and they discovered that by using patches of credit and money owing, here and there about the countryside, Henry Ireton had managed to get together these horses and the rest that was seen. He was plowing a vegetable patch by the creek bottom, now. And he was fencing the burned wheat field, because even half-charred wheat has its value. It will fatten pigs handsomely, and Ireton intended to use it for that purpose.

The man was of rubber. The harder he was floored, the more quickly he bounced back to his feet.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MONEY LENDER.

"HIS luck has run out," said Mr. Lawes, when his companion at last turned away with him. "And it will never turn back to him. He succeeded for a while. But there's a flaw in the Iretons, as other men have found out before me. A big flaw. They can't win out in the finish!"

It cheered Oliver Christy to hear this. He had almost felt that his master stroke which had involved him in such difficulties had been struck in vain. It had given him Rosaline, it seemed. He had only to ask for her, and she was his. But she was not enough. He was not even sure that he wanted her at all!

But now, it seemed, public opinion sided with him in downing this man. Disaster had struck down Henry Ireton, and the entire countryside enjoyed the spectacle of his fall. They would not let him rise again, no matter how he might struggle to that end!

So thought honest Oliver.

In the meantime, since the Lawes place was on the way toward town, he turned in to visit Rosaline. He stayed on the front porch long enough to bask in the bright, welcoming smile of Mrs. Lawes. Then he went off to find Rosaline.

He saw her coming down from the dairy carrying a bucket, her sleeves rolled up to her elbows. And the moment he saw the sun sparkling in her hair, and glistening along her round throat, he knew that he wanted her, indeed. Wanted her with all his heart!

He hastened to take the bucket of grain and scraps.

"What in the world are you doing, Rosaline?"

"I'm going out to feed the chickens."

"Why, you silly dear, isn't there a hired man to do that for your father?"

"There's a hired man to help my father. There may not always be a hired man to help me."

"What? Am *I* to turn pauper? And have you changed your mind about marrying me?"

"I told a man this morning," said Rosaline, eying him steadily, "that I wouldn't be in a hurry to marry you."

"The deuce you did! Who did you tell, Rosie dear?"

"Henry."

"Henry who? Camden?"

"No. Henry Ireton."

"What the devil! Has that fellow been showing up here to beg for sympathy after he was burned out?"

Rosaline looked deeply into the eye of Christy.

"Don't talk like that, Oliver," said she. "I tell you, I've never seen such a man as Henry Ireton was this morning. You would have wondered at him! You would have stopped hating him!"

"I don't hate him. I despise the poor clod, and that's all."

"He's not a clod."

"I've heard you call him worse than that a thousand times."

She said illogically: "Father and mother haven't the least use for him now that he's been broken! At least, now that they think he's broken!"

"By my word, Rosie, you've fallen in love with him!"

"No. I don't think so."

She became a little pensive, and then spoke.

"I wish that you'd seen him coming down the path, there, Oliver! His tattered clothes, all baggy at the knees, and his hollow eyes."

"And his grimy whiskers," added Oliver with a sneer.

"He was as clean as a whistle," said the girl a little hotly. "You mustn't talk about him like that! He's a man."

Sharp, hot words rose to the tongue of Mr. Christy. But this girl seemed so crystal clear and lovely in his eyes, this morning, that he could not take chances by opposing her. He listened to what she had to say further.

"He came to talk to me," said she. "I didn't want to see him. Mother didn't want me to. She met Henry at the gate and told him he mustn't have any more hopes of me. I couldn't afford to wait another five years. That was so brutal! I came out and met him. I told him that I was glad to see him. I wish that you could have heard him talk, Oliver. So gently, and yet so steadily. He said that he was afraid that it was only pity that was working in me. And he said that he would get on without the pity; but that he realized that he had made a great fool of himself in working directly for dollars and thinking that a wife would come on the side, so to speak. And he wanted to know if I could possibly give him a few months, or even a few days to work some sort of a miracle, and come to me again. He wanted to try to work the miracle, and try to make me love him, you see."

"What's so fine about that, Rosaline?"

"You don't think so? Well, I thought so!"

"What did you say?"

"That I had never cared about him. That I liked him that minute better than I'd ever liked him before. And that if I loved him, I'd marry him in five seconds! No matter whether he had five cents or not!"

"You didn't mean that!"

"Didn't I? You just bet that I did."

"Rosie, I think that the scoundrel turned your head!"

"I don't know! I do know that from that minute I began to think seriously. I always thought that I wanted an easy life. Now I don't know. And all at once I knew that I would have to be at least *prepared* for anything. Prepared to marry a pauper!"

"But what about me? Have you forgotten your promise to me? If anything stopped your marriage with him?"

"No matter what I promised you, I wouldn't marry you if I didn't love you, dear Oliver. You can always know that, because it's the plain truth. Oh, I wouldn't dream of marrying the best man in the world, no matter how well I had sworn to do it, if I found the day before the marriage that I didn't love him!"

"And you definitely don't care a whit for me!"

"No. I didn't say that. I'll tell you, Oliver, that you've always been so handsome, and so much desired at the dances, that I've just taken it for granted that I loved you—because all of the other girls, mostly did. Don't simper like that and look so silly, Oliver. I'm not saying it to flatter you. I'm just telling you what's been in my mind. If I let you hold my hand, yes—and kiss me a few times—I don't know whether it was because I cared a lot for you, or just because I thought that it was really the thing to do."

"Tell me one definite thing?"

"If I can."

"Are you engaged to me or not?"

"Most decidedly not. I wouldn't trample on Henry's soul like that. I told him that he could have some time, you know."

Oliver Christy remained staring at the ground and biting his lip. And then he flashed a quick glance up at her.

"You're really a great girl, Rosaline. I don't blame you for not wanting to grind him into the dirt. I don't want you to, not for a minute. Let that go. Give *me* time, Rosie. Will you do that?"

"I will! And—I wish that you'd give poor Henry a hand! If he'll let you!"

"If he'll let me?"

Oliver laughed hollowly and bitterly.

"That *is* a bit of a joke, old dear!"

"Well, you go and try it. Tell him that you want your father to arrange a five-thousand-dollar credit for him. And then see what happens. Because you'll be—oh, so terribly surprised, I think! I don't think that he'd take a penny from you. You go and try! Oh, that would be a fine thing for you to try, Oliver dear!"

Her shining face dismissed him. He went off and took his horse and went slowly down the road. He had permitted himself to say one sharp thing to Mrs. Lawes:

"I don't think that Rosaline has much time for me, Mrs. Lawes. She's too busy with the chickens, you know!"

That would bring Rosaline a talking-to from her mother, who looked a sensible person, to say the least. It might even involve the authoritative hand of Mr. Lawes, and Oliver grinned a little at the thought. But, between them, they should be able to bring the silly creature to her senses!

Ah! To be able to listen in at that talk!

He went straight on toward town. Rosaline—and Ireton—and the Lawes—and the destroyed farm became of less and less import to him. And he began to think more and more of the greater climax which lay before him.

He was to try to get money—lots of money—six thousand dollars in cash! And he was to try to get it from the formidably famous Sackstein.

Just how he would persuade the gloomy Sackstein, he did not know. But at least, he was reasonably sure that even Sackstein would hesitate before refusing anything to the son of Christy, the millionaire.

The more he dwelt upon the power of his father, the more secure he felt, and so he went into the town with a better nerve, and straight on to the office of Mr. Sackstein.

It was hardly to be called an office.

Over the livery stable there were three or four rooms, and there dwelt Mr. Sackstein. There he conducted his business without a secretary, just as he lived without wife or child or servant. Men said that as much as a hundred thousand dollars in cash often was held within the capacious arms of Mr. Sackstein's old-fashioned safe. And half a dozen times clever robbers had raided the premises. There they always learned that Mr. Sackstein possessed other old-fashioned articles, notably, old-fashioned Colts of a ridiculous date and pattern. However, from his hand the bullets from these guns flew straight to the mark.

At various times, five men had given up their lifeblood upon the naked floors of Mr. Sackstein. And recently, it was beginning to be understood, even by the boldest and the greediest, that he who took the Sackstein fortune would probably have to pay down more than even that fortune was worth.

In the meantime, Sackstein never dreamed of a different address. He was known in his place above the livery stable. Men traveled five hundred miles to come to him and make him

strange proposals. For he had an ear for everybody. He was a court of last resort. He was the goal of desperate missions. And it was well known that he would risk fifty thousand dollars in a cause from which a bank would shrink instantly. Many were the fortunes which he had lost for these wild ventures, these truly lost causes. But many and vaster fortunes he had made in the same manner.

Young Oliver Christy, looking at the battered, sagging door which gave entrance to the stairway, wondered how many lost souls had entered by this means before.

Then he pulled the door open, and climbed softly up the steps, until at the upper landing, he heard a loud voice, its words muffled a bit by distance and intervening partitions—the voice of none other than big Henry Ireton, who it seemed had come, also, to this court of last resort!

CHAPTER VII.

IF THE DEAD RISE!

A SNEER touched the lips of Oliver Christy, and yet there was complacence in his eye, also. For this was the result of his own handicraft, that had brought Ireton to such a pass.

Mounting a step or so higher, he could hear all that passed, for the voice of the money lender was as piercing as a steel drill; and the loud, rumbling of Ireton echoed all through the building.

Those tones were dying away, now, and the last that Christy heard was this:

"That's the lay of the land. I've been cleaned out and gutted, but that ground is rich. I've fertilized and rotated crops until I've freshened it up. The fifty years of wear and tear it has received have been made up for. I could put in five wheat crops one after another and always get a good yield. But I don't intend to do that. I tell you, there's a future before that place. All along the creek, there's soil so rich that it will do for truck farming. And with fifteen hundred dollars I can run a permanent dam across the little creek and hold enough water there through the year to irrigate that low ground. Think what good, fresh vegetables would bring in this city where everybody lives out of tins!"

"I don't know," said the money lender. "Tinned food is the lazy man's habit, and the lazy woman's habit. You can't say how it will change with 'em. Tell me, how many acres have you altogether?"

"Two hundred and eighty-four."

"That's a round bit of land."

"For the truck gardening, there's about forty-five acres of the low ground. That ground is made up of pure river silt. It's so rich that you wouldn't believe it! I can run in some laborers and farm that ground for every kind of vegetable. I'd go halves with them. I give the ground and and tools and such. They give the handwork, which is the most important part of the game. We split the profits fifty fifty. Now, that may not seem very much to you, but I've worked the thing out. I tell you, if I can sell those vegetables at all, every acre of that ground will show at least a thousand dollars in stuff during the course of a year, with any luck at all. Split that thousand two ways. It gives me more than twenty thousand dollars for my share. Twenty thousand dollars a year from that bit of land."

"Not possible," said Sackstein.

"It doesn't sound possible. Because you're like the rest of the people around here. You've got your guns sighted for wheat and cattle and such games. But there's other work worth while. And nothing looks possible until it's done and finished!"

"Just what, in a word, do you want?"

"I want twenty-five thousand dollars from you."

"Twenty-five thousand! How much land?"

"Two hundred and eighty-four acres."

"What's the sale price of that land?"

"With the barns and the house down, and the whole place burned black, I've had an offer of a hundred and fifty dollars an acre for the farm."

"That would be close to forty-five thousand dollars?"

"Yes."

"And what's the mortgage?"

"The mortgage is for thirty-one thousand dollars."

"Let me see. Thirty-one thousand —and twenty-five thousand. You want to hold mortgages for fifty-six thousand dollars on land which won't bring you in forty-five thousand dollars at a quick sale!"

"That's what I want!"

"For how long do you want the loan?"

"Five years."

"How will you pay?"

"Not a penny of interest the first year. After that, I'll pay you twelve per cent for four years. That will give you about a ten per cent return on your capital."

"You offer me ten per cent in a deal where I'm apt to lose the whole capital sum!"

"Put it higher, then. Name your own item, and I'll see if I can stand it."

"I should say, twenty per cent."

"You want to double your money in five years?"

"I take a great risk."

"That rate would bleed me to the core," said Ireton after a pause. "It would mean five years of horror for me. Well, I've had five years of horror already, and I'll undertake five years more. Do I get the money?"

"When could you build your dam?"

"Inside of two weeks."

"And get in a crop next spring?"

"No, the fall is coming on late. I'll get in a quick crop of vegetables the minute the water has raised behind the dam. I'll catch the market with some late things and get fancy prices for them. For that matter, if this town won't take the stuff, I can slap it into fast trains and send it express to the nearest city. That would cut down my profits, but still it would leave me a fine margin. I'll raise four crops a year on that land, Sackstein!"

"Wait a minute."

A chair scraped back. Oliver Christy snapped his fingers softly and shrugged his shoulders. If Ireton could get money as easily as this, how simple it would be for him, the son of a rich man, who was dying! And yet he was irritated. Ireton had been put down once. He would be better pleased to keep the farmer down.

"You want twenty-five thousand dollars?"

"Yes, Sackstein."

"Count that money."

"This is thirty thousand."

"You keep the extra five thousand so that you can live like a man and not like a dog from now on."

Mr. Christy leaned against the wall of the stairway, hardly able to give credence to his senses.

"And sign this note, Ireton."

"Heavens, man," cried Henry Ireton, "you only ask for forty thousand dollars at the end of five years—and you extend the time at six per cent if I am not able to pay then! What do you mean?"

The snarling, harsh voice of Sackstein said:

"I ain't interested in these deals, Ireton. I ain't a bit interested. I like chances. I like big chances. Chances on men, and weather, and dead mines, say. That's the way that I like to venture my money, and make big or lose big. But this deal of yours, it's too small. It's too safe. It's too sure, and I ain't interested."

"But you risk thirty thousand——" began Ireton.

"I don't risk anything," said the other. "I know you. There ain't anything that you couldn't do. If it came to a pinch, I suppose that you could make yourself good weather and turn the hail away. Well, I've followed you. I know how you planted potatoes and worked over 'em and got yourself money and elbowroom that way, while the whole county laughed at you. But I didn't laugh, young man. No—I knew! And when your place was gutted by the fire, I knew that you wouldn't quit.. There isn't any risk for me. Instead of giving my money to a bank to keep for me until something worth while turns up to invest in, I give it to you. Within two years, you'll have enough money to pay me back. But don't bother. Keep plugging away, and by the end of five years, you'll have your houses and barns and all rebuilt, and enough to pay me off, and fifty thousand in cash, besides. And in the meantime—I think I could let you have a little more money, young man, that is, for just one purpose."

"What purpose?" asked Henry Ireton, his voice quite shaken and off key at this singular speech.

"To marry on," said Sackstein.

"What!" cried Ireton. "Marry, when I've been——"

"Burned out? Young man, marry that girl poor. Marry her rich, and she'll keep you poor. Marry her poor and she'll make you rich. Let her work. She wants to work. She needs to work. I know women. You believe what I say!"

And he added: "I'm putting in another twenty-five hundred. That gives you plenty. You go get married. Go quick!"

"But," exclaimed Ireton, "she wouldn't have me. Her father and her mother——"

"Her father and her mother ain't her," said Sackstein. "You go try her. Because I know! You go try her, and you'll see what's what! And for her father and mother, just let them know that you've raised thirty thousand dollars. That's all!"

Henry Ireton was saying: "I want to say——"

"I don't want to hear you," barked Sackstein. "I'm pleasing myself, not you. I don't often have a chance to put money on a sure thing. Now go back to work. That's where you want to go. And don't wait for nothing, except to pick up the girl on the way. Good-by. Don't talk back to me. Good-by!"

Oliver Christy slipped softly down the stairs, and around the corner from the door; he stepped into the shelter of a little group of poplars.

From that covert, he watched big Henry Ireton stride out from the money lender's door and go off up the street, leaning eagerly forward, like a man walking into the teeth of a heavy wind. And there was a sway to the shoulders of Ireton that reminded Oliver of the walking beam of a big steam engine.

He watched Ireton out of sight, and then he turned in at the door of the money lender, once more, and went slowly up the stairs. For he was filled with anxious thought. Not twenty-four hours ago, Rosaline Lawes had been a person of no importance—just a grade better than the rest of the pretty girls who could dance well. But now she had stepped far higher, by the operation of the law of supply and demand.

There was only one girl, and two men wanted her. And where he had felt himself invincible with women in the past, he was by no means so sure at the present moment. For this fellow had risen from the ground where he should have remained for the rest of his life. He had found generosity in a man whose heart was supposed to be harder than chilled steel. And if a fel-

low could work such a miracle as that, might he not, also, work another miracle with Rosaline?

Storm clouds, then, were gathering around the head of Oliver Christy. And as he climbed those stairs, he wished fervently that the flames which had scoured the fields of Ireton bare and black had also consumed the master.

But as the thing turned out, it seemed that the dead could rise from the grave!

CHAPTER VIII.

BURNING VISIONS.

HOWEVER, while Oliver Christy, in a black frame of mind, climbed the steps toward the office of the money lender, the happiest man in that county was big Henry Ireton, striding up the street toward the spot where he had left his horse.

He had his hands filled with such tools of power as he had never dreamed of before. Ready money! It meant nothing to him for its own sake, but because he would, with it, transform his farm into a garden; a bit of fairyland, covered with greenness and richness and capable of pouring out a glorious tribute every year.

He had asked for twenty-five thousand dollars, in the first place, because he had wanted to be able to cut down the size of his demand if necessary. He had imagined the hands of Sackstein thrown into the air, and an exclamation of protest and rage breaking from his lips. But instead, a sort of divine madness seemed to have come upon the man. There were extra thousands, and many of them, in the hands of Henry Ireton.

Well, he would use every penny of that money and turn it to a shining account. And, in the meanwhile, he could not help glancing upward, now and again, and noting the drifting of the white, massive clouds across the face of heaven. He was filled with gratitude. And on this rare day, thoughts of God swept through his mind like the passage of the great clouds through the heavens. He determined, with this vague swelling of his heart, to make his life better, and more and more fruitful.

He passed by a school. A throng of children had poured out for the recess, and their shouting and their tumult was stilled, while many hands pointed toward him.

He was the man who had worked so vastly hard and from whom misfortune had stripped away the fruits of labor. So in a silence awed and reverent they watched him go past.

And a fire came into the hollow eyes of big Ireton. One day those children would have cause to know him better, and to know him without pity.

Yes, one day he would be rich. He felt the sinews of money, of power. All was his—granted a little time for him to bring his wider schemes into execution! And then he would build such a school as the town had not even dreamed of. And he would give them the best teachers. And he would build them a fine high school, too, where boys, such as he himself had been, could receive an excellent education.

The fire still burned in the eyes of Ireton as he went down the street, although no trace of a smile appeared on his lips. He reached his horse, mounted, and turned toward the bank. And then he paused. In that pause, a new resolution came to him.

So he hurried straight to the bank, and as he entered the front door, he saw President van Zandt turn hastily away. He knew the meaning of that haste. Van Zandt did not care to meet face to face the man to whom he had recently refused money.

Up to the cashier's window went Ireton, and: "Hello, Ransome," he said. "What's my account?"

"Six hundred and twenty-two dollars

and sixty-three cents," replied the cashier after a moment.

"Close the account for me, will you?"

And as he stood with broad back turned at the opposite counter beneath the window, writing his check for that sum, Ireton could hear the murmur go up and down the bank. He was a known man, surely. He could have lived all of a most prosperous life and yet not have sunk into the imaginations of people as deeply as he had through this recent calamity. People looked at him with awe; yes, and with a sort of terror, as though he were a man who had known all of the horrors of hell.

Then a stir, a brisk footfall, and the hand of a man on his shoulder.

It was President van Zandt.

"Now, my boy, you're not thinking of closing out your account and carrying on without a banker?"

"D'you think that's foolish?" said Ireton controlling himself.

And he began, as though automatically, to shuffle in his hands the great sheaf of bank notes which Sackstein had so readily intrusted to him.

That rustling, soft noise caught the attentive ear of the banker. He could not help looking down. And then a look of startled wonder shot across his eyes. He almost forgot what he was saying.

"Yes, yes, my boy. If you ask my advice, I must tell you that I think a man has cut off his right hand when he gives up a bank where he is known!"

"What good is it to be known here?" asked Ireton. He allowed his voice to swell a little. "I'm going to John J. Rix and let him handle my money for me."

"Rix!"

Van Zandt laughed with a broad sneer.

"Rix ain't a fool," declared Ireton. "He started with nothing. He's got a tidy bank, now. Because he knows how to back men. He's growing every year!"

"It's a small account!" said the president. "I do hope that you're not going to trust a little bank like that with any considerable sum!"

"Only thirty thousand dollars," said Ireton.

"Thirty—good heavens! Where did you——"

"From Sackstein."

"What! Have you sold your soul?"

"Look here. Does that look like selling my soul? I get thirty thousand for five years. And at the end of that time I pay back forty thousand."

Van Zandt clasped a hand against his forehead. He could not speak, for the nonce; and now, from every part of the bank, attention had been focused upon them. And when Ireton spoke, all could hear. For he could not lower his voice. It would swell out loudly in spite of himself. It had a powerful hum, like the sound of whirring machinery.

"I'll tell you what, Mr. van Zandt, I banked with you for five years and did a lot of business through you. I've paid you fat interest and premiums on thousands of dollars. I've never missed an interest day. And I've never begged off. You know that. And a few days ago when I came in, you said that my credit was ace high. Then along came a fire and wiped me out. When I came again, you couldn't see that I was the same man. There was soot on me. You thought that the fire had burned my heart out. But it hadn't. I'm the same man that made the old farm pay, and I'm going to make it pay bigger. But I'll not work through you. Rix is square, and he knows men. He gets my account!"

Mr. van Zandt was still blinking, and he could only cry out: "My boy, my boy, such a sum, in such a bank—why, it's unheard of. Rix only carries a few hundreds at a time—the cow-punchers put their paltry little savings with him. And——"

"That's the kind of a fellow I want," said Ireton. "The sort of a man that wouldn't trim the cow-punchers with their little accounts of ten and twenty dollars. As for his being small, he's growing. But you're shrinking. Five years ago you were bigger than you are now. And five years from to-day, you'll be shrinking still smaller. And one of these days John J. Rix is going to run you out of the banking business, because he knows how to risk his money on men, and not on acres of ground!"

As he strode through the door, he had a feeling that Van Zandt was curling into a corner, very badly sagged; and that there was something like a cheerful smile sparkling behind the eyes of the clerks. Very plainly, they had heard some one speak aloud the things which they had been thinking for many years.

Across the street and into the bank of John J. Rix went Ireton. There were two clerks and Rix himself. That was the entire staff. And a burly cow-puncher was telling John Rix how he chased a fine band of wild horses across country but could not get their leader—a matchless pacer.

"Is that band still together, Jerry?"

"Yes."

"You're broke, now, and you want me to fix you up for another run?"

"That's what I'd like."

"Well, this time I'll fix you, but you play to take the wild mares as you run the leader. We'll hope for the leader. But at any rate, we'll make money on the mares."

"Will you do that, Rix?"

"I will!"

"Man, but you are a square shooter!"

"No, it's just business, to me. Have a talk with Mitchell, there, and get it fixed up in detail with him. Hello, Mr. Ireton."

"Hello, John Rix. Can I open an account?"

Not a shadow crossed the stern face of Rix.

"I'm glad to have you. Gladder to have you than I am to have your money. And I don't suppose that there is much money?"

"Well, not a lot."

"I want you, just the same. You'll make money for the bank, and though my resources aren't very big, as you know, I'm going to scrape together what you need."

"You don't know——"

"I do know. You want cash to turn back into that land."

"Hold on, Rix. How would you lend it?"

"Six and a half per cent will do for this bank."

Ireton laughed aloud, so great was his joy. This was indeed a man.

"Sit down and tell me what I can expect from you. Then I'll go away and think it over. And to-morrow I'll make my deposit."

Hours later he left Rix. Burning visions had unrolled before their eyes. He knew that he had at last found a man thewed and sinewed like himself. What could stop them, now?

In the dusk he rode out from town, and heard a hail from the side of the road.

"Hello, Henry Ireton! What are these wonderful things that we hear about you?"

Aye, that was Corbett Lawes.

"It's late, Henry. You better plan on having supper with us as you go on out. Wait a minute—I'll telephone to the wife to have things ready for you!"

And he ran back from his buckboard into the store which he had been leaving.

Ireton stared down the road, smiling faintly. It was not Lawes that he was seeing with his mind's eye. It was Rosaline as she had stood before him earlier in that day. She had not failed him. Rix had not failed. And what

did fires and follies matter when one could find, in a single day, one real woman, and one real man?

CHAPTER IX.

A FINANCIAL SURGEON.

IT was long before this hour, of course, that Oliver Christy climbed the stairs to the office of the money lender.

He was received in the usual fashion of Sackstein.

That is to say, after he had knocked at the door at the head of the steps, a sharp, bitter voice called: "Who's there?"

"Oliver Christy," he answered.

There was a moment of pause, and then followed several soft clicks, which he knew were caused by the moving of the well-oiled bolts.

Then the door opened, and before him there was an open doorway. He heard a voice saying: "Come in, Mr. Christy!"

He strode into a little, dingy room.

On the opposite side of it stood Sackstein, a tall, stooping man. He was so broken by age, or by sickness, that his bent attitude gave one continually an impression that he was lost in contemplation.

But he was never lost. His keen wits were perpetually working, as Oliver Christy well knew. More than once desperate fellows had gained access to this chamber and had attempted to shoot down the old man while pretending to talk business matters over with him. But not one had succeeded. And the reason lay on the table before Sackstein in the form of two heavy revolvers, not of the latest model, but of an undoubted accuracy and ready condition.

You might say that these were the only friends and protectors that Sackstein had in the world. But there could hardly have been any man who wished for less protection and friendship than he. Twice a week a woman came to the rooms and cleaned them thoroughly under the keen eye of the master of the place, and it was said that his entire stock of information concerning the outside world was gained from these visits. An adroit questioner can learn much from even the humblest source.

But it was certain that nothing could induce Sackstein to leave his chambers. There he remained and watched the world from afar—and never missed a significant detail which might affect his own affairs. Up and down through the mountains men ventured on expeditions in which thousands of his money were committed to the hazard. And still he remained behind in the dingy little rooms, and let fortune take care of her own.

Now he said to Oliver Christy: "I first have to ask every man to close that door."

Oliver closed the door.

"And then to sit here."

Oliver took the chair, but since it was facing rather sharply toward the brightness of the window, he strove to hitch it back into the shadow, but found that it was fastened to the floor.

He had to remain where he was, partly blinded by the light, and awkwardly uncomfortable before the keen glance of the money lender. No doubt that was a contrivance on the part of Sackstein that had been carefully thought out before.

"Now," said Sackstein, "what brings you here?"

"Money," said Oliver Christy. "I've come for money, of course."

He could not help speaking rather sharply—it was such a foolish question. As though anything under heaven except money could have dragged him to such a house as this!

"You've come for money," said Sackstein. "Well, well, well! And yet I suppose that you have a good deal from your father every year?"

"We are not speaking of that," said

Oliver. "The point is that I wish to have money from you. Six thousand dollars."

"That is the point, of course," said Sackstein, "but at the same time, one wishes to know. There are ways of throwing money away. Money is my lifeblood. You ask me for six thousand drops of it. And then you are angry when I ask you why you should need that blood—you who have so much of it! For your father is a rich man! Quite a rich man!"

"Yes, a little more than 'quite' I presume," said Oliver, more irritated than before. "I suppose that he's about the richest man in the county."

"In the county? Ah, no, no!" said Sackstein. "By no means as rich as all that."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite."

"That he's not the very richest man in the county?"

"Quite."

Oliver slumped indignantly back in his chair.

"I'd like to know who is, then," said he.

"I wouldn't tell you that," said Sackstein impolitely. "But I would name a few who are richer. There's Samuel H. Chandler. He's richer."

"That old scamp?"

"He has just above a million dollars."

"What? My father is worth five or six times that amount!"

"Your father, young man, is worth a shade over six hundred thousand dollars. That is to say, he's worth that much if some of his present investments turn out fairly well. It's a mistake for elderly men to invest too much. Men who are past a certain age, and who are invalids!"

Beads of cold moisture stood out on the forehead of Oliver, and his eyes thrust almost from his head. This was a dreadful shock to him.

"You've no way of knowing," he gasped.

"I have, though. I never make mistakes about such things. Money is just hard, dirty stuff, to you. To me, it is the air I breathe, the food I eat, the drink I taste. So I know all about the money affairs of our neighborhood."

"And if you did," said the boy, "you wouldn't tell what you know to me! Not unless you had some distinct purpose——"

"I tell you," said the other gravely, "because your father has not more than ten days to live!"

"Ten days!" said Oliver standing transfixed beside his chair. "Ten days! But the doctor said——"

"The doctor is a kind man. He lied a little. More than a little."

"But why should he lie?"

"You will see, after a while. But now tell me—knowing that your father is to die within ten days, do you still wish to get money from me?"

Somehow, one could not doubt the exactness of the information which this man claimed to have. He spoke with a resolute certainty. There was a ring of iron knowledge in his tones. He could not be wrong.

But before ten days passed, long before, he would have to reckon with the first of the notes of the beggar. Yes, the entire lot might be presented at the bank, and then what would happen?

One glance at them would ruin him with his father—cut him out from the old man's will. There were only ten days to wait. No matter if the size of the estate were so vastly reduced from his great expectations. Still, there was over half a million, and that would take a good deal of spending!

What was six thousand, then, to him, who would inherit so much in a day or so?

"Yes, yes," he said aloud. "I need the money. I'll have to take six thousand dollars at once."

"Six thousand dollars is a great deal of money," said the other.

"Come, come! I happen to know that you've just given thirty thousand dollars to that pauper, that burned-out rat of a fellow—Henry Ireton!"

Sackstein whistled.

"So, so, so!" said he. "You don't like poor Henry Ireton?"

"I? I never think about him. It's not a matter of likes."

"Well, he is a great young man," said Sackstein. "But to provide for him, I had to strip myself. It left me very little, and very soon I expect great demands."

"I know that this is the sort of nonsense that most money lenders talk."

"You have heard others, I suppose?" said Sackstein.

"Well? Will you talk sense to me?"

"I try to talk sense. I try to tell you that a while ago money was cheap, but now there is a premium on it!"

"So! You mean to say that a few minutes ago, you were willing to give to Ireton. But now you see a chance of trimming a customer, and so you want to hold me up!"

"Tush, tush! You talk very violently, young man!"

"Well, be brief. Tell me what I must sign. I want six thousand at once."

"I prepare the paper—at once."

He took a blank note from the table drawer and scratched out the words of the statement in a hand that accomplished much with little trouble.

"There it is," said he.

Mr. Oliver Christy found himself staring down in bewildered lack of understanding.

"Man," said he, "do you realize that for six thousand dollars in hand, you demand twenty-five thousand dollars in three months?"

"That is what I have written down," said Sackstein, and he met the enraged stare of Christy with an unfaltering eye.

"Twenty-five thousand damnations!" cried Oliver leaping to his feet. "Do you mean that——"

"Hush!" said the other. "Hush. I hate loud talk."

There was so much iron of determination and contempt commingled in his voice that Christy suddenly saw in amazement that Sackstein meant exactly what he demanded. Four hundred per cent for a three months' loan! It was a usury too dreadful to believe.

"Only tell me," said Oliver, trembling with fury, "what has made you ask such outrageous terms?"

"Because I thought I could get them, and I still think so," said Sackstein. "You have to pay me for the insolence with which you entered this office, the scorn with which you stared at my poor room, the disgust with which you eyed me—and above all, you have to pay for your self-certainty, and for your knowledge of how I treated the burned rat—as you called Ireton. You have to pay for those things. But then, you can afford to. What are a few thousands to a rich-blooded fellow like you, with half a million in hand? Besides, the need is very great—the need is very great. And I am a financial surgeon. I am only called in in rare emergencies. And then I am at liberty to charge a round fee to a rich patient."

He added the last words with a sneer, and looked so coldly in the face of Oliver Christy that the latter winced.

"Give me the money," said he, "but if there were any other place where I could get it, I wouldn't be here, Sackstein. Perhaps some day I shall be able to take revenge on you!"

CHAPTER X.

BEGGAR'S PHILOSOPHY.

FROM the office of Sackstein, Oliver Christy came forth in a grim humor. However, since he had paid such an enormous price, he might as well turn

his money to the best advantage. And that was to find Elky and pay off the blackmail as soon as possible.

Some one was always sure to know where the old fellow could be met. Now it seemed that he was last observed on the road out of town, wandering toward the old dead town of Sandy Gulch. In that direction, accordingly, rode Oliver Christy, and at a brisk pace.

He was a full three miles from the town when a stumble of his mare brought her down on her knees and sent Christy flying over her head.

But he fell without breaking a bone, and springing up again, he ran back to her and found her well enough. She had not even skinned her knees, and the cause of the trouble was, apparently, that her off fore shoe had wedged neatly between two rocks.

For, when he examined that hoof, he found that the outside of the shoe had snapped squarely off for almost an inch from the point. He mounted and went on again more slowly, thanking Heaven that his neck had not been broken in the fall.

His spirits rose, after a time. There had been enough discouraging events, within the last few days, but in the sea of troubles there was one spark of encouragement, and that was that his father had not ten days to live!

How the old money lender could know, was certainly beyond the comprehension of Oliver, but it did not enter his mind for a moment to doubt the prescience of Sackstein. Such a man as he simply could not afford to make mistakes.

And, a moment later, sighting the wavering form of the cripple before him, he called out in a tone of positive cheerfulness. Tom Elky turned and regarded the rider with some doubt in his mind. For he shifted both his canes into the left hand, and left the right hand free.

What that movement meant, Oliver Christy could not help understanding. He had seen the blunt-nosed weapon produced before. But he had no intention now of attacking the old fellow.

"Tell me, Tom," said he as he came up, "what is the reason a man can forgive another man after he's been wronged by him? Because I feel that I could almost forgive you, Tom."

"Mostly it's that way," said the beggar. "I'll tell you why. The people we hate are the ones that we have wronged. We hate them because we know that they have a right to hate us. They've seen the devil in us, and therefore we loathe them. But if a man harms you, on the other hand, you're apt to respect him. You may be hot against him, but at the same time, you cannot help feeling his strength. You'd be glad of his friendship."

"You're a philosopher," said Oliver smiling in spite of himself. "You're a philosopher as well as a beggar and blackmailer. Is that it?"

Tom Elky merely smiled.

"You've got some sort of a message for me, I suppose," said he.

"I've come to make you a proposal."

"Well, sir, I'll listen to it."

"You have notes of mine for six thousand dollars."

"And I'm a sad man that I had to ask for them."

"I know how sorry you are. But tell me—will you do a stroke of business for yourself and sell me those notes at a price?"

"What sort of a price, sir? Suppose that I turned those notes in at the bank? They'd be pretty sure to honor them."

"Not a penny of them! I haven't an account big enough to feed a sparrow."

"Well, well," murmured Tom Elky. "But your father—but what do you propose, sir? And where is that first five hundred that you promised to me?"

"This is the day that I promised it to you. But in the meantime, I could show you something better. I'll compromise

with you. For three thousand dollars cash, give me those notes."

"What? Fifty per cent of the whole thing?"

The cripple laughed excitedly.

"Why not? Three thousand dollars is a fortune."

"Not half so big a fortune as six thousand, sir. No, not for three thousand."

"Well, I'll strain myself and make it thirty-five hundred."

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said Tom Elky, "and that's this: I'll take five thousand dollars cash from you on the spot. And then I'll give you the notes."

"Five thousand!" shouted the youth. "Five thousand dollars?"

"Yes."

"Not a penny more than four thousand."

"You're not talking to me, then, Mr. Christy."

"Hold on, Elky. I can barely manage forty-five hundred. How is that?"

"Why, sir, I'll make it a gentleman's agreement at that figure, if you can't afford to live up to the terms of your contract with me. Have you got the money?"

"Have you got the notes?"

"Here, sir."

"Let me see them."

"I'd rather see your money, Mr. Christy."

"You old, doubting scoundrel! Here it is, then!"

"Thank you, sir. I'm very glad of that. Thank you very kindly, sir."

He took the money and passed over the notes, and young Christy touched a match to them and watched them burn.

Afterward, he regarded the old man with a snarling look of dislike.

"That money has cost me something," said he, "and I may as well tell you, Tom, that I had the other fifteen hundred here ready to pay you for the notes, if I'd had to. I'm fifteen hundred in on the deal."

"Maybe the forty-five hundred will last me out my time," said Tom Elky with perfect good nature. "I'm not a man to mind a sharp bargain, because I've had to drive some on my own account in the past—as you may remember, sir."

"I remember," said Christy. "I was a fool that night. But I'll never be such a fool again. And it may very well be, Elky, that one of these days you'll run out of coin and remember the old story and come trying for blackmail once more. I warn you now that you'll be risking your wretched head if you do."

"I know that, sir. No, I've played my hand for what it was worth, I suppose. And now I'll have to rest content. And, after all, you'll have to agree that forty-five hundred dollars for the observations of just one night—that's not so very bad, sir?"

"You old devil!"

"No hard names, sir. By the way, I think your horse has a broken shoe, by the marks."

"Never mind that," said Christy. "And see that you remember what I told you about blackmail. You caught me the first night and troubled me a little when I was nervous. But that will never happen again."

"All right, all right," said Elky. "I've forgotten all about the Ireton fire. And I suppose that the rest of the people will, too, before long. They say that he's got big backing, and that he's going to be able to open up in grander style than ever. They say that in the very first year he'll be able to strike out wider than before."

"Do you believe that, Elky?"

"Why, a man could believe anything about a fine young fellow like Ireton. He's proved what there is in him."

"Bah! I'm sick of the talk about him. Suppose that he slips once more. Could he get backing for a third time?"

"If he slipped once more?" Tom

Elky, repeating the words, shuddered a little and shook his head.

"What's the matter?" asked Christy.

"Why, if Ireton slipped once more and lost everything the way that he did in the fire—if that happened, why, he would never do another lick of work."

"He'd sit down and mourn, eh? Break the heart of the puppy, would it?"

"Break his heart? No, it would start him breaking the hearts of others. If Henry Ireton is ever put down again—why, the gent that puts him down had better have the wings of a bird, because unless Ireton is killed, he'll run amuck. I know his nature. If he's checked again, the world will pay for it!"

"You think he would go bad?"

"Let me tell you something," said the cripple. "When his supply of chuck was low, he used to kill squirrels. And you know what he used to kill them with?"

"Well?"

"With an old Colt."

"I've heard that yarn."

"You don't believe it?"

"Not a word."

Tom Elky shuddered with a sort of uncanny pleasure, and then he murmured: "I didn't want to believe, either. But then I saw with my own eyes. Just the heads, Mr. Christy. Just chipping off their heads. A bullet apiece, very neat, and never anything wasted! He says to me: 'If only I had a smaller gun, I could save money. Ammunition for a revolver is too expensive to waste on squirrels, Elky!' That was what he said to me. I remember the day well. And him with three days' whiskers on his face, standing behind his forge and whanging a big bar of iron with his hammer. He has a grand right arm. He could make a fortune in the prize ring, if he missed out farming. But no—let him fail once more, and he'll take a short cut to fortune with a gun in his hand!"

"You're fairly sure of that, it seems to me."

"Oh, I'm fairly sure, well enough!"

"Perhaps he'll have a chance, one of these days. Good-by, Tom."

"Good-by, sir. And remember what I said."

"What's that?"

"We hate the men we've wronged, not those that have wronged us."

Oliver Christy turned in the saddle and regarded the grinning old man for a thoughtful moment. Then he rode on.

He was beginning to turn a new series of thoughts through his mind, and they were not unpleasant thoughts. So little unpleasant that, in riding, he could not help whistling a little again.

And he took the way toward the house of Lawes, for the day was wearing late, and in that house there was always a welcome waiting for him.

CHAPTER XI.

STAGED BY THE DEVIL.

THAT the devil had taken charge of the life of young Oliver Christy will be more than apparent before we have proceeded much further in the course of this history. For all that Oliver accomplished can hardly be placed against him too directly. There were other affairs to be taken into consideration. And, perhaps, he was too sorely tempted to resist.

For, as he jogged his horse through the shadow of the trees before the house of Mr. Lawes, he did not have to enter the place in order to see what was happening.

A big lamp cast a broad glow over the porch of the house, and on that porch sat Mr. and Mrs. Lawes, and their daughter Rosaline, and with them was none other than big Henry Ireton.

The center of the group was indubitably Henry. He talked, with few gestures, but with an earnest rumbling in his voice that rolled out to the road-

way and hummed like the sound of hornets in the distempered ears of Oliver Christy. For Mr. and Mrs. Lawes to hang upon the words of that young man seemed bad enough, but worst of all was Rosaline Lawes in person—a shameless and abandoned baggage!

For she leaned a round arm on the back of Henry's chair, and peered over his shoulder, now and then, at the design which he was sketching on a piece of paper that he held. Not many glances for his sketch. Most of the time her head was raised toward her parents, as though she already knew exactly what Ireton was saying, and all his plans.

And Oliver Christy sat his horse in the dusk of the trees which shadowed the road and cursed the sight, and cursed the girl; and above all, he cursed the man who was the central figure of that scene. The girl, perhaps, could be said merely to err. But Henry Ireton was a manifest villain. In what the villainy of Ireton consisted, Oliver Christy did not pause to seek. The fact was that his heart was so tormented by overwhelming jealousy that there was a mist before his eyes. He knew that he hated Ireton. He knew that he wanted to rub out the farmer as a boy rubs out a word on a blackboard.

Let no trace be left.

But, on the other hand, it would be no easy trick to rub out Henry Ireton. There was enough blood and bone in him to make annihilation a difficult job.

So great was the ache in the heart of Oliver Christy, that for a moment he thought of snatching out a Colt and trying a bullet for the head of Ireton, and it was no sudden compunction of conscience that stopped him. Rather, it was a knowledge that all his muscles were twitching and his body shaken so from head to foot that no gun could be fired accurately from his hand at that moment.

So he remained staring hungrily. And the beauty of the girl fascinated him because of the very indistinctness on account of the distance. She was not herself, but was all that he had ever hoped or dreamed she might be. She was not Rosaline Lawes. She was simply "beauty of woman." Then she laughed, and the sound made him almost cry aloud.

He turned the head of his horse and rode carefully away, praying that his presence so near by should never be detected. And, as he swung into the long, twisting lane that started toward the house of his father a scant mile from that spot, the devil who was so apparently managing this affair from beginning to end plunged him into a brand-new adventure.

There was a clatter of hoofs behind him, and three riders swept up.

"Hello, stranger. Is this here the way to the Christy house?" called the foremost.

"Yes, and I'm Oliver Christy."

"If that's your name, shove up your hands. I want to talk to you." And he added slowly: "And I dunno that you'll need your hands for your answers. You being an educated man, you don't need gestures!"

"Good!" said Oliver Christy nodding at them. "I see you fellows know your business. What do you want of me?"

He lifted his hands above his head without any sensation of nervousness or of great anger. Rather, this affair was a soothing thing to him. Compared with the vast irritation of his heart, this holdup was as nothing whatever.

"You've got six thousand dollars with you," said the spokesman, while the other pair circled rapidly behind Oliver. "You've got six thousand. Now let us know where you carry your wallet and when we have the coin, we'll turn you loose and ask you no questions."

Oliver Christy merely laughed.

"You won't tell us?" This came in a more threatening tone.

"Three quarters of that six thousand is gone already."

"What are you kidding us about that for? Where could you have spent that money this side of town?"

"Well, there's my wallet in my inside coat pocket—no, on the other side. You count what's in that wallet. Then tell me if I lied to you."

The wallet was snatched out, and the leader growled: "Keep a gun on this bird. He ain't as mild as he talks. I know him!"

He was counting the money which he had found, and cursing between the hundreds.

"It's an outrage," said he. "There ain't more than enough to wet the throat of the three of us, boys, because he's told the truth."

"Unless there's some more money hiding about him."

"He ain't that kind of a crook," replied the leader. "No, there's no danger that he's got more stuff around him. Fifteen hundred! And we expected enough to get us to——"

He was checked by a warning word from one of the others.

"What do we do with the big boy now?" asked one.

"Aye, what do we do with him!"

"There's the roar of the creek, not far off."

The blood of Oliver Christy stopped in full current, for the moment, but then he saw the leader shake his head violently.

"Killing before, that ain't so bad. It's got to be done, sometimes. But killing afterward—why, that's murder. And I won't be no murderer. No, sir, I'm gunna keep my hands white!"

"I wish," said another, "that we could send to the devil the bird that gave us this bum tip."

"It ain't so bad," said the leader. "We've got something to travel on, now. And we'll need it. But I wish that we could take a crack at something really big—that's my wish, friend! Christy, if we turn you loose will you not try to trail us?"

"Boys," said Christy, "there are three pretty good men, here. And it's a shame that so much nerve has to be wasted."

The leader chuckled softly.

"You ain't grieving one half so much as me and the rest," said he, "and if you know of any little jobs around this part of the world that we could fit our hands to——"

"Not so big, at that," said Oliver, his idea growing fiercely in him.

"How small?"

"Well, there's only one man."

"One? That's neat! How much of a man?"

"He's got an old, rusty Colt. That's the only sign of a gun on his place."

"Aye," said the leader, "this sounds sweet. I take it that there's some gent that you ain't very fond of, Christy?"

"Yes, that's about it."

"What's his name?"

"Never mind his name. You're new to this country?"

"Yes, I'm new to it."

"All of you?"

"Every last one of us."

"Suppose that I take you to thirty thousand dollars in hard cash, my boy!"

"Thirty—ten thousand apiece? Why, old son, that would be about man-sized, for us!"

"Hold on," put in a member of the crew, "we don't hold out on a partner, do we?"

"I was talking like a swine," said the leader. "No. We don't hold out. Why you should need money, Heaven knows, your old man being as rich as they say he is. But you're due for your quarter of the loot if you put us onto it!"

"I don't want the money," said Oliver.

"That's what they all say—mostly—till they see the coin. And then they change their tune."

"But where's the lay?"

"The first lane, there, on the right, and then straight onto a main road, where you turn right as far as a broken-backed barn on the left side of the road——"

"Big boy, showing is better than telling. That's what the teacher used to say when I was a kid. Who is the gent you're sending us after?"

"Never mind his name. You want money, don't you? Or do you want the dope to write a newspaper article about it?"

So the leader silenced his too officious follower.

"Mr. Christy, we'd take it mighty kind if you would show us the way," he went on.

All of this time, Oliver Christy was meditating profoundly. The devil had placed these tools at his service. And he would be worse than a fool if he failed to use them.

"Follow me, then," he said.

"Wait a minute, old-timer. You get back this wallet and what was in it, first."

"Thank you."

"And if this deal works, we'll call you the whitest man that we ever met up with."

A white man!

Even Christy had to shudder a little as he listened. But presently he touched his horse with the spurs and set off at a round pace. The three followed, and with a dust cloud whirling up behind them and turning the lower horizon stars dim, they galloped down the lane which he had first pointed out, turned onto the broad main road, and sped on through the night until they saw before them the broken-backed barn.

Now they were close, and Oliver drew rein.

"You go on into the field beyond this one," he commenced, "and wait till——"

"Hold on, big boy. That's too thin. We go over there alone, and while we wait you round up some other friends —no, we don't doubt you none, but still we ain't fools. You see our reason?"

"I see your reason," said Oliver, "and I'll go with you and see the whole thing through. Why not?"

CHAPTER XII.

THREE AGAINST ONE.

THERE are some who say that to conceive is really the same as to plan, and to plan is, vitally, the same as to act. But the advocates of such an idea should have stepped into the heart of Oliver Christy for a moment as he strode across the fields with two of his new companions.

As for the fourth man, he had been left with the horses, because it was always well, in such affairs, to have the means of retreat well secured. And surely three of them striking by surprise should be enough to master a single man.

For this reason, as the fourth and youngest member of the party remained behind, the three of them went across the fields. The horses were concealed in the shadows of a dry slough. That left them means of retreat near at hand, and at the same time invisible.

And the big body of Oliver Christy fairly trembled with delight as the time for action approached. All the other matters of his life seemed nothing whatever. And yet it seemed to him rather strange that he who had sent that field up in smoke—partly by accident—should now be lying in wait in the blackened stubble of his own making and striving to destroy the owner of the field in a new way.

He said: "I'll tell you this. The man that we're waiting for is not such a giant. Not any larger than I am, as a matter of fact. But he's a regular Hercules. Naturally strong, and he's made himself stronger all his days by hard

work. Besides that, he's a very good shot."

"What might you mean by that?" asked one of the three. "Will you tell me what you might mean? Some gents can shoot pretty straight at a target—rifle or revolver. Some are only good with a rifle. Some can hit a target but not game. And I've known lots of bang-up hunters that was no good at all when it came to a flurry with other men. What sort of a shot is this here friend of yours that we're laying for?"

"I only know this," said Christy, "that when he was low in funds, he used to get his fodder by shooting off the heads of squirrels."

"Hello! That's pretty rare! But I've managed it myself, now and then, with a good rifle that I had. Not often, but I got them now and then, the tricky little devils!"

"With a rifle, yes," said Christy. "But this fellow was using a revolver."

"What?"

"An old-fashioned revolver that most men couldn't work with at all!"

This statement was followed by silence for a moment, after which the leader said:

"You know that this here yarn is the facts?"

"I know it," said Christy. "I never saw him do it. But I've heard him say what he did, and he isn't the kind of a fellow who would lie."

"Look here," said the leader of the crew, "you have been mentioning a gent that has thirty thousand dollars, and that lives here in that tent in the midst of this burned-down house and sheds and haystacks, and all that. Tell me—does he own the land?"

"What's that to you?"

"Questions don't do any harm, but what I was chiefly thinking was that you've been telling us about a gent that was a hard worker—strong, and steady with a gun—and what's wrong with him, I would like to know? Because I never have hankered to get on the wrong side of a decent gent!"

"You never have?"

"No."

"Then get out of here," said Christy savagely. "I'll take on this job by myself, because I think that I could use thirty thousand dollars."

He added after an instant: "Don't start whispering with yourselves, and don't try dirty work, my friends. I have a pair of guns with me, as I don't mind telling you. And I know how to use them, and use them fast. Now put that in your pipe and smoke it. You stay here and work with me and stop asking your asinine questions, or else you cut loose from here and leave me alone. I don't care which."

This stern statement reduced the others to a moment's silence, after which the leader said calmly:

"You're a rough bird, I see. Well, I don't mind roughness when I'm making a fair share of money out of it. I don't take lip, but I don't think that you mean this for lip. It's just your way of expressing yourself, I suppose. But look here, amigo. You get away with this, just now, but don't try that line of talk again. The bigger they are the harder they fall, is my motto!"

This, in turn, brought no rejoinder from Oliver Christy. He was, in fact, a little ashamed of his outbreak, and, yet in the speaking, never had words been sweeter on the tongue than these! All the violence in them did not offend, but rather delighted him, and as he spoke them, he had thrilled and filled with a grim determination to be at least as bad as his threat.

"Hush!" said the third man. "Do be steady! There's some one coming!"

Down the road passed the beating of hoofs, and then through the gate into the field came a single rider, who dismounted at the little tent. They watched his outline as he tethered his horse.

"Now!" said Oliver Christy.

For a savage wave of emotion had risen in him, and he wanted to close on his victim that instant.

"Wait!" cautioned the chief. "Wait, man! There'll be a better time, in a moment!"

But he strove in vain to hold Oliver Christy down. They had tied handkerchiefs over their faces; and now, as they rose, the three white spots were visible for some distance.

Yet that was no advantage to Henry Ireton, for the moment. He had turned his back, in the act of carrying his saddle toward the tent, and the first he knew of danger was the hard-jabbed muzzle of Christy's revolver poked into the small of his back, while the hoarse, shaken voice of Christy bade him put up his hands.

Up went his arms, mechanically—and then jerked almost down again as he remembered the vast prize in cash which he was carrying—and his hope for victory in his labors, as well!

"Don't do that again, bo," cautioned the leader. "Go soft and easy, kid. Otherwise, I'll blow you to bits. We're playing this game for something more'n pin money!"

"Very good," said Ireton. "I understand. You've beaten me. It's in the belt."

He spoke so quietly that one might have thought his heart was not breaking.

Christy ripped the belt away from his victim, and opened it. It was fairly jammed, in the money compartment, with bills of large denominations. And a faint cry broke from each of the three.

For that instant, their interest in the plunder they had received was greater than their interest in the man from whom they had taken it. Their guns still pointed in his direction, but their attention had wavered, and in that instant, Henry Ireton struck.

He had not been afraid from the first —not afraid for himself, but for his money. It was more than life to him. Now, as he saw his ghost of a chance, he used the weight of his fists with glorious effect. The left hand smote the assistant to the chief on the side of the head and staggered him terribly, though he blazed away with his revolver and punched a series of bullets at the sky. His right hand, falling with more effect, nearly dropped the leader. And then he leaped for Oliver Christy, who held the money belt. He leaped blindly —and got the barrel of a Colt slammed squarely between his eyes. The gun exploded at the same moment, and Oliver Christy, standing fairly over his victim, fired straight down at his head.

"You've killed him!" said the leader of the crew, creeping nearer.

"What call had he to cross me?" asked Oliver Christy. "He's taken no more than he deserves! I've no regrets. Is he surely dead?"

"I don't feel any heart action. No —and there's blood here between the eyes! You've shot him through the brain!"

"Dead men keep tight lips," said Christy with a grunt of satisfaction. "Now let's clear out of here. The noise of these guns may bring some one. But first—have we left any sign behind us?"

"Such as what?"

"Such as they could trace us by?"

"Old son, you been reading books."

"Yes, if you want to put it that way."

"You go home and stop worrying. You're fixed. They'll never find us!"

"You haven't dropped anything? And there are no finger prints on the body?"

"No, I guess not. Come over here. Strike a light, Shorty. Hey, here's Sammy come with the horses—like a good kid. He's never off the job. Sammy, come here. Shorty'll strike a light, while the rest of us split up the boodle on the spot. That's the most satisfactory way, eh?"

"A lot the most," said Shorty obediently making the light.

"Now let's have the stuff, big boy," said the leader.

"One moment," said Oliver Christy. "Who suggested and planned this affair? Who brought you here and then who was it that pushed the deal through, after Ireton had knocked the pair of you down?"

"I wasn't down!"

"You were done for, though, shooting in the air like a drunk."

"Big boy, wait a minute. How much would you claim?"

"Not claim, but take. I'll take just half of this stuff. That leaves five thousand apiece for the rest of you."

"Ye gods, man," said Shorty, "are you gunna throw your life away?"

"You won't let me have it, then?"

"Are we crazy?"

"Boys, hold on!" gasped Sammy. "He ain't dead!"

"Who? Ireton?"

"Yes. There—he's moving—he's gone!"

"Who?"

"Ireton!"

For the big shadow of the supposedly dead man had jumped from the ground and lunged for the tent.

Three guns blazed instantly after him. But Christy was already sprinting for dear life. He knew that there was apt to be a rifle in that tent, and he did not care to be standing in shooting distance if a rifle opened on them in the hands of Ireton. So, catching his horse by the bridle, he threw himself into the saddle and shot away across the field.

CHAPTER XIII.

HONOR AMONG THIEVES.

ALTHOUGH Oliver Christy fled fast and first, he was not such a vast distance in front. The other three were not a fraction of a second in following an example so quick and intelligent. They flung themselves headlong at their horses, but they paid the penalty of an instant of delay. Such penalties are constantly paid, the world over, but in no place so often, or at such a terrible price, as in the Western States.

Lying prone, now, in front of that huddle of a tent, regardless of the crimson which was spreading over his face, Henry Ireton cuddled the butt of his rifle against his shoulder and took aim. He had only starlight for his shooting; otherwise, not even Oliver Christy, head start though he had, would have escaped.

The rifle spoke, and the horse of the leader pitched high in the air and fell down with a human scream of pain. The outlaw himself had landed on his feet, like a cat, still running in the direction of freedom.

The rifle spoke again and Sammy threw wide his arms and pitched headlong for the ground.

A third time Ireton fired. But, after that, the riders drove into a thick veil of darkness. For some moments there remained vague shapes before the eyes of Ireton, but he knew that he was shooting by guess rather than by aim.

In the meantime, the leader had reached the body of Sammy where it lay crumpled on the ground, and, great as was his fear of the deadly marksman in the dark behind him, he was true to his instinct of leadership and crouched beside the fallen man.

"Sammy! Sammy!" he gasped. "Are you gone?"

"I'm done," groaned Sammy. "That hound is a cat. He can see in the dark. So long! Give Sally——"

So he died.

The leader remembered freckled Sally. Give her what? The golden watch, perhaps, which was Sammy's most priceless possession. He wrenched it away, and starting to his feet, still bending low, he raced away again.

Fortune favored him for the good

heart he had shown. The horse of Sammy had slowed to a dogtrot. That fine gelding he caught, and in another instant he was off on the traces of the fugitives, where their vague outlines were rapidly melting into the night before him.

Fast and furiously he rode. Three times fences rose before him, and three times he recklessly put his mount at them, and cleared them flying. That brought him up with the other two, for the great weight of Christy in the saddle had brought him back to his companions in mischief.

And, as they came into a road beyond the long fields, a white hand went up through the eastern trees, and a pale moon showed them to one another.

"Sammy dropped!" said Shorty.

The leader answered gravely: "Poor Sam is dead. God rest him. He was a bunkie."

That was the epitaph of Sammy, but Shorty added, with a sigh: "It comes high, big money does. Always. And now do we get the coin?"

"You get your half," said big Oliver Christy.

A twitch of a hand, and Christy found the revolver in the hand of the leader pointed toward him.

"Christy," said the outlaw, "I've been trying to treat you like a man. But I see that there ain't any use. Gimme that belt!"

The hand of Christy had dropped into his coat pocket.

"I have you covered from my pocket, man," said he.

"How do I know you have a gun there?" sneered the other.

"You take your chance on it, then, and see what happens."

"Christy," said the outlaw, "they're apt to come swarming around us at any moment, now. There's no doubt that if Ireton was able to shoot that way, he wasn't dead, he was only stunned. He wasn't even badly wounded. And such a man as him will be a hard one to put off the trail."

"You told me he was dead," said Christy bitterly, "and if I hadn't been sure of that, I would have stopped and finished the hound. But I trusted to your word. Confound him! He'll make trouble for me until one of us is dead. Tell me one thing before we make the split: How did you find out that I had six thousand dollars?"

"Let that rest."

"Sackstein told you," said Christy, "because nobody else could have known! Sackstein told you, and he would work in company with you to rob me of the money that I had from him! Isn't that a fact?"

"Who is Sackstein?" asked the leader.

A stinging retort almost burst from the lips of Christy, but he controlled himself.

"Here's the belt," he said suddenly. "Count out the stuff, you. There's ten thousand apiece for us!"

He flung the belt, as he spoke, to Shorty, and the latter greedily opened the money compartment.

"Nobody would accuse you of being in this game for the fun of it," said the leader, as Shorty counted out the money. "But the fact is that I pay the dead men and the living as well. There's no shares lost by going West. Not with my men!"

"You mean that you'll pay Sammy a share, too?" said Christy.

"I mean just that."

"So that you and Shorty can split it up between you as soon as you're out of my sight?"

"Do you think so? You don't know my reputation, if you say that, my friend. Sammy has an old aunt that raised him. She could use seventy-five hundred a lot better than any of the rest of us. And she's going to get it."

"I've got your word for that," sneered Oliver Christy.

"It's good enough authority for you,"

replied the leader hotly. "Let it go at that, because you won't get any better chance. Now that I've got the drop on you, I've a mind to croak you—you've been so keen to beat the rest of us out of our shares!"

"Try it," said Oliver Christy. "I invite you to step out and try it, old son. You and me could have a fine party, on the strength of that. You and me and Shorty. I don't ask for trouble, but just one of you start to fade away with that money!"

After this, a moment of pause followed, the horses stamping and tossing their heads impatiently, and the steam going up from them through the moonlight.

"All right," said the leader at last. "Have you made the split, Shorty?"

"Yes."

"Then count out a share to Christy."

It was done, the bills being shuffled rapidly into the ready palm of Mr. Christy.

He received seven thousand five hundred dollars, exactly.

"Now," said the leader, "the time has come for us to quit each other, and I got to say that I'm glad to go. I like to be in strong with my partners, I don't mind saying, but I never before seen a man that I could leave so easy as I can this one here. I'm through with you, Christy. I hope that I never have to lay eyes on you again. For all of the murdering, cold-hearted swine that I ever met, you're the meanest and the worst. Shorty, let's get out of his sight!"

They reined their horses back, whirled them around, and galloped rapidly away.

They left Oliver Christy thoughtful and somewhat downhearted behind them. For he had not yet grown entirely calloused. There was still some room for kindness in him, and still some quality of gentleness and the desire for the respect of his fellow men. He did not care so much for love. But he wished to be respected. Respected for strength and valor.

But even these criminals despised and hated him. And that cut him rather deeply.

However, he could not remain foolishly there in the road, waiting to be taken. So he turned the head of his horse and cantered briskly away toward the house of his father.

It was not very late when he arrived in view of the light that shone continually from the lower windows of the front hall. But what amazed him was the glitter behind the windows of his father's bedroom, just above. The elder Christy was in the habit of retiring early, and had been ever since his fatal illness commenced. But here it was nearly eleven, and there were all of these lights!

He pushed his horse rapidly ahead, swung down, and strode up the steps. The pale, drawn face of the servant at the front door told him everything.

Up the stairs with a bound, and into the room where there was a hushing of whispers. Figures drew back against the wall. And he stood above the white, dead face of his father and wondered at the softness of the dead man's smile, which had been so pinched and stern with pain during the last years of his life.

Then he went downstairs again and poured out a drink.

He needed to be alone and to meditate and to add up, as it were, his account of the events which had happened on this day. He knew that he had in his pocket nine thousand dollars. He knew that he had paid off a blackmail debt of forty-five hundred, and the total left him in debt to Sackstein for twenty-five thousand dollars. Thirteen thousand five hundred to show against a deficit of twenty-five thousand dollars, and this in spite of the fact that he had used guns and trickery, and the advantage of

number, and secret information secured as an eavesdropper. That, too, in spite of the fact that the stain of one man's lifeblood was already upon the money which he held.

It began to appear to young Christy that, after all, it might be just as well to avoid sin hereafter. It hardly paid. It was distinctly a losing account.

He finished his drink and extended himself more comfortably in his chair.

After all, he had finally spiked the guns of Henry Ireton. He had stamped that man out of his way.

Rosaline would become Mrs. Christy. The face of life would smile for Oliver.

And yet he could not be sure. He could not be *quite* sure. What was overwhelmingly important was that he had failed to kill Ireton.

The devil had certainly been in that piece of hard luck!

CHAPTER XIV.

SLUMBERING GIANT.

THERE is no giant so large that he may not be stunned by a blow which is heavy enough. And Henry Ireton was stunned. He knew that he had slaved for many years. He knew that he had conquered, and then chance had wiped out his victory in a cloud of fire.

It had not entirely destroyed him, however. No. for he learned that his work had won him the confidence of men and women, and when he started on the upgrade, the first person to meet him with kindness had been Rosaline Lawes. She had given him heart to try his fortune further. The adventure with the money lender had been in the nature of a miracle. And then there was the dealing with Rix.

And then, at the very moment when he was reëstablished, the money had been snapped up out of his hands. He had been left empty-handed.

Not quite empty-handed. Yonder in the field lay a dead horse. And near it there was a dead man.

He went out and looked at them with vague, regardless eyes, and then he turned sadly back to the tent. No, not so much in sadness as in a daze.

There in the tent he sat with fallen head.

The news traveled rapidly up and down the countryside, for when was there a time when the story of tragedy did not leap like lightning?

The sheriff came—big, urbane—a man gentle in speech as he was terrible in action. He touched the shoulder of Henry Ireton.

"Ireton, I'm sorry," said he. "Tell me what's happened?"

Ireton pointed to the field where the dead man lay, and bowed his head.

"But the way it happened—I want to know that. And how many of them were there?"

Ireton's head rolled loosely back on his shoulders.

"I dunno," said he.

The sheriff looked down for a moment into that blank, stricken face, and then he, too, retired.

"Leave that man alone," said he. "Wait for a doctor, will you? Leave him alone until a doctor has a chance to get at him."

A doctor was brought. He found a passive patient. And the doctor came out from the tent even graver of face than the sheriff had been.

"I'll tell you what," said he. "If the poor devil had another house standing here, filled with live stock, I'd advocate putting it on fire at once."

"What do you mean by that?" asked the sheriff.

"I mean that he's in very bad shape. He's fallen into an apathy that may mean any number of things. But for my part, I think that it means a broken heart."

"Broken nonsense," said the sheriff. "That fellow is tough as iron."

"I've had to do with these iron men before," declared the doctor. "These mountains are filled with 'em. They do very well under certain conditions. But usually they're best for work that needs edged tools. Now Ireton is that sort. Give him a mountain to move, and he'll try to move it. But give him a mystery, and he's up in the air."

"I don't follow that drift," said the sheriff, gnawing the end of a sandy mustache.

"Listen," explained the man of science. "When this chap received for an inheritance a property mouse-eaten with debts, and worn out by stupid management, it was a concrete objective for him—and he started marching straight toward his goal. It took him five years. But he beat the game. The whole county knows what punishment he took in turning the trick. It was a grand thing—a miracle, I'd say. Then came the fire. Well, that was chance. A bad blow. A sickening blow that would have stopped most men dead in their tracks. But in seven days this fellow Ireton had started the machinery of credit working and was back on his feet—more strongly fixed than ever. But just on the heels of that reëstablishment comes a second attack that wipes him out. He's robbed. And mark what happens, not to his pocketbook, but to his mind. He doesn't mind the money loss. At least he could recover from that. But what destroys his morale is that this blow comes—one on the heels of the other—through no fault of his own. It unnerves him. It's a mystery. Why should bad luck pick him out like this and kick him twice? He can't understand, and being baffled, he's entirely at sea. His will fails him. He doesn't try to hold up his head. And inside of two or three weeks—we'll bury that iron man, sheriff."

"Hello! Hello! You haven't been drinking, old man?"

"Not a drop. Except on Saturday nights. Not a drop. When he dies it'll be a cold, perhaps, that'll turn into pneumonia. Or it'll be from a consumption that will develop and run at a gallop through him. Because, man, he's going to be so weakened by his grief and his bewilderment that the first disease that comes along will kill him as surely and as easily as a bullet planted between his eyes."

"I guess I sort of understand," said the sheriff slowly. "I had an uncle, once—by the way, how bad Ireton's face is, eh? Somebody must have fired a gun right into his eyes. He is burned and blackened with the powder burns!"

"And yet they missed him!" said the other. "Well, and they battered him with some heavy club. I tried to dress the wound between his eyes and clean his face, but he brushed me away. You've no idea of the power in that man's arm, sheriff!"

"I have, though," said the sheriff, smiling grimly. "I remember when young MacMahon ran amuck one day. He'd come down from the lumber camp, filled himself with liquor, and started out to paint the town red. I heard of it and started to get him, but I was ten miles off when the message got to me. When I arrived, I was just in time to see the finish. MacMahon had ridden down the street, a gun in each hand, shooting at the lights on each side, in the houses. And halfway through the town he met Henry Ireton driving a farm wagon. He shoved his guns into the holsters and roped Ireton with his lariat. Before the noose was pulled tight, Ireton stood up—I saw this—and jumped for MacMahon like a tiger cat. He reached the horse of the lumberjack. He pulled MacMahon out of the saddle, and they had it out hand to hand. MacMahon stood half a foot higher than a tall man. He was a giant. But Ireton folded him in his arms and smashed his ribs like chalk.

You could hear the bones snapping in the poor devil's body. MacMahon was a fighting devil. But I heard him scream with the pain of it. He crumpled in the dust, and Ireton left him lying face down, and got on his wagon and drove off. No, there's no man in this county that would take chances with that fellow with bare hands. And now you tell me that Hercules is going to die of a broken heart?"

"Yes—or go crazy. He has to be brought out of the stupor that he's in at present. Has he any very close friends?"

"No, but there's a girl."

"Good! Get her!"

They got Rosaline Lawes. Mr. Lawes was by all means against her coming.

"There's been a friendship between her and big Ireton," he told the sheriff. "But you can't expect a girl to throw herself away on a pauper and——"

Rosaline cut in sharply with:

"Friendship? I was engaged to marry him. And I'm still engaged! And I'm going to him as straight as I can."

"Rosaline!" said her father sternly.

"I'll be on a horse in two minutes," she said to the sheriff. "Will you go with me?"

"Honey," said the sheriff, "I never done nothing more willingly."

In another moment or two they were on the road, and the sheriff explained as well as he could what the doctor had said.

He cautioned: "You'll find him looking awful. They bashed him in the face before he ran them off."

"What do I care how his face looks?" cried the girl. "I know what his heart is, and that's what counts with me! But don't you know who did it?"

"No, we can't even identify the dead man."

"Ah, if he'd only killed them all!"

And so they swept up to the place. There was a score of people wandering around the field, now, and looking at the spot where the dead man had been found, and at the dead horse, whose body had not yet been removed. The sheriff and the girl went past these and to the tent where big Ireton still sat in his stupor.

Near by, old Tom Elky, the beggar, took off his hat and stretched out his hand to them.

"You scoundrel!" snarled the sheriff at him. "I've a mind to take you to jail for this. Turning the misery of an honest working man like Ireton into capital for your own lazy hide!"

"I've been a working man in my day, sheriff," whined Tom Elky.

"You have? Tell me one good thing you ever accomplished in your whole worthless life?"

And they pushed past the beggar to the tent.

There the sheriff waited outside. He merely had a glimpse of the girl falling on her knees at the feet of Henry Ireton and then he turned his back sharply; but still her broken, choked voice came out to him.

He shook his head and breathed hard and moved farther off.

"Women," he said huskily. "Well, God bless 'em!"

"Aye, aye, sir," said the piping voice of Tom Elky.

The sheriff started and looked askance at his unsought companion.

"Bah!" said he. "Get off this land!"

And he moved a little farther on.

A minute more, and Rosaline Lawes came out, weeping, terribly shaken.

She ran to the sheriff.

"Do something! Do something!" she said. "I think he's lost his mind. He just sits there. He didn't seem to know me. And when I began to sob, he took my face between his hands and called me little girl, and told me not to cry, and to go home to my mother—he didn't even know me!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE BEGGAR TAKES A HAND.

IF she couldn't turn the trick, no woman could," said the doctor to the sheriff. "Now what can we try?"

"There's John J. Rix getting out of that buggy, just now. Try Rix. He's the banker for Ireton now, they say."

They met Rix at the fence. And on the way to the tent, he listened to the doctor with an intent frown. Then he looked up with a smile and a nod.

"I know," said he. "He thinks that he's ruined. I've seen men smashed like that before by money loss. Wait till I have five minutes with him. I'll bring him back to life!"

Both the sheriff and the doctor were near enough to overhear most of what John J. Rix said to Henry Ireton on that day in the tent, and their report of it did much to bring to Rix the business and the confidence of the entire county later on.

They heard the banker say:

"Ireton, you've had two doses of bad luck. That's your share for the rest of your life. But don't think that I'm through with you. I trust you still for a money-maker, old fellow. Keep your head up. I can't finance you to the tune of thirty thousand dollars. But I can do enough to build barns and sheds for you, live stock and tools can be bought with my money, and I'll keep you going with seed and every other necessity. We'll make a campaign of this together, Ireton. Are you agreed? Do you hear me, man? We'll, I'll say it over again and——"

And over again he said it. But there was not a ghost of a response from the big farmer. The doctor and the sheriff moved to the road with Rix who was much moved by what he had seen.

"If what you had to say, Rix, couldn't move him," said the doctor, "then nothing could move him. We've tried a man, and we've tried a woman. They've used the two best arguments in the world—money and love. And he's still not touched. What can we do?"

"Go deeper still," said the banker, clenching his fist. "The man in him is dead, I tell you. There's only the brute left. He looked straight through me the way a lion looks through you when you stand in front of the bars of the cage in the lion house. I never had such a chill go down my spine. I tell you, sheriff, that fellow is breaking his heart because he doesn't know how to get at the fellows who robbed him!"

"That may be," said the sheriff. "But some one of you suggest something, will you?"

Nothing could be suggested. And it was the final opinion of the doctor that the big fellow should be left alone, undisturbed by a crowd, and allowed to rest, if he would, until the following morning. Then if life and activity had not come back to him, he should be removed at once, and cared for in some public institution if there were no friend to take him in. Certainly he was in too strange a situation to be left to roam at large.

So the crowd was driven from the fields of Henry Ireton. The last to go was the old cripple, Tom Elky, hobbling on his canes, and very loath to move, because he had reaped a rich harvest from the people who had come to the place that day.

"Put him in stir, sheriff!" called a strong, cheerful voice. "Because I don't think the old rascal deserves a penny of charity. Search his pockets, and I'll bet that you find money enough to keep him the rest of his days!"

Elky jerked his head around toward the speaker, and saw sitting on a fine horse, in a gray suit with a black, broad band around the upper arm, none other than young Oliver Christy.

"Who would I get lots of money from?" he croaked back. "From you,

Mr. Christy? And what would make *you* give money away? Not charity, I'm thinking!"

There was a subdued chuckle from the bystanders, and in the midst of it, Christy rode off in a rage, for he was not celebrated for his generosity.

"Mind you," called the sheriff as he rode away with the rest of the company, "mind you, Elky, you're to keep away from this place and leave poor Ireton in peace!"

"Aye, aye, sir!"

But to himself Tom Elky added: "Me that never done no good in my life, eh?"

He paused, leaning upon his canes, close to the fence, and with a grim frown, he thought back over his years of life. No good deeds? He would raise them to his memory one by one.

But the triumphant smile began to fade from the lips of ancient Tom. Year by year and decade by decade slipped in review past his mind's eye. And still the great good deed did not appear. There had been many and many a fine hope, and many and many a noble thought. But deeds are the current coin which passes in this world of ours. And what had Tom Elky done?

He looked up with a sudden gasp at the pale blue of the sky. He looked down and shook his head, and at that moment he saw something printed on the ground that made his brows pucker.

Only the print of a horsehoof, but it was enough to make Tom Elky gasp, and then glance sharply over either shoulder.

He looked again, and, turning about, he retraced his way across the field, studying a trail, until he came to the side of the tent, where all the trail disappeared in a blur of recent sign.

Then he drew himself nearer on his sticks and looked through the open flap of the tent into the blank face of the man within.

"Good day, sir!" said Tom Elky.

There was not a shadow of understanding on the face of Ireton.

"Good day, sir!" said Tom Elky again. And he added: "I was thinking that I might be able to do something for you, sir. Something in the way of getting your money back for you."

"Aye," said Henry Ireton. "I thank you kindly. Good-by, I thank you. I want to be alone!"

"I mean," cried Tom Elky in a sudden passion, "that I want to take you where you'll get the heart's blood of him that robbed you last night!"

As by a miracle, the body of the strong man was filled with life. He rose. He strode forth, and his hand fell on the shoulder of little Tom Elky. The cripple cringed helplessly away.

"You old snake," said Ireton, "you were lying here in the field, watching, and you saw it all, and recognized 'em in spite of their masks. Aye, and you've kept the knowledge, until you knew that they were safely away!"

"I wasn't here! I wasn't here!" said Tom Elky. "But I tell you this: Oliver Christy was in this field last night or this morning. He wasn't here this morning, because I seen him come and go again. And there you are!"

"Wait, wait!" cried Ireton. "Christy's a rich man. And what have I ever done to harm him, tell me?"

"You fool!" snarled Tom Elky, "What's right or wrong to a skunk such as Oliver Christy? And as for a cause —aren't you engaged to the girl that he wants to marry? Isn't that enough for him?"

"Rosaline? Rosaline?" whispered Ireton. "I think she was here this morning."

"Crying at your feet. Yes, she was here."

"Never mind her!" said Ireton coldly. "I want to know something more about this same fellow Christy. I want your

proof that he was here last night. Because if he was—if he was——"

"I seen the mark of the shoe of his horse."

"How can you tell a horse by its shoe?"

"Because his horse yesterday was shod with one broken shoe, and this field has prints of a broken horseshoe in it."

"Ha!" murmured Ireton. "I think you know what you're talking about! Do you? Do you, Tom Elky?"

"I know! Go prove it with me! Come—look out yonder at the sign of a——"

"I don't want any proof. I want Christy! It's he that I want! I'm going now."

"Where?"

"To find him."

"Not now in broad day."

"Aye, in broad day!"

"And what'll you do?"

"I'm going to kill him. I'm going to take him in my hands and kill him, Tom Elky. Stop holding to me, or I'll throw you down!"

"You won't, Ireton! You won't! Listen to me! I only wanted to stir you up and do you good. If there is a murder done, the sin of it'll be on the head of Tom Elky."

"Keep your hand off me!"

"Ireton, dear Henry Ireton, kind lad, listen to me! They've got all the other things against me in heaven. I've been a sneak and a coward and an idler and a traitor. But there's no red mark against me. There's no blood, Henry. Don't you put it against me now!"

But Henry Ireton jerked himself rudely away, and Tom Elky fell upon the ground.

He gathered himself up and brushed the dirt and the soot of the black stubble from his face.

"God forgive Tom Elky!" he said. "God—don't count it against me!"

Then he saw the figure of Ireton striding away, and scrambling to his feet he started to stagger after it, screaming.

But that was quite vain. He saw Ireton reach the fence and vault across it into the road. And then he was out of sight around the next bend.

There was nothing to be done, and the terrible silence of the naked countryside settled around the heart of Tom.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN LAWES' DINING ROOM.

THAT day was one of the great ones, if not the greatest, in the life of Oliver Christy.

He had begun in the early morning by discharging on the spot with no extra pay for long service, all of the old retainers who were distasteful to him—and nearly every one who had ever borne a tale to his father about him was an enemy, in the eyes of Oliver.

Then he had given directions to the undertaker to proceed with the arrangements for the burial, and he had ridden over himself to arrange at the church for the most magnificent funeral that the town had ever witnessed. By doing such credit to the dead man, he felt that he was very directly doing credit to himself.

When this was done, he had gone here and there, always with a very grave face, collecting little speeches of sympathy, and scoffing at them in his heart. For he felt that any son must rejoice to come into the fortune of a rich father; and he believed that these speeches of condolence were the rankest sort of hypocrisy.

That was one of the main charges which Oliver leveled against the world—hypocrisy. He felt that he saw through it, and for his own part, believed that all human actions may be well enough motivated by sheer expediency.

So he came around past the scene of

his last night's exploit, and he could not avoid stealing close enough to see Henry Ireton within the tent.

It gave him an immense thrill of satisfaction. And then, just as he was riding off, he learned that Rosaline Lawes had come to Ireton that day and attempted to rouse him.

It caused a sudden and violent reaction in the heart of young Oliver Christy, and straightway he was flying down the road toward the house of Mr. Lawes. It would be seen what effect the inheritance of a great estate had upon Mr. and Mrs. Lawes, even if a young girl had been so rattle-brained as to lose all sense of proportion!

It was nearing dusk when he reached the house of Lawes, and he was received by Mrs. Lawes at once and with great unction.

She was a practical woman, was Mrs. Lawes, and Oliver had recognized that element in her nature long before.

He went straight to the point.

"I want Rosaline. I can give her the sort of a home that she should have. Tell me, Mrs. Lawes, will you back me up with her and with your husband?"

"You'll need precious little backing-up with my husband," said Mrs. Lawes. "He's got an eye in his head, I hope, and can at least tell white from black, poor man. And as for Rosaline, she'll come around in time. Just give her a day or two. Let me tell you something, Oliver Christy. All young girls are a little crazy. I know that I was. And when Rosaline had a chance to throw herself away on a bankrupt farmer, it appealed to her romantic self. She wanted to do it terribly bad. You wouldn't believe! However, when she comes to understand that poor Henry Ireton is really quite simple-minded, now——"

"He was never much better at any time, really," said Oliver coldly.

"Maybe not! Maybe not!" said Mrs. Lawes hastily. "However, he's all broken now."

"I saw him sitting like a great calf," said Oliver. "His spirit is broken."

"Well, Rosaline is in bed. She's cried herself into a fever. But she'll come round. There's common sense in her. Now, dear Oliver, you stay here and wait till my husband comes. Well, isn't that his step on the porch now?"

Oliver stayed. He stayed till dinner time, and the talk was all that he could have wished it to be. There was no question of opposition. All should be as he wished. Only, they must go slowly and softly, for Rosaline was a stubborn girl, with the fierceness of a tigress, when she felt that she was in the right!

The telephone began to clamor. But Oliver Christy knew that nothing could come to that house by way of news so important as the things that he had to say to this pair.

"Take the thing off the hook and let it hang," he suggested. "I hate a telephone. I never knew any one to hear anything of importance over the wire, did you?"

So, when Mr. Lawes could not at once understand the message, he followed that clever suggestion and left the receiver hanging off the hook.

"Couldn't get the name," said Mr. Lawes. "Anyway, they weren't asking for my name. That's all I was sure of. They must have the wrong number. Listen to it buzz, still, like a hornet!"

They finished their coffee. But no sooner was the telephone placed on the hook than it sent a thrilling clangor through the house once more.

"I'll answer it myself," said Oliver curtly, and he snatched it off the hook.

"Hello!"

A hoarse voice shouted dimly back to him: "I want Mr. Lawes' house. I want Mr. Lawes' house. Is this the right place?"

"Yes," said Oliver, and he added to his hosts: "Some drunkard on the wire, it seems. I can hardly hear his voice."

"If this is the Lawes house, then is Mr. Christy there?" called the other speaker on the telephone.

"I'm Oliver Christy."

"Thank God!"

"What's wrong?"

"I thought you were a dead man before this. I been trying to get you. Something wrong with the phone. I sent off fast riders. But I thought that he would beat them——"

"Peters! Is that you?"

"Yes, sir."

"What nonsense are you talking?"

"No nonsense, I'm afraid. He means deadly murder, sir."

"Murder?"

"Yes."

"Who—what under heaven—who are you talking about?"

"Henry Ireton. He came here with blood on his face. A dreadful sight. He asked for you. When he couldn't get you here, he said that you were probably at Mr. Lawes' house, and he took a horse from your stable and started off at a wild gallop without so much as a saddle blanket beneath him to——"

"Great heavens!" cried Oliver Christy.

He dropped the telephone receiver.

"Let the doors and the windows be closed, Mr. Lawes!" he cried. "Send for all your servants! Call in the men from the bunk house. Lose no time. Lose no time in heaven's name, or I'm a dead man! Henry Ireton is coming here to murder me!"

Mrs. Lawes started up with a scream. Lawes himself turned deadly pale, and his face grew flaccid.

"I'll—I'll send word—Ireton has waked up!" gasped Lawes. And he began to rise.

He had no time to complete the movement, for a heavy step crossed the porch, and the door to the dining room opened. They saw the lamplight flash far away on the green face of a tree in the garden. And then the shadowy bulk of Ireton entered the room—Ireton with the crusted blood still streaking his face; Ireton with his eyes on fire.

Oliver Christy leaped backward with such a shriek as could never come twice from the throat of any human being. He tugged and pulled a revolver from his clothes. He fired.

But Ireton leaped in. A second bullet seemed to be fired at him in vain from the shaking hand of Christy. Then Oliver Christy went down with a crash before the charge of the farmer.

Twice they rolled back and forth on the floor. Then Ireton rose to his feet.

In his hand he held Christy's gun gripped by the barrel. On the floor lay Christy, not dead, but senseless.

"Now let them come and hang me!" said Henry Ireton quietly.

They did not hang Henry Ireton.

In the first place, it was long before Oliver Christy recovered enough to appear in court against the other man. In the second place, when the sheriff sat down one day with the pale-faced, bandaged convalescent, something snapped in Oliver Christy. And the whole story of his misdeeds burst from his lips. He could not help talking. He confessed it himself. His nerves were gone from the moment when he first saw the dreadful figure of Henry Ireton stalking toward him through the door of the Lawes' dining room.

But there was no legal punishment for Christy. He was allowed to pay for his double crime as far as money could pay for it. But as for pressing a prison sentence, Henry Ireton relented.

Newly married men are too often foolishly forgiving of their foes.

Look in that Water!

By Adolph Bennauer

Author of "The Fifth Partner," etc.

WITH the level lands behind him, Sheriff Jessup realized that there was no longer anything to be gained by crowding his horse. The abruptly sloping foothills ahead would soon wear the game animal's strength down at such a pace. Wherefore he drew back a little on the reins and brought the pinto to a walk.

"It ain't losin' me anythin', anyway," he consoled himself. "I'm either all right or all wrong on this hunch an' it's too late to turn back now! But I don't see how I can be wrong, 'cause if I was in 'Colt' Morgan's shoes I'd certainly head for the Canadian border over the shortest trail I could find—even if that trail was mostly straight up and down!"

It was a robbery and a cold-blooded killing that had sent him forth upon this quest. The night before Colt Morgan, an ex-convict, had broken into the express office at Tamarack, shot down old Bart Payson, the watchman, and escaped with currency and dust, valued at ten thousand dollars. Morgan's identity had been established by Payson himself, who had lived long enough to tell his story. Jessup had immediately wired the news to the neighboring towns and called up all the ranchers who had telephones. Then he had saddled up and taken the outlaw's trail shortly after daybreak.

At the start the sheriff had been accompanied by two deputies, but, soon after leaving Tamarack, each man had struck out for himself. This was because there were three different routes by which Colt Morgan might reach the Canadian border; and, since the posse were unable to locate his sign anywhere about town, they were compelled

to cover all the routes. The fact that this would give the outlaw an even break against the man who overtook him did not bother them in the least. Each one of the three was as game a fighter as the West could produce, and, in addition, each knew that, should he be the one to bring Colt Morgan back, the thousand dollars reward that had been offered for his capture would go to him alone.

"Yep, I'm plumb sure he took this trail now," Jessup broke out suddenly as his keen gray eyes swept the ground beside him. "He got off into some sand there, an' his tracks show up as plain as day! An' from the looks of 'em, they ain't over four hours old! You bet, we'll take it slow an' easy now, old-timer, 'cause it's goin' to be the hoss that keeps his wind the longest that wins this race!"

A glance at his watch told him that it was just eight o'clock. If he could continue to gain upon Colt Morgan as he had been doing he should be able to overtake him that night. Then, if luck and his gun hand did not fail him, he would be able to bring the outlaw back to Tamarack the next morning! Eagerly, almost expectantly, he lifted his eyes to the towering Cascades above him, as if, somewhere along those sheer slopes, he might catch a glimpse of the man he was after. But, even had he been able to distinguish such an ant-like object at that distance, the mighty forests of spruce and cedar would have hid it from his gaze. The only human touch visible in all that vast expanse was a tiny log cabin that lay about a mile ahead of him at the junction of the trail and Cinnamon Creek.

The sight of that cabin brought an added satisfaction to Martin Jessup, for he remembered that Lafe Wiggins, the owner, kept two excellent saddle horses. By replacing his own animal with a fresh mount he would be able to gain a distinct advantage over Colt Morgan. Besides, either Lafe Wiggins or his boy might be able to give him some information about the bandit. He had not been able to get in touch with them by telephone, for the homesteader was too poor to afford such a luxury, but, if Morgan had passed that way when they were up, they might have seen him.

It was ten minutes later that he arrived at the creek. Lafe Wiggins' cabin lay on the opposite bank, a few rods above the narrow, wooden bridge. But the sheriff did not cross over to the cabin. Instead, he stopped on the near side of the stream and gazed curiously at the bridge itself. Along the upper side of the piling a wire weir had been erected by the game warden, apparently to keep the fish confined in the upper reaches of the stream, and against this weir had drifted boxes, empty tins cans, newspapers and débris of every description. Stretched out, face downward, upon the bridge, busily engaged in poking among this débris, was a husky, red-headed youngster of fourteen.

"Hullo, 'Rusty,' called Jessup in some amusement. "What are you huntin' for?"

So preoccupied had Rusty Wiggins been that he had not heard the sheriff's approach. He sat up with a start, his round blue eyes almost popping from their sockets when he noted the visitor's identity. But boyish exuberance quickly overcame his awe and he returned the sheriff's grin.

"Whatever I can find, Mr. Jessup, an' I'm sure findin' things, too! Look here!" He reached behind him and brought forth a cantaloupe and two empty beer bottles. "That's what I found this mornin!' You'd be su'prised what a lot o' stuff is throwed into the creek by the tourists an' lumber campers! Two or three times a day I'll come down here an' find somethin'! Yesterday it was some oranges,

an' the day before that a pineapple an' some more beer bottles."

Remembering the time when he, himself, had been a boy, the sheriff nodded understandingly.

"Fine, Rusty! That cantaloupe is sure a dandy. Camp cooks is sure scandalous wasters, ain't they! But what are you goin' to do with them empty bottles? Yuh can't eat *them!*"

The blue eyes sparkled a bit.

"Naw, I can't eat 'em," said Rusty, "but I can sell 'em! The Emporium over to Tamarack gives me five cents a piece for 'em. The only trouble is that I don't git half o' what the campers throws away. Most of 'em fills up an' sinks before they reach here!"

Jessup expressed his sympathy.

"That ain't so good, is it, Rusty? But I'd say you was havin' pretty good pickin's just the same." His features sobered, and he nodded toward the cabin. "Your dad home to-day?"

The boy shook his head.

'He left for town about six o'clock this mornin'. Won't be back till noon."

"No matter," explained Jessup. "I wanted to borrow one of his hosses, but I reckon he won't have no objections to my takin' the animal in his absence. By the way, Rusty, you ain't seen a stranger go by here this mornin' ridin' a pinto hoss with three white stockin's; a middle-aged, heavy set feller with black eyes an' a hook nose?"

The boy was upon his feet on the instant, his face flushing resentfully.

"That guy? I sure have, Mr. Jessup! He come along here 'bout two hours ago—just after dad left for town! Said he wanted to buy some grub, but when he found I was alone he changed his mind about payin' for it an' helped hisself to everything we had! When he left he follered the trail straight up to the pass. Whatcha after him for, Mr. Jessup? Is he a bandit?"

Despite the story of Rusty's mistreatment, the sheriff could not repress an exclamation of triumph. If Colt Morgan had passed through there only two hours before he was gaining upon him even more rapidly than he had thought. With a fresh horse he should be able to catch up with him that afternoon! Motioning Rusty to follow, he started across the creek toward Lafe Wiggins' corral where he could see the spare horse rolling some of the kinks out of himself. While he occupied himself changing his saddle to this animal he acquainted the boy with the particulars of Colt Morgan's double crime.

If he had expected to strike any fear into the heart of Rusty by such a recital, he was disappointed. The eager light that flamed in those youthful eyes betrayed the fact that Rusty had inherited from his father something more than his red hair.

"Gee!" he cried excitedly, "can I go along with you, Mr. Jessup? That roan can carry double easy, an' I got a rifle o' my own in the house that can knock over a grizzly! I sure would like to help ketch that bandit, not just for that thousand dollars, but because he was so darned——"

But the sheriff, already in the saddle, held up a restraining hand.

"Not this time, Rusty! I shore admires your spirit, an' I bet when you grow up you're goin' to be a real he-man, an' then some! But right now I figger you'd better stick around an' sort of keep an eye on the place. When I bring Colt Morgan back you can make him pay for that grub he stole with interest! Meanwhile here's a little somethin' for your trouble. Now I got to be movin'. So long!"

Flipping the boy a five-dollar gold piece, he touched the roan lightly with his heels and started up the winding trail toward Lookout Pass.

The sheriff had not covered a mile of that trail before he found cause to thank himself for changing his horse. Not only was the roan a fresher mount,

but he was particularly adapted to this mountain country. At its best the trail was steep and tortuous, but in many places it hugged the sheer wall of the mountain, a shelf scarcely more than a yard wide, so cluttered with débris that it seemed as if nothing but a goat could negotiate it. His own horse, while invaluable in a level country, where speed was the chief requisite, would have needed the spurs here, if he could have been induced to go forward at all. But the roan not only took that trail without urging, but seemed to know every dip and turn in it.

If Jessup had needed anything to complete his satisfaction, this splendid behavior of the roan's supplied it. With Colt Morgan off his mind until mid-afternoon, at least, he turned his thoughts upon himself. He would not partake of the cold lunch he had brought along to eat in the saddle, but would stop over at the Foley-Davis lumber camp, which lay a few miles up the pass, and enjoy a real meal. He felt the more justified in doing this because he had already notified the camp of Colt Morgan's flight by telephone, and they might have some word for him. There was even the possibility that they might have succeeded in capturing the outlaw, though he was not optimistic enough to encourage such a belief.

Engrossed in such thoughts as these, he paid but little attention to his surroundings. Consequently he was wholly unprepared when he found himself suddenly and rudely brought back to them. He had just turned a bend in the trail and come abreast of some cedars when he heard himself hailed sharply.

"Reach fer the clouds, Mr. Sheriff, an' reach fer 'em quick!"

It was through no will of his own that the sheriff acted. Instinct brought his hands upward and saved his life, for his first glance in the direction of that voice told him that any hesitation on his part would have been fatal. Not thirty feet to his right lay a huge granite boulder, upon the top of which rested the barrel of a Colt .45. And behind that gun, his black eyes gleaming, his lips leering hatefully, was the face of Colt Morgan, the bandit!

"Purty neat work, eh?" The bandit's satisfaction vented itself in a chuckle. "If you could see your face now, sheriff, you'd sell yourself fer thirty cents! But you won't be wuth even that much if you try any funny stuff! Drop down off that hoss an' come over here!"

Jessup did not need to see his face to know how much of a fool he looked. His flaming cheeks, alone, told him that. But he was not fool enough to tempt his fate further by arguing. With what grace he could muster he dismounted from the roan and marched over to the granite boulder, behind which he could now see the outlaw's own mount quietly grazing.

"It's what I'd call a real surprise party, Morgan," he conceded with a shrug. "But the reason ain't quite clear to me yet. With all that start you had an' your hoss lookin' as fit as ever, I don't savvy why——"

Colt Morgan interrupted him with an outburst of profanity.

"It was them cussed lumberjacks up there in the pass," he explained sourly. "You must have tipped 'em off about me by telephone, 'cause I darned near run into two of 'em that was scoutin' around with rifles! When I seen the pass was blocked like that I backtracked down here, intendin' to cut across to Cinnamon Creek an' git through the mountains that way. Then I spotted you comin' up the trail from Wiggins' cabin an' had another hunch. So I laid an' waited fer you."

The crafty light that gleamed in the outlaw's eyes interested the sheriff, but told him nothing.

"Well, you waited for me an' I come

along," he prompted. "If you was figgerin' on puttin' me out o' the way, why didn't you do it?"

"'Cause you wouldn't be no use to me daid," was the curt response, "but you c'n be a whole lot o' use to me alive! I ain't so sure that it'll be safe up there along the creek, 'cause there's gen'ly two or three timber cruisers workin' around that might have been tipped off about me by the home camp. If I run across 'em alone I'd have a hard fight on my hands, but with a real sheriff along fer comp'ny—why, I c'u'd laugh at 'em!"

As if to prove how easily that could be done, Colt Morgan broke into a raucous chuckle then and there.

"But how in the world do you expect *me* to help you?" demanded the now thoroughly mystified sheriff. "Surely, you don't figger that *I'll* do any fightin'."

The chuckle died in the bandit's throat, and his black eyes once more took on their baleful gleam.

"Naw," he retorted caustically, "you ain't goin' to do no fightin', 'cause there ain't goin' to be no need o' any! In case we meets up with anybody, I'm your prisoner—savvy? You've captured me up here in the mountains an' are takin' me over to Granite Ridge, the nearest railroad point, 'stead o' herdin' me, hossback, all the way down to Tamarack! An' we're goin' to look our parts, too, 'cause you'll have your guns on an' I'll be ridin' alongside you with my hands in my pockets. The only difference'll be, *your* guns'll be empty, but I'll be holdin' a gun inside o' my coat with all six chambers loaded. An' at the first false word or move you make I'll fill you so full o' lead your hoss won't be able to hold you!"

Martin Jessup was not a man who lost control of himself easily. His temper was the one thing which he had schooled himself to maintain under all conditions. But, as he looked into those malevolent black eyes and read the proof of that diabolical intention, something seemed to snap within him. His upheld arms came down, the hands knotted into fists.

"Why, you low-down coyote!" he gasped. "Do you think I'd be a party to any such dirty scheme as that? I got *some* sense o' pride an' honor! I'll see you to blazes before I'll——"

The interruption came from the muzzle of Colt Morgan's .45, the bullet ripping through Jessup's coat sleeve and grazing the flesh of his right forearm.

"That's jest a little reminder, sheriff," came the hard, flat voice of the bandit. "I'm takin' it you didn't figger I was in earnest at first an' I'm givin' you one more chance! Go along with me peaceable, like I said, an' I'll turn you loose soon as I'm past the head o' Cinnamon Creek. Refuse, an' I'll send another bullet through your heart!"

Strange how a touch of lead will cool the most violent passion! Jessup was not a coward. In the performance of his duty he had faced death many times. But on each of those occasions there had been a justification for facing it—he must get his man or his man would get him! Now there was no such justification; he had merely allowed his pride to get the better of his common sense. If, on the other hand, he were to accompany Colt Morgan and risk his life by divulging their true relations to the timber cruisers, that would be justification beyond question.

"All right, Morgan," he stated grimly. "I reckon you win some more! Only I ain't lettin' no man take my guns off o' me! I'll attend to that myself!"

Colt Morgan made no answer to this, but kept the sheriff covered as he unbuckled his belt and tossed the outfit over to him. It took the outlaw but a few moments to remove the cartridges

which he dumped into his capacious pockets. Then he tossed the useless articles back to the sheriff, thrust his own gun inside his coat and led his pinto horse down beside the roan, tying him to the latter's saddle with a twenty-foot lead of rope.

"I ain't takin' any chances on your givin' me the slip, sheriff," he explained with a grimace. "All set! Let's go!"

If ever Martin Jessup had tasted the bitterness of humiliation he tasted it then. A short hour before he had thrilled to the thought of riding with Colt Morgan at the end of his lariat. So far as external appearances went, he was realizing that ambition now. The only difference was the fact that in Colt Morgan's gun were six little leaden pellets which he did not have in his own. But what a vast difference those tiny bits of metal made! For lack of them he was servant to the man he had expected to master!

He noticed the decrease in speed now. This was partly due to the fact that the horses were traveling together, but mostly to the nature of the country itself. For they had no trail to follow in their short cut to Cinnamon Creek. Their way lay along the bottom of a winding ravine. This ravine was filled with water during the spring freshets, but now merely a labyrinth of boulders, some of these boulders lying so close together that the horses could hardly pass between them. Nevertheless, it was a definite trail, and, after following it for about an hour, they came out upon the west bank of the creek.

Here Colt Morgan called a halt while he sent searching glances up and down the stream. The creek ran straight in this locality, and one could see for a quarter of a mile in either direction. Nowhere along that vista could be discerned a single living presence; no sound broke the silence save the intermittent call of birds and the continuous tinkle of the running water. The outlaw gave a grunt of satisfaction and was about to motion Jessup to proceed when suddenly he paused, his glance directed at an object whose very nearness had thus far caused it to escape his observation.

"Hullo! What's this?" he demanded, his hand moving instinctively to the breast of his coat.

Against the wall of the bank stood a recently constructed shelter of boards and canvas, its open flap showing the interior to be furnished with a bunk, a table and a small sheet-iron stove. Halfway between this shack and the creek was a cradle, or rocker, such as is used by placer miners in washing out gold. A little farther up the bank lay a few weeks' accumulation of tin cans, empty bottles and table scraps.

"Belongs to Sam Logan, prospector," explained the sheriff shortly, for his thoughts were elsewhere.

A gleam of interest appeared in the bandit's eyes.

"Huh," he grunted. "Is he findin' any gold?"

Jessup did not hear him at first. He was wondering just how far up the creek those timber cruisers were. Five miles, perhaps, possibly more! In that case—Colt Morgan's voice, repeating his question, cut into his reflections sharply. He turned, equally impatiently, to answer that question with a single word, when abruptly he paused. Here was a man, evidently, who had not heard the story of Sam Logan! For some reason for which he could not account, but which may have been prompted by the gleam in those black eyes, Jessup decided not to tell that story. Instead he merely shrugged and nodded toward the rocker.

"Dig up a handful o' that sand an' see for yourself!"

Colt Morgan was not slow to comply. But he was cautious enough not to dismount from his horse. Keeping Jessup in front of him, he rode up to the

rocker, secured a handful of the fine sand and allowed it to trickle slowly through his fingers. The next instant he let out a gasp.

"Gold? Why, that sand's loaded with it? That feller, Logan, must be a millionaire! Where's he at now?"

The sheriff's heart was pounding, but his features were emotionless.

"He was in Tamarack yesterday," he explained truthfully, "gettin' some bad teeth fixed. Reckon he won't be able to get around much before the end o' the week."

An oath of satisfaction escaped the bandit.

"Fine! Couldn't suit me better! While he's visitin' his dentist I'll jist add a little to my collection! I ain't in no pertickler hurry, now that you're along, an' there ain't nobody likely to bother us till Sam Logan gits back, so we'll stick around for the rest o' the day an' do a little prospectin'! One o' them empty bottles over there'll do to put the dust in, an' if you work good an' hard you ought to be able to fill it by dark. Now, tumble down off that hoss an' git busy!"

The sheriff did not immediately obey that command. This was not due to any resentment at Colt Morgan's greed, but to an emotion infinitely greater. Up to then he had been unable to think of any way out of his predicament, feeling that he must abide by the inevitable. But the bandit's concluding words showed him a way like a flash. Born out of an inconsequential happening of that forenoon, it seemed such a simple way that for a moment it left him stunned. Dazedly, he glanced from the dump pile to the creek and back again. Noting his attitude and misconstruing it, the bandit's anger flared.

"You waitin' fer another reminder?" he snarled. "I'll sure give it to you if you are!"

He had no need to execute that threat, however. Jessup was off his horse on the instant and striding briskly in the direction of Sam Logan's dump pile. And the eyes that had known only despair a moment before were now gleaming brightly.

"I ain't needin' any more reminders, Morgan, thanks," he returned cheerily. With his back toward the bandit, he searched among the débris for a likely looking bottle. "I was just thinkin' how it's sometimes the little things in life that turns out to be the biggest, after all! When you stopped over at Lafe Wiggins' cabin this mornin' do you remember meetin' a husky, red-headed kid, about fourteen?"

The anger in the bandit's eyes changed to an expression of sullen surprise.

"That fresh kid? I sure do! What about him?"

Jessup did not reply at once. He seemed to have some trouble finding a bottle that suited him, examining and throwing away one after another. Presently, however, he selected one and returned with it to the rocker.

"Well," he stated frankly, "he was sure peeved at the way you made off with that grub without payin' for it, an' when he found out who you was, he wanted to come along an' get you hisself. An', do you know, Morgan"—the sheriff's eyes sparkled at his own audacity—"I got a hunch that's just what he's goin' to do! It's that red-headed kid that's goin' to send you to the gallows, an' nobody else!"

Had the subject of Martin Jessup's remarks been a full-grown man, that threat might have cost him his life. But the idea of any fourteen-year old boy sending him to the gallows was too incongruous for Colt Morgan to swallow. Evidently, he thought that the sheriff was trying to trick him into an argument that would throw him off his guard, and he greeted that attempt with the derision he felt that it deserved.

"All right, Mr. Sheriff," he leered "When he comes I'll be ready fer him! Meanwhile I'm givin' you jist ten seconds to git to work! An' you needn't figger on knockin' off till that bottle is full, either! Now snap into it!"

The sheriff snapped into it. Never in his life, perhaps, had he entered upon a task so willingly. His zeal was not lost upon Colt Morgan, who at first regarded it with suspicion and watched him closely. But, as the hours passed on and Jessup's enthusiasm showed no signs of abating, that mistrust departed. Possibly, he felt that Jessup was as much carried away by the sight of the treasure as himself. At any rate, he finally unbent to the extent of sheathing his gun and assisting the sheriff in the work. And in the excitement of that task he did not notice the occasional furtive glances that his captive sent up the little gulch behind them.

The long afternoon wore on. Having had nothing to eat since daybreak, Jessup grew weak with hunger. But he kept at his task, buoyed up by a hope that was greater than any physical strength. Not for anything in the world would he have confessed his fatigue and begged Colt Morgan to move on. As for that, there was little danger of the outlaw complying. As the contents of the bottle increased his greed seemed to increase with it. His only fear was that darkness would be upon them before the bottle was full. At sunset, when the yellow flakes were still two inches from the top, he let out an oath of impatience.

"Confound it, man! You're wastin' too much time packin' that stuff up here on a shovel! Gimme a hand an' we'll drag the rocker down to the creek!"

The sheriff was at the water's edge, in the act of scooping up a shovelful of moist sand. At Morgan's protest he desisted, but he made no attempt to comply with the other's request. Something he had glimpsed in the water had changed his attitude entirely. He dropped the shovel where he stood, and, tipping back his head, broke out into hysterical laughter.

For a moment the outlaw stared at him, anger struggling with astonishment.

"You crazy galoot!" he exclaimed, striding forward. "Are you laughin' at *me?*"

With an effort the sheriff controlled himself.

"Why shouldn't I be?" he retorted, his eyes dancing. "If you could get a look at your face when you try to sell that stuff I reckon you'd laugh, too! That ain't real dust you got in that bottle! It's nothin' but iron pyrites, fool's gold, they calls it, an' it ain't wu'th packin' home! If you don't believe me, take a look at the dust in your saddle bag an' notice the difference!"

Evidently, Colt Morgan had heard of iron pyrites, though he was unable to distinguish it. And the sincerity in Jessup's manner rendered it unnecessary for him to make the comparison. He stepped back a pace, his features purple with wrath.

"You knowed that all the time?" he roared.

"Sure. I knowed it," Jessup said. "Wasn't I in Tamarack when Sam Logan brought the stuff in to be assayed? When he found out it was only fool's gold he was so disgusted he never went back to his claim again! I could have told you that at the start, Morgan, but I was playin' for time an'——"

He was interrupted by the bandit with a savage oath.

"Well, you played one trick too many, Mr. Sheriff, an' you're the biggest fool o' the two fer admittin' it! I didn't intend to bump you off till we got to the head o' the creek, but just for that——"

"Wait a minute, Morgan!" The sheriff's voice arrested the hand that was reaching for the gun. "S'pose you take a look in that water before you draw! If you see what *I see*, mebbe you'll change your mind!"

Involuntarily the outlaw glanced into the stream. Mirrored upon that silvery surface was every detail of the bank that lay behind them. At the mouth of the dry gulch through which they had come sat two horsemen with rifles at their shoulders. One of those riders was a heavy-set man of middle age, the other a husky youngster of fourteen. And the setting sun gleamed brightly upon twin heads of fiery red hair!

"Stick 'em up, Mr. Bandit," came the shrill voice of Rusty Wiggins. "Git right up on your toes! That's it! Gee, you're a full-grown man when you're stretched out that a way, ain't you?"

For Colt Morgan had made no attempt to fight against such odds. His hands had gone up, even before he turned. Dumb amazement seemed his only emotion as the sheriff, with practical skill, stepped forward and relieved him of his weapon. Only when that act was completed, when he realized that he was now a helpless prisoner, did the reaction set in. Then his eyes gleamed with an impotent wrath.

"That ornery kid?" he snarled. "How in blazes did *he* git here?"

Jessup motioned the pair to come forward.

"Why, I sent for 'em," he returned triumphantly. "Didn't I tell you it was that kid that was goin' to send you to the gallows?"

The outlaw paid no heed to that thrust.

"You *sent* fer 'em?" he echoed, his anger changing to surprise. "Are you tryin' to kid me, sheriff?"

For answer, Jessup turned to the boy.

"I sent you three, Rusty," he stated. "Do you happen to have one of 'em with you now?"

With a grin the boy reached into his coat pocket and drew forth an empty beer bottle and a note which he passed over to the sheriff.

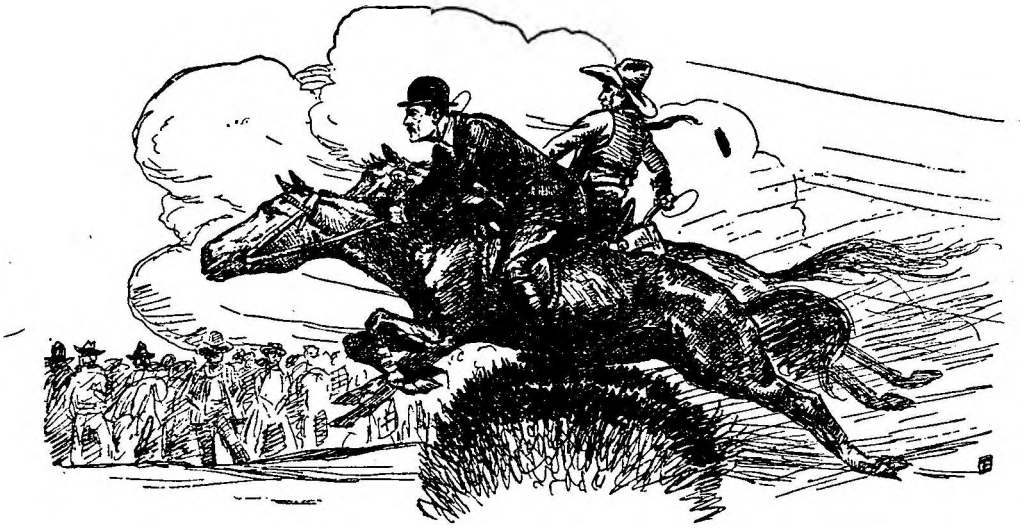
"I only picked up two, Mr. Jessup, an' I brought this one along to be sure we was follerin' directions!"

With the bottle in his hand the sheriff turned back to his prisoner.

"You remember me tellin' you this noon," he explained, "how it was sometimes the little things in life that turns out to be the biggest? When I come by Lafe Wiggins' cabin this mornin' I noticed Rusty leanin' over the bridge, pickin' up some empty bottles an' other things that had floated down against the weir. He said he done that two or three times a day. Well, that was one o' them little things! It didn't mean much to me then. But, when you suggested that we use one o' these empty bottles to put that fool's gold in, it showed me a way to turn the tables on you right pronto! When I was pokin' around that dump pile I throwed three corked-up bottles into the creek with a note in each of 'em!"

He held the note forward so that Colt Morgan might read the penciled words:

Trapped at Logan's claim. Come through gulch and be careful. JESSUP.



Smiling Charlie

By Max Brand

Author of "The Canyon Coward," etc.

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

COLONEL STOCKTON, virtual owner of the whole Sierra Blanca region, has a beautiful daughter, Olivia, with whom the Baron Wakeness is in love. The Colonel disapproves of the Baron, and chooses Billy Jacks, the raconteur of the story, to be one of his right-hand men and a member of his household, because Jacks' remarkable shooting shows up the Baron as a relatively poor marksman. Meantime, the whole region has been stirred by the presence of an elusive horse thief and philanderer, known as Smiling Charlie. All sorts of traps are laid for him—especially by the fathers of girls, who have fallen hopelessly in love with him on account of his remarkably handsome appearance. And now the Colonel has taken a hand in the matter, offering him immunity from punishment, if he will surrender himself.

CHAPTER VII.

LEARNING THE ROPES.

WHEN I took on with the main drag and got to be one of the Knights of Sierra Blanca, as somebody had called 'em, there were six of them altogether. There were Chet Murphy and Jeff Hudson, Hal Doolittle and Roger Bartholomew, Joe Laurens and Dick Wace. I put Dick Wace last because, of course, he was really first. Dick was so important that, when he fell out with the general boss and foreman of the whole valley, the foreman was fired and Dick was kept on. I mean to say that Dick was important. You could tell it by the look of him. But, for that matter, so were all the rest of them. There wasn't a man of the six, who mightn't be put at the head of ten thousand cattle to be driven to a distant market, and that man had everything left in his hands. He could hire and fire drivers. And he could make up his expense accounts and turn them in. And they were paid, and no real questions asked.

However, it wasn't all roses for the select circle of gents who worked for the Colonel. There was somebody who figured out that only one man in four

ever lived long enough to retire. Most generally they got bumped off by thugs while they were handling a big cash shipment, or when they were managing some round-up of cattle thieves, or when they were doing any one of a dozen hard jobs such as generally come along pretty frequent up in the Sierra Blanca. But, when one of them died, the Colonel always gave them a right nice funeral in the town. Then there was a big procession, and everybody went out to the burying grounds near the church. The Colonel himself was there, and made a fine speech and told what a great man the dead fellow was, because, after a man was dead, there was nothing too good for the Colonel to say about him.

Well, I been telling you these things, just so that you would understand why it was that a man got rather excited when the Colonel asked him to work for him and live at Stockton House. But just the same, though I have to tell you how set up I was. I never want you to lose sight of the fact that the main thing of interest all of this time is the case of Charlie Lamb. He's sort of dropped out of sight for a while. But that's because I don't know how to keep your eye on him.

However, I'm asking you to follow me for a while and see the way that I rode out to Stockton House, feeling that most of the world was using my name in vain behind me.

When I got out there I looked around and was shown to my quarters, which were up on the third floor, where a negro opened the door and says, "Good evening, Mr. Jacks, sir."

I settled down in a fine big room, about twenty by twenty, and looked out the windows south toward the rim of the mountains, where they were butting their heads against the sky. I felt pretty good and reached for cigarette makings, when along came the colored man and handed me a humidor filled with cigarettes. And then I reached for a match, but he had me beat and held a light. I stared at him.

"Have one yourself," says I.

"Thank you, sir," says he. "I can't smoke now."

I saw that I was out of order and got a little red.

"What's your name?" I asked.

"Vincent," says he.

"Vincent," says I, "you and I are going to get on fine."

"Thank you, sir," says he and sort of faded out into the general background. I sat there and took a new look at myself and saw that Bill Jacks had risen to be somebody in this world, and no mistake about it.

Finally I asked Vincent where I could find Dick Wace.

"I shall go hunt for Mr. Richard Wace, sir." says Vincent, and he disappeared.

Pretty soon he came back, just before I got delirious thinking about everything. And he said that Mr. Wace would be happy to see me in his rooms.

So I went down and was shown into a layout like mine, but a good deal better. And by the lay of the land I could see that I was important, but that there was no doubt about Wace's being a lot more important than me.

Dick met me at the door and shook hands.

"You know me, Wace?" I asked him.

"Not exactly," he said, "but I passed up Sugar Cañon one day just behind you, so I know something about you!"

Which was by way of a compliment —Sugar Cañon being the place where I once met up with three thugs. And modesty sure forbids my saying what happened when we met. Anyway, in a minute, I was having a drink and after that, I just busted out and said. "Wace, why am I here?"

"Because the Colonel needs you," was his answer.

"But he's never kept more than six fellows like us before," I reminded him.

"It may be," Wace remarked, "that he expects that there will be vacancies before long!"

I let that idea shiver down my spine and get assimilated.

"Between you and me," says I, "I understand that the rest of you are all boss cattlemen, or else you know farming, and you got other business qualities. But I got none."

Wace fiddled with his pipe for a minute and then he looked up quite suddenly.

"You shoot very straight, old fellow," says he.

"Hello!" I asked. "What are you driving at?"

"Jacks," says he, "I may be saying more than I should. Frankly, I don't know what he wants with you and, if I did, I'd let my tongue be cut out before I would tell you anything out of school. However, I don't mind guessing that the Colonel always has all sorts of business on his hands. So, if he hired you, he needed you. And, if he needed you, it was probably because of the greatest talent that you possess!"

That was certainly to the point, and it was true that I knew guns.

So, seeing that I would have to do my own guessing about the case, I broke in on another tack.

"Look here," says I, "they employ girls out here a good deal, don't they?"

"In the house? Yes! Servants and secretaries and what not."

"I dunno what they do," says I, "but I know a girl that wants to be here."

"How well do you know her?" he asked.

"Not half so well as I'd like to," says I. "And not half so well as I hope to."

"I understand," remarked Wace, who was extremely decent in every way. "I suppose that something can be done about it. Only, partner, you have to bear in mind one thing—the Colonel will do almost anything in the world for us. He doesn't care what we ask. But each of us has his limit. And, before you ask a favor, you want to decide for yourself that it's a thing that you really want a lot! You follow me?"

"I follow you," I said. "But I want the girl here if it can be arranged."

"Certainly," says he. "I'll see to it at once."

"And how can you do that?" I asked him.

He looked at me for a minute, sort of surprised.

"Of course," says he, "I'll simply speak to the housekeeper in your name."

CHAPTER VIII.

A NEW HENCHMAN.

WELL, I should like to tell of a lot of things that happened along about this time, and chiefly about the thing that tickled me most after I settled down in Stockton House—about how, when I was late for breakfast, it was brought to my room on a tray, and about how everything that I asked for was mine as soon as I asked. But there was nothing as important to me as the coming of Betty.

The very next day after I asked about her, which was the second day for me at the house, she was brought out in a buckboard and she was shown into the room of the housekeeper, who says to her, "Mr. Jacks has suggested that Stockton House employ you. And, since Mr. Jacks is a person of much consideration here, of course, it is my duty to find a place for you. You can enter the laundry department."

"I cannot," says Betty. "You've missed me entire, ma'am."

The housekeeper got red and stabbed her pen at the paper that was before her. Then she says:

"Ah-hem! Some other arrangement is, perhaps, possible. The care of the rooms——"

So Betty was let in on that job. And, there being so many rooms in Stockton

House, you can see that they had a whole flock of maids there.

She came up and tapped at my door and, when I opened it and asked her in, she made a bow to me and said that it wasn't for her to talk to her betters or enter their rooms, but that she had come to thank me. And then she told me about everything that had happened, and how the whole staff had to be nice to her because it was known that she was my friend.

"And are you the Colonel's uncle or something?" says she.

Well, I almost felt like it, I was so dizzy with the things that were taking place. But now I have got to get back to the things that were taking place about that Smiling Charlie Lamb.

I was given nothing at all to do about the place for three days, except to drift around and ride my bay gelding and such. And then the Colonel sent for me.

"I have word from Charles Lamb," says he. "And now I wish you to ride to Del Marte and meet him at once. You are to find him there some time after dark, at the hotel. And when you meet him you're to tell him that I have a position waiting for him, and that I shall arrange to have all of his crimes forgiven by the State."

That was all that the Colonel said. So I went out and first oiled up all of my guns—because I felt sure that I'd need them, perhaps—and then I saddled the bay, and away we went for Del Marte, off in the mountains.

I passed Olivia Stockton and the baron as I started off. They were out riding and they swung in beside me for a ways, and the baron was very keen to have me use a gat. And, when I pulled down on a rabbit that we scared up and knocked it over with the third shot that I fanned out of my gun, he was as pleased as a kid with his first pair of long pants.

Well, I said good-by to them and went along through the country, thinking about Betty most of the time and wondering what sort of a wedding the baron would have with Olivia. And so I went on, until night found me forty miles away, with the lights of Del Marte winking ahead of me on the hillside.

I rode right up to the hotel, put my horse up in the stable, and booked a room in the inn. Then I went out on the veranda and sat there for a while, digesting the dinner that I had enjoyed.

But there was no sign of Smiling Charlie.

I remembered then, what sort of a reputation he had, and what I knew about him. So I circulated around in back of the hotel and snooped until I got to the kitchen window, and there I looked through and saw Smiling Charlie as big as life. He was seated at the kitchen table, with about five girls all sailing around and getting things for him—one of them pouring coffee for him, one loading more ham and eggs onto his plate, another offering him something else on a platter, and another leaning on the back of his chair.

He was sure comfortable, and don't make no mistake.

I stepped through the back door with both guns ready.

The girls screamed and scattered like a flock of hens and Smiling Charlie turned around slow in his chair.

"Charlie," I said, "will you please put up your hands?"

He didn't ask any questions at all. He just put up his hands above his head. Then I went and jammed a gun into his stomach while the girls all screamed again and said that it was murder. I frisked Smiling Charlie for his guns, and got three besides a derringer, slung around his neck, from that lamb—to say nothing about a whacking big bowie knife, good for a sword or a javelin, as you might say.

"All right," says he, "now I suppose that you're ready to talk business?"

"What sort of business do you expect?" says I, curious and mean.

"Something very attractive," says Lamb, "if I'm to give up this life."

"You like it, eh?" I asked, remembering what the sheriff had often said to me, and what he had said to the Colonel, also.

"Of course, I do," said he, casting an eye toward all of the girls, where they were huddled with pale faces in a corner of the room. "Did you ever have that many ladies frightened for your sake, Billy?"

I couldn't help admiring his nerve. He was all there, that fellow was, and you really couldn't take him by surprise.

And, all the time, he seemed to be laughing up his sleeve at me, and at the girls, too. I could see why he was called Smiling Charlie, because his eyes were always smiling, even when his lips were still.

He looked a little browner and leaner than before, but a shade more handsome, if anything. No one ever saw such a man!

I says, "All right, and now I'll talk turkey to you. You're so lucky that I never heard anything like it. But I got to follow orders. You're offered a job by the Colonel. And I suppose that it'll be something fat. And, besides, he'll see that your slate is rubbed clean!"

But Charlie didn't seem a bit excited. He just got a little thoughtful and said:

"And if not?"

"If not," says I "you trek back to town with me, and the sheriff will find something to start talking about where I leave off."

"You fellows are very rough," remarked Charlie with a sigh.

And he looked across the room at the girls.

Yes, sir, I give you my word that he didn't seem a bit tempted.

"You got ten seconds to think it over," says I, "because I'm a little rushed."

"All right," says Charlie. "If I don't like it, of course, I can always quit."

"Quit the Colonel?" I repeated. And then I laughed; for the idea of anybody's ever leaving off work for the Colonel sort of amused me. Because, when you started in for the Colonel, he didn't rent your body and hands only. He rented your soul, also.

"However," says I, "it looks as though you just decided in time. I might ask you, if you've made up your mind firm?"

"I have," he answered.

And just then six men busted into that kitchen by three doors. They had got on his trail somehow, but they had arrived just too late. They were all over guns, and they looked at me like gold-diggers when somebody else has just found the pay dirt.

"We'll help you guard him!" says one of them.

"He don't need guarding," says I. "Here's your guns, Charlie."

"Hello!" sings out one of them. "What the mischief is this? Hold off with those guns. Lamb, if you touch one of 'em you're a dead man!"

And he jumps a double-barreled shotgun to his shoulder—all ready to let her fly.

That made me a little irritated, for the last few days I'd been enjoying a good deal of authority, and I hated to be crossed.

"Drop that shotgun, you fool!" I told him.

"Keep your pet names for yourself," said this man with the cannon. "Seems like I got a better right to Smiling Charlie than you have, and I intend to have him!"

"You intend to have trouble," said I, extremely polite. "Drop the butt of that gun and drop it quick."

He meant fight—there was a tight look around the corners of his mouth.

But just the same, he wasn't going to press the scrap unless he had to.

And just then a fat man came busting through the side door, and he cried out: "Chris! Chris! Are you crazy?"

"What's the matter?" asked the man with the shotgun.

"This is Bill Jacks!" says the fat man.

"Hello!" says Chris. "You mean the Colonel's new man?"

"I mean just that," the fat man told him.

Well, it worked like a charm. It was plain that it didn't take the valley long to learn the names of the new men who were taken into Stockton House. He let down on his shotgun and gave me a good, long look.

"All right," he mumbled at last. "I'm beat."

And he turned on his heel and got out of the room.

Well, it made me feel pretty good—take it all in all. So I passed the guns back to Lamb, and we walked out of the room together. But he paused at the door and kissed his hand to the girls.

"Wait for me, dear," he said, "because some day I'm coming back."

Says I, when we got to the yard below, "Which of them is the dear?"

"I can't guess," says he, "can you?"

CHAPTER IX.

STATING THE CASE.

WE headed right back for the home place. I never even thought of stopping for the night in Del Marte, because somehow, when you were on the road for the Colonel, the shortest and fastest way of doing his work always seemed the only possible way.

We cut through the night, riding side by side. It was a queer journey, too. I laid my cards on the table right at the beginning.

"Some day, old-timer," I said, "I'm going to have the chance to shoot you. Or else you'll have to shoot me. But just now we're both going on the Colonel's pay roll. So I have to keep hands off. But I'm not through—one day, we'll have it out."

"Thanks," says he. "Whenever you're ready, I'm ready. Day or night, morning or evening, foot or horseback, fist or knife or gun—I'm your man, Jacks. But, as for what happened between us that other day, I'm really sorry about it. The idea would never even have entered my head if it hadn't been for the way that you were holding out your jaw asking for a punch!"

And he began to laugh like a child.

It made me pretty mad, but I held on to myself. It didn't pay to lose your head when you were on the trail for the Colonel.

Says he, "I wonder what the old goat wants of me?"

"Who do you mean?" I asked.

"The Colonel, of course," was his answer.

That took my breath a little, because you wouldn't refer to the Colonel like that, not even if you were the president of the United States.

"What he wants of you, I don't know," says I. "All I do know is that he's amazing kind to you, after what you've done!"

"Not at all," says he. "I've kept any number of his riders and hunters in good trim and fighting shape. Not enough of a war to put a drain on his resources, but just enough of a war to keep his men and horses exercised. The Colonel is really under a great obligation to me, as I see it."

You would think that he meant what he said—to hear the calm way in which he said it.

"All right," I remarked. "Any way, you have the plum."

"Not yet," he said. "And when he offers it I don't think that I'll bite."

"Don't you?" I asked.

But I couldn't help laughing again.

He was so sure of himself, I mean, and so set and confident. And him with the Colonel in the offing!

"I don't," he asserted.

"Well," I said, "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll bet you a cold thousand that you'll take a job with the Colonel rather than split with him—and get yourself shot an hour later!"

He turned his head in the darkness and studied me for a moment, and then he said quietly, "You don't seem to understand me, Jacks. I really never hunt for trouble, but it's impossible for me to run away when trouble comes hunting me. Is that clear to you?"

I admitted that it was, and he went on, "As for your bet, I'll take you up."

"If you have a thousand, you will," I said.

"Oh, yes," says he, "I always make it a point to have plenty of ready cash about me!"

He was like that, I mean. Not exactly fat-headed, but just satisfied and sure of himself. And now he struck up a tune, and began to sing in one of the best voices that you ever heard in your life. I forgot how much I hated him, while I listened to that voice.

When he was tired of the singing, he unlimbered a guitar and struck up a tune on that. And I never saw the hours and the miles fly as fast as he made them do with his music.

I took him up to the house and we got there about midnight. And when I asked, I heard that the Colonel was still up, so I brought my man right up to the door of the study.

The Colonel called us in.

"Well done, Jacks," says he. "Now go to bed and sleep tight."

I went out. But I was aching to hear what was happening between the pair of them. So, finally, I slipped outside the house and climbed up to the little ornamental stone balcony that passed under the windows of the Colonel's study.

It wasn't honorable. But, somehow, honor was the last thing that you thought of when you were in the employ of the Colonel.

Anyway, there I sat as big as life, and I could hear them both. They were talking about cigars when I arrived. But I heard the Colonel switch off by saying, "What was your college, Lamb?"

"An Eastern one," says he.

"Thank you," said the Colonel, apparently not peeved by being dodged. "One of the big ones?"

"A famous place, but rather provincial," says Lamb.

"Princeton, perhaps?" asked the Colonel.

"Perhaps," replied Lamb, and smiled again.

"I am glad to know," said the Colonel, "that you have such an excellent educational background. That always helps—particularly in view of the work that I have in mind for you."

"And what is that?" asked Lamb.

"Something with a sufficient remuneration," the Colonel told him.

"Ah?"

"Let's say—five thousand a year?" the Colonel remarked questioningly.

Smiling Charlie didn't smile. He simply laughed.

"Did you say sufficient remuneration?" he remarked.

"I don't know on just what plane you've arranged your ideas of money," says the Colonel.

"My ideas of life," said Lamb, "are not ideas of money. But, where there is nothing but money to attract one, the money payments would have to be large to make up for the rest!"

"To make up for what?"

"For freedom, sir."

"I intend to give you a very free hand," the Colonel said.

"No doubt you do. But still you would hold the reins," Lamb told him.

"A position in my establishment,

Lamb, is one that makes you a literal prince."

"I suppose that I understand you now," says Lamb. "I am to be one of your hired gunmen and general lieutenants, like Billy Jacks, for instance?"

"Is that beneath you?" asked the Colonel curiously, but not in a heat.

"A great deal," said Lamb, in exactly the same manner.

Well, I wasn't much surprised—some surprised, but not much. Because, after you'd been with Lamb for a while, you expected him to answer just the opposite from everybody else.

"Ah, well," murmured the Colonel. "there are other ways of arranging the matter. As for the salary——"

"Let that subject drop," said Mr. Lamb, "until I hear what the work is to be."

"In the first place," said the Colonel, "it would be in the nature of a secret commission."

"Ah? That, I suppose, means something a little shady?"

"Are you particularly interested in such matters?" asked the Colonel.

"Terribly," said Lamb, the fugitive and horse thief.

The Colonel looked for a moment at the end of his cigar.

"I believe that I must lay my cards on the table, face up," he said.

"Perhaps that would be better," Lamb remarked.

"Very well. You know that I have a daughter, of course?"

"I do."

"You know that my daughter is engaged to be married?"

"I do," came again to Charlie's lips.

"And that the man is now in my house?" the Colonel pursued.

"Yes."

"It is about her that I wish to talk."

"Yes?" Lamb's monosyllable was a question.

"About my daughter, Olivia, and Baron Wakeness."

The Colonel seemed to find it very hard to go on, but finally he brought out with a snap:

"My friend, that marriage must not take place!"

CHAPTER X.

INTRIGUED.

NOW to me, on the outside of that room, hanging on to the balcony, it seemed that things were suddenly clearing up.

Of course, everything was still as mysterious as possible. But, just the same, I could begin to follow the Colonel's drift a little. All of his elaborate scheming was to get his hands on Charlie Lamb and then use him as a tool to separate the girl and her fiancé. Other things were lying behind and ahead of that idea, so that it was easy to guess that the devil would be at work with all hands before very long.

I had looked on my stay at the Colonel's house as a sort of a fairy tale up to now. But, after this, I could see that I was apt to get into active service. Nothing was clear to me. But I did some of the world's tallest guessing for a while.

I was curious, too, about the way in which Charlie Lamb took this last speech from his host. He didn't seem shocked. He didn't seem surprised. He just sat and looked the Colonel in the eye. And both of them smoked their cigars; and the clock began to tick loud and steady from the corner of the room.

After a while, Charlie Lamb knocked off the ashes from his cigar.

"I think that I'd better be starting on," said he. "It's already rather late."

He got up and went to the door, without the Colonel's stirring.

"Good night," says Charlie from the door, as he goes out.

"Hold on!" barked the Colonel. "Come back here, sir, if you please!"

He'd thought that it was a bluff!

Charlie closed the door and stood with his hand on the knob.

"I don't think that there's any use talking the matter over," says he. "I never change my mind, sir."

The Colonel had to get his wind before he could answer. He was stricken dumb. Finally he got up and took Lamb by the arm, and led him back to the opposite chair.

"Neither do I," said the Colonel. "I never change my mind, sir. And, since I'm an older man than you, I have the greater right to maintain the habit."

Charlie Lamb sat down—agreeably enough and very polite. But you could see that he was as steady and as hard as stone in his determination not to give way.

"Now, sir," said the Colonel, "let me ask why you've jumped so far to a conclusion?"

"Colonel Stockton," said Smiling Charlie, "I'll give you a few of my reasons: The first of them is that no man has a right to interfere between a man and the woman of his choice."

The Colonel was silent for a moment, and then he smiled rather grimly.

"May I ask you, young man," says he, "what would have happened to the lives of several girls, if you had not been interfered with once in a while during your life?"

Charlie Lamb smiled in turn, but he also grew a little red. I was glad to see that there was some shame in him.

"I've been a bad sinner," he admitted.

"And yet," said the Colonel, "I suppose that most of the time you've actually felt that you were in love with the girl of the day?"

"I suppose that I have," said Charlie, growing still more red.

"But, on the whole you're rather glad —either that you were interrupted, or that you grew tired of the lady yourself?"

"I suppose so," replied Charlie, frowning a little, as though he did not wish to have the talk kept to this most painful subject.

"And yet," said the Colonel, coming suddenly back to the point, "you feel that one should let a man have the woman of his choice?"

Smiling Charlie frowned again, but then he added sharply: "Do you think that the baron is the same sort of a sinner that I am?"

"Not a bit," replied the Colonel. "Not a bit! I shouldn't worry so much if that alone were the case! But the fact is that I haven't yet decided that I must tell you of what I suspect him. There are no established crimes that he has committed. On the surface, his character is as attractive as one could wish to have it. But what lies beneath the surface counts most with me. Give me a habitually gloomy man, if he can be cheerful in times of danger. That is a rule with me. It is the man inside that counts!"

You could see that Charlie had forced the Colonel to come down to his own level and talk man to man. But you couldn't help wondering which of the pair would win out. I felt that the Colonel's was the strongest and most commanding personality that I'd ever met. And still, I didn't see how he could overcome Smiling Charlie.

"I suppose," said Charlie Lamb, "that I may as well cut the matter short by telling you that I don't care for the assignment."

He said that in a very final tone.

"And where would you go after leaving this house?" asked the Colonel.

"You are fond of the Sierra Blanca, aren't you?" asked Lamb.

"Certainly! The happy part of my life has been spent here."

"I agree with you," said Charlie, "because the happiest weeks in my life have been spent here, also!"

"I wish that you'd explain," remarked the Colonel from behind his cloud of tobacco smoke.

"Certainly! It's the perfect freedom —the jolly days, and the uncertain nights. I've never had so much fun all the other years that I've lived. Besides, the girls in the Sierra Blanca won't see a poor fellow go hungry!" Charlie explained.

And he laughed deep in his throat.

Yes, he certainly meant what he said. And I was surprised to see that the Colonel was also chuckling.

"You infernal young scoundrel," says he, "I should like to know just how much trouble you have raised in my country. However, that's aside from the point. But tell me, Lamb. Have you never cast eyes at a married woman?"

"Never," said Charlie Lamb. And he said it so quickly and quietly that I was startled, because I knew that it was true.

"And you've never even interfered when a girl was engaged?"

The answer came just as pat, and was just as much of a shock to me. "Never!" said Charlie. "That is, when she was really in love with the other fellow," he added.

"And you're an unfailing judge of such things?"

"I think that I am," said Charlie calmly. "I've had enough experience," he added, coloring a little again.

"Ah," said the Colonel, "I think that I understand you fairly well, now. As a matter of fact, when I sent for you, I thought that you were a worthless rascal. Now that I find that you are not, I see how absolutely essential it is that I make you one of my men!"

"Thank you," said Lamb, "because I know that it is meant as a compliment. I should be a thousand times happy to have you as a friend—but never as a master!"

"My dear young man," replied the Colonel. "We'll get on famously along the lines which I lay down."

Charlie leaned back in his chair and smiled.

"You intrigue me, sir," he said.

"I knew that I would," said the Colonel. "There are a great many people who cannot escape the service of the devil, simply because they're so eager to see his face at first hand, as I may say."

There was just enough truth about this to give a point to what he said—a sort of stinging point, you know.

"The game is still to be won, I may remind you," said Charlie Lamb. "But, in the first place, may I ask you what service, exactly, you would expect of me?"

"The same service that you have performed before, without any reward other than your own pleasure in doing it. I mean, young man, that you have a particular talent for making a girl forget other men. And I intend to use you as a taste of Lethe to make my daughter forget the baron. And, after that, you will fade unexpectedly from the picture!" the Colonel explained.

I've never seen such a look as that which came into the eyes of Charlie Lamb.

"Do you expect that any man can play the part of a hired cad?" said he. "But I don't intend to prolong the conversation, sir. I think that I've said enough to let you know my position, and you've certainly said enough to let me see yours. I find it—unattractive!"

He talked like that. I've remembered all of the words, because each of them jumped right through me like an electric spark. I almost expected to see the Colonel throw a blast of lightning at him, but the Colonel was merely sitting back and smiling.

"My dear Mr. Lamb," said he, "I've never enjoyed anything more than my conversation with you—which is not yet ended. And I assure you that you need not feel insulted, when I say that I call in your services not as a cad, but as—let me say—a medical man, who, I hope, will remove from the mind of my poor

daughter a dreadful hallucination. In the first place you will expect me to give you reasons connected with the case—I'm very willing. But, to begin with, have you seen my girl?"

Charlie shook his head. And the Colonel took a little leather case from his pocked, opened it, and passed it to Charlie Lamb.

"Darking painted it," said the Colonel.

Charlie didn't answer. I suppose that he didn't even know that the Colonel had spoken. He was lost, like a man in a dream.

CHAPTER XI.

ALBEMARLE LOSES.

FINALLY he closed the case softly, handed it back to the Colonel, and stood up.

"I thought that I should be able to hear you out," said he. "But now I find that I'm afraid to stay to hear another word on this subject."

"I thought that you would feel that way," said this devil of a Colonel. "However, you will, nevertheless, hear my reasons. Because, if you were once convinced that my girl was about to make a gross mistake in her marriage, then you would be keen to stop the affair?" he asked.

"Keen, sir?" said Charlie. "I should kill the dog with as little feeling as I would shoot a wolf!"

"Excellent!" said the Colonel. "However, you would require stringent reasons?"

"Entirely so!"

"In that case, I think that I must ask you to stay here a few days—on trial, as I may say. And then I shall arrange matters so that you will see a good deal of young Baron Wakeness. In the course of your meetings, I'll manage it so that you may look beneath the surface. Does that appeal to you?" the Colonel asked.

Now the Colonel had found the right touch completely to shake Charlie Lamb.

He was fighting a losing fight with himself, and his face was white with the struggle.

"I suppose that I shall stay," he said. "I suppose that I'll stay. But mind you—I shall expect convincing proofs!"

"Exactly," smiled the Colonel. "Proofs that you yourself shall help to demonstrate, I hope. In the meantime, you'd better go to bed, I think. Your rooms are waiting for you——"

I didn't wait for any more, but snaked down from the balcony and skidded around into the house by a side door and got up to my own rooms.

I was barely in time to peel off my coat and light a cigarette and look sleepy, when there was a knock at the door, and Charlie came in.

He said, "What do you know about the Colonel, partner?"

"I know that he's a clever old devil who always has his way," I ventured on him.

Charlie bit his lip.

"At least," says he, "the devil part of it is true enough."

And he turned on his heel and went back to his own rooms, without even saying good night. The last thing that Charlie would ever have been was discourteous, so I knew that his brain was in a real fog.

I could hardly sleep that night, since I felt that things were gathering to a head so rapidly.

But, though I got up early, Smiling Charlie Lamb was ahead of me, and I found him talking to Albemarle.

"Well," says Albemarle to Charlie, "do you know horses, Mr. Lamb?"

You see how quick they got to know about the Colonel's inside men! Even a gent that had been there only one night!

"Not a great deal about them," says Charlie. "I like 'em, though. May I have a look?"

"Look as long as you like," says Albemarle with a satisfied smile.

And he stood by the fence, still smiling to himself and snapping his long fingers, and making them pop like whips. You could see that he was sure that his pets would be safe as could be while Charlie was picking.

Charlie walked around through the drift of horses—taking his time, whistling and smoking, and never stopping long to look over any one horse.

"Mr. Lamb," says Albemarle with a sneer, "seems to think that reading a horse is no harder than reading a novel!"

Charlie leaned an elbow on the fence.

"What are those in that field?" he asked. "Work stock?"

Down in the hollow there were a few horses, too.

"Just weeds," says Albemarle. "What is he up to now!"

That last was to me, because Smiling Charlie had vaulted over the fence and was now sauntering down into the hollow.

"Maybe he found nothing to fill his eye here!" said Albemarle with a snort.

"He's simply taking his time and missing no bets," I told Albemarle.

"Hell!" says Albemarle. "What does he mean by that?"

Smiling Charlie was coming back up the hollow, leading a rusty-looking old chestnut by the mane.

"He likes a horse old enough to get its character well established," I suggested.

But Albemarle paid no attention. He just lighted a pipe. And he seemed so excited and disgusted that he bit off the stem right away and cut his lip, which made him swear in earnest.

Charlie opened the gate and came through to us with the veteran.

"How old is this one?" he asked.

"Seventeen years," says Albemarle.

"Hello!" exclaimed Smiling Charlie. "As old as that? Well, well!"

"Why?" sneered Albemarle. "Do you like him?"

"Well, he has a sort of a comfortable look," says Charlie. "I'd like to try the gaits of the old boy."

"You can't do it!" snapped Albemarle.

"I can't? I thought that I could make my pick from the whole bunch of horses?" Lamb remarked.

"You can. But you have to make your choice before you get into the saddle. However, if you want that old stallion, you can have him. Shall I call a boy?" was Albemarle's reply.

He whistled and a little groom came running.

"This gentleman wants Cringle," said Albemarle.

"Wait a moment," said Smiling Charlie. "Don't rush me! Let me take my time."

The stableboy stood by, grinning behind his hand. But I was grinning openly. When you took a good look at the chest and the legs and the bone of this old veteran, you could see why Charlie might really like him pretty well. But, of course, to prefer him to the beauties in the other fields——

Suddenly Charlie stepped back and snapped his head up.

"All right!" he said. "Put a saddle on this horse—I'll take him!"

I was really staggered; and the stableboy, turning his back to hide his laughter, came out with Charlie's big range saddle.

"Not that infernal monster of a saddle," said Charlie. "Can't you lend me an English saddle, Albemarle?"

"I'll lend you nothing!" snapped that outraged man.

I looked at him and thought that he'd gone mad, for his face was white, and his lips were quivering and twitching.

I couldn't make it out but Charlie, slipping a bridle on Cringle, nodded and whistled to himself.

"I half guessed it!" says he.

Then he jumped onto Cringle's bare back and took a sort of hard, pulling grip on the reins.

The old stallion thrust out his head, arched his tail, bowed his neck, and busted into a gallop with a stride so long that it made you dizzy to watch.

Charlie turned him around, and Cringle floated over the fence of the paddock and then dipped out again and stood dancing beside us.

"I thought so!" cried Charlie Lamb. "I thought that this was the one!"

Poor Albemarle turned around, and threw up both his hands into the air.

"You impostor—you only guessed! You only guessed!" he shouted, and then he turned on his heel and ran into the stable and out of sight, half-crazy.

"You might have picked one of the others," said the stableboy, sort of scared by the way that Old Albemarle carried on. "This old nag is just what Old Al hacks around the country on."

"Exactly," said Smiling Charlie. "I guessed that this was his chosen horse!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE BARON UNDER OBSERVATION.

WELL, it only dawned on us by degrees.

You couldn't believe it at first. But then the cat came out of the bag. They say that poor Albemarle sat with his head in his hands for about a month, groaning because his horse was gone. Of all the fine horses that were ever raised at Stockton House, there was never a one that was worthy of being mentioned on the same page with Cringle.

You could see how poor Albemarle worked it.

You see, Cringle wasn't seventeen years old. He was only seven, but he'd always been kept rough, and his mane was in no sort of order. Then, he was gentled till there were no shine and show in him, and his coat was always left rough.

But he was a horse in a million.

I never knew whether Charlie Lamb knew or guessed.

But, then, there was a lot about Charlie that nobody could really fathom. He kept his life and his thoughts to himself most of the time. And he didn't open the door and ask you in to sit down with him and his thoughts.

I couldn't actually believe that Charlie had picked a speedster, so I dared him to try paces with my bay.

"I've never seen your horse," remarked Charlie, "and I won't bet with you, unless you'll put up the thousand that I owe you."

"Because you're going to work for the Colonel?" I asked.

"Yes, it seems that I am—for a while!"

"All right," says I. "Here I am in another thousand!"

And I was laughing myself almost to death as I got out my gelding. I had called him Vincent, and told my servant that I had named the horse after him, which tickled him to death.

Well, there I was in my saddle on Vincent and, in the meantime, Charlie had had an English saddle strapped on the stallion. In another minute, off we sailed down the road, with Vincent going first. I saw the stallion go back behind me at every stride. Then I turned Vincent loose at full speed in order to let Charlie really taste my dust and see what a fine horse I'd picked out.

I looked back after a minute, and nearly dropped out of the saddle, because there was old Cringle rocking along behind me.

Before I could get my wits back, Charlie sailed past me, calling out, "Come on, Billy!"

I tried to go on. But Vincent seemed to have ten pounds of lead on each leg all at once. And Cringle walked away down the road until I gave up.

When it was over, I stopped Vincent and cursed him a little—I couldn't help it. He was a fine horse and a stayer, but he was against a better horse than himself.

Smiling Charlie came back to me, patting the neck of Cringle and talking soft to him—as well he might, because Cringle had just dropped a thousand in cold cash into his pocket. But, somehow, you could see that Lamb wasn't thinking about the money.

He said, "The lovely part about it is that this fellow is going to improve at least one hundred per cent after he's put into training and handled properly. Why, he's as rough as a rake, just now. But what a working stride!"

It was, too. It was like wings, you know.

A little later, the Colonel heard that Charlie had unearthed a diamond among the horses—a diamond in the rough, in more than one way.

"Every dog has its tricks," said he to the trainer. "This is a rare one of yours, you rascal."

"Every dog has his day, too," said Albemarle, too heartbroken to be ashamed of what he had done. "And mine has ended."

"Tush!" said the Colonel, putting his hand on the shoulder of Albemarle. "Your day is just beginning. You're going to raise finer horses than Cringle ever dreamed of being. And the next time you'll have your pick to keep for yourself!"

I sort of admired the Colonel more for that speech than for any of the sharp, smart things that I ever heard him say, before or after.

Baron Wakeness was out with the Colonel to see the horse. He looked him over and admired him a good deal. And he hoped that Cringle would be in shape to try out the speed of the baron's own best horse which he had brought over from England and which was expected out West at almost any moment.

"What's this, Wakeness?" asked the Colonel. "Are you suggesting a match between your crack horse and this old fellow?"

And he patted Cringle's head.

"Certainly not," said the baron, flushing a little, "except with a sufficient handicap for Cringle, perhaps—that is, if the idea were attractive to you!"

"But," said the Colonel, "your animal is a stake horse, isn't it?"

"Quite so! Quite so!" assented the baron, flushing a little more. "Of course, I only threw out the suggestion. You can handicap any horse to equality."

"Humph!" exclaimed the Colonel. "What do you say, Albemarle?"

"With a week's training," says Albemarle very cool and collected, and looking at the sky line, "I think that you might venture on Cringle, sir."

But under the coolness of his tone you could guess that he was fair quivering.

I happened to look at Smiling Charlie just then and he was watching the baron very closely. There was no doubt that he was seeing something in him—what it was, I couldn't guess.

"In that case," says the Colonel, "we'll call it a match, baron."

"Very well, sir," says Wakeness, smiling at once. "We'll arrange the handicap on your own terms."

"Handicap? Handicap? Not at all! We'll run even, sir, for the honor of Sierra Blanca, if you please!" the Colonel told him.

"Ah?" says the baron. "We'll leave it that way, then. But under my protest, of course. Inverary is a proved runner, as you know!"

"We'll call it ten thousand a side, then," said the Colonel. "How does that fit in with your idea?"

There was a spark in the eye of the baron. His lips set a bit and his nostrils quivered.

"If that pleases you, sir," he said, "of

course we'll arrange it in that manner, exactly!"

And he turned his head to give another rather anxious glance at big Cringle.

In that minute, the Colonel's glance flashed across to Charlie Lamb, and he nodded a little, as much as to say: "Write that down among your notes, because it's worth remembering."

There was no need of pointing anything out, however, for Charlie Lamb obviously hadn't missed a trick.

The only trouble was that I didn't see just what the game might be. Something, however, was up that meant a lot to both the Colonel and Lamb.

However, I've always been willing to wait and watch. And I felt that this was just another rumble of thunder, while the storm gathered. Pretty soon we'd be seeing the lightning, too—and maybe it would be striking near by!

CHAPTER XIII.

BETTY TO THE FORE.

THERE were other affairs going on in Stockton House, along with the things that I've been talking about. And, among the rest, there was one thing that mattered a lot more to me than almost anything else.

Betty came up to my room one morning, pretty early, before I got my hair combed proper. I felt pretty silly, because my hair is uncommon balky in the morning and makes my head look like an old thistle, where half of the down has already blown away.

Anyway, she came up and sat down in the big chair by the window, and she slumped over to one side of the chair and buried her face in her arms.

Her back humped and quivered a little.

I went over and stood beside her.

"Look here, Betty," says I. "Do you want love or comfort?"

She let out a gasp.

"Are you crying," says I, "or just trying to cry?"

"Oh, Billy," says she, "you're going to break my heart!"

"Hey! How come?" I asked her.

"Because you're grinding me down," says Betty.

"Hold on," I said, "I got you your place out here. Wasn't that giving you a boost in the world?"

"You want to see me a common chambermaid all the rest of my days!" says Betty, sobbing.

"No," I said, "I want to see you married to myself, and I will hire you a servant. And all that you will have to do will be to sit still and be a fine lady the rest of your life."

"Humph!" says Betty, and she gasped again. "How—how could I marry a man who shows that he despises me?"

"Betty, stop blubbering, and talk so that I can understand you. What else could you do here in Stockton House? Will you tell me?"

"There's the job of maid to Miss Olivia!" she said.

That staggered me.

It was true that Miss Olivia's maid had just left, but that maid could speak French and other things, had read everything, and was sort of a lady herself. At least, you couldn't tell her apart from one, unless you could look closer than me.

"Why, honey," says I, after I'd settled the idea inside of me, "are you clean rattled?"

"I know! I know!" sobs Betty. "It just shows! You're not happy unless you're keeping me down!"

I hit the ceiling at that. It made me wild.

I said, "Betty, name anything that a man can do that I won't do for you!"

Her answer knocked me right out of time.

"Go to Olivia and tell her that I want to be her maid!" says she.

I said, "Betty, you really want me to

make a fool of myself by going to that girl and asking?"

"Yes," she answered. "Only it won't make you a fool. It'll only show me that you love me!"

"I'll do it! I'll do it!" I told her. "But stop crying, will you?"

She jumped up and threw her arms around my neck and kissed me.

"Billy, you're such a darling," she said. "Will you go right this day?"

"I will," says I, paralyzed, like I was saying a while back.

And Betty went away before I could count ten.

You couldn't beat that girl. At least, I couldn't.

So I was faced with my promise, and it was a pretty hard thing for me to do. But that afternoon, I took hold of myself, for I saw Miss Olivia sitting out under a tree in the garden all alone.

I walked up to the gate and took off my hat.

"Do you want to see me, Billy?" says she.

"If you please, ma'am," I replied, very polite and miserable.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

And she came right over to the gate.

"Nothing wrong with me," I said, "but a friend of mine has got a terribly wild idea, and is afraid to talk to you about it, so I'm elected!"

"Dear me," says Olivia. "What could it be?"

"The idea," says I, feeling hard for the words, "is that she wants to be——"

"What? A lady?" asked Olivia and, all at once, she smiled at me. "Is it that very pretty girl who's already here?"

"Yes," I said.

"I'm sure that whatever is wanted can be arranged," Olivia remarked. "Won't you tell me what it is?"

"I mean," says I, "that she's extremely ambitious. And she knows that your maid has just left——"

I stuck.

"Oh," says Olivia.

And she looked at me, rather thoughtful. Then she smiled, and her nose wrinkled a bit—almost the way that Betty sometimes smiled.

"After all," said Miss Olivia, "why not?"

"She don't speak French nor anything," says I.

"Well, my own French is hopeless," says Olivia. "I've practically given it up. And—I suppose that your friend will really have to have her way!"

So that was all that there was to it.

She said for me to send Betty around to talk to her right away.

Then I went to see Betty and told her.

"Billy, darling," says she, "you can always manage just anything that you put your mind to. You see, I knew that you could do it for me!"

And off she went in a whirl. And, from a window, I watched her talking with Olivia, until, pretty soon, I heard them both laughing like a pair of birds. And then I knew for sure that Betty had her place.

I felt pretty puffed up by what I had managed to do because it naturally made me feel that I amounted to something at Stockton House, but just then—that very day—Inverary arrived, and we all had something to think about besides Betty and her affairs.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PRELIMINARIES.

BY this time, as I was saying, the baron's horse, Inverary, had arrived on the train and had been brought out to Stockton House. And, after we had had a good look at him, we didn't have to wait for the running of the race before we were sure that poor old Cringle was in for a beating.

Cringle had been coming along all of this time. And he had been groomed and worked over and slicked up until

now you could see the lines of speed and strength in him. But, still, he was nothing compared to that Inverary.

Inverary made you feel that he could fly. He wasn't only a beauty, but he seemed everything that a horse should be for covering ground—except maybe that he was a trifle leggy.

Inverary had been on the track—first on the flat, and then steeplechasing and, after that, he'd been used as a hunter by Wakeness. And you never saw anything so pretty as his sailing over the big jumps, which the fences and the wild hedges gave him around Stockton House. It seemed to me that Cringle was a tramp in comparison with him.

The baron proposed, everybody said, that the match should be called off, because now there had been a chance to see what his horse was really like. But the Colonel was just as cheerful as ever. He only said, "Suppose that we make it a rather long trial, if you please?"

"Certainly," says the baron, "but with a weight no greater than mine in the saddle, distance is really nothing to him. I should warn you of that, in the first place."

"Thank you," says the Colonel. "I've always preferred a long race to a short one. It gives the ponies a chance to stretch themselves, and the quitters are shown in their true colors—I've always detested a quitter, Wakeness."

The baron said that he had, too.

"I mean," says the Colonel, with a good deal of point, "the horse or the man who can't stand the rub, but quits in the middle of it—or loses its head!"

"Quite," says the baron. "I understand perfectly!"

So they laid out the course, and it was a humdinger. It was sketched out in a great circle, all around the house. It was about three miles around, and they were to make it twice. The baron seemed hot for a lot of fences, and finally it was agreed to have four in every mile, which made twenty-four jumps during the course of the whole race.

Twenty-four jumps, taken at high speed, squeeze a lot out of a horse, of course, and I wondered how poor old Cringle could manage to stand the work?

I was given to understand just what the two of them wanted. Then a gang of twenty men was turned over to me to put that course in order in a week. I slicked it up fine, and every day Smiling Charlie rode out Cringle and put him over a few of the fences. And every day the baron would come and exercise his flier.

It would be an easy course to watch, because folks could just keep on the inside of the circle, fairly close to the house, and work their horses around slowly, and keep their glasses fixed on the runners if they wanted to see every detail.

Albemarle was to put up a fine stableboy to ride the old-timer. But, three days before the race, a bomb dropped into the camp, when the stableboy got into the saddle and got out again without asking to be put down. Then they tried the gamest of the rest of the boys, but none of them could handle the horse.

I was standing by and offered to take a try. And, although it was a hard go, I managed to stick the thing out. Only, they had to give me a range saddle, because I wouldn't try to ride an old cow with nothing to grip but one of those English saddles.

Well, as things were going along like this, I seemed to be elected for the race. I was about the weight of the baron, and I was used to riding, of course. I'd laid out the track, so it was taken for granted that I would be accustomed to it. The main thing was—how was I to get accustomed to the horse?

I tried hard, but he wouldn't do anything but fight me, except when Smil-

ing Charlie was walking along at his head, and then he was as sweet as pie.

I think that that was the first time that Olivia ever took a good, full look at Smiling Charlie.

Up to that time she'd been hypnotized and could see nothing but the lean, aristocratic face of the baron, that looked like a picture torn out of a history.

"What is it that the man does?" she asked.

"You'll have to ask the horse, my dear," remarked the Colonel, "because it seems to be a secret between the two of them."

I got out of the saddle about done up —and Cringle leaned up against Charlie, puffing hard.

"Another ride like that, and my horse will be beaten before it's entered," said the Colonel, with one of his wicked smiles. "What are you doing to the horse, Lamb?"

"I appeal to his sense of humor, sir," says Smiling Charlie as serious as could be. "And then he hasn't the heart to fight with me."

The baron bit his lip and looked sideways at the Colonel, because he was a lot too polite to laugh. But the Colonel seemed as cheerful as ever. It took a good deal to upset him, except when somebody presumed on him.

He says, "And now you have a horse which won't run except with you in the saddle, young man!"

"Infernally awkward!" remarked the baron.

But I couldn't help noticing that he didn't offer to call the race off again!

"Very well," says the Colonel, "I suppose that the only thing to do is to weight your horse up to the riding weight of Lamb, baron?"

The baron passed a hand across his face.

"A heavy weight kills Inverary," he said. "Frightfully sorry — simply frightfully!"

"Ha?" says the Colonel. "And what do you weigh, Wakeness?"

"A hundred and fifty, sir."

"And you, Lamb?"

"Just under two hundred," was the answer.

"The devil!" commented the Colonel.

"It is the devil," the baron agreed. But he didn't offer anything.

"It seems to me," said the Colonel, "that poor old Cringle is handicapped enough without the extra weight. But, if extra pounds kill your horse, suppose that we split the difference. You carry twenty-five pounds of lead—that will still leave you twenty-five pounds to the good!"

"Exactly," says Lamb.

The baron bit his lip again, and hung fire, but Olivia thoughtlessly broke out, "Of course, that's perfectly sporting."

Then the baron had to say, "I suppose that it will have to be arranged along those lines."

But you could see that he didn't like it. It upset him a good deal. And, for the first time, I guessed how extremely keen he was to win that race!

It shocked me a little, for it was something that I wouldn't have guessed. Of course, though, ten thousand dollars is a good deal of money.

I said to Albemarle: "Now you'll worry, old fellow, and wish that you hadn't put up that five hundred on Cringle!"

He was worrying all right. But he set his jaw and wouldn't give way.

He said: "It's a long race, and you have to remember that these horses are not quite clean bred. There's a dash of Indian blood in 'em, and they're apt to wear like hickory!"

CHAPTER XV.

A MATTER OF BETS.

I WANTED to bet on Cringle. My heart was all with the home horse and, besides, I was a little cut up about the way that the baron had acted on the

question of the weights. However, there was no use throwing money away, as I told Smiling Charlie.

"I don't know," said he, "but what odds do you think that one could get on the chances of my horse?"

"Three to one, I suppose," said I.

"I'll take three hundred of your money against a hundred of mine," Charlie remarked.

I closed the bet then and there; but, afterward, I was a little uneasy. It wasn't that I had any doubt about the superior speed of the English horse. And it wasn't that I doubted that Wakeness was a fine, brave, steady rider. But there was another thing that had to be counted in the race, and that was Smiling Charlie himself. You never could tell about that man.

That was what kept the odds down on the race. It seemed hard to believe that Cringle could win, but I knew that the sheriff, who was a pretty shrewd fellow, and who ought to have known a good deal about Charlie Lamb, had got down half a dozen bets that added up to nearly two thousand dollars. He got odds of between three and four to one. And there were others in Sierra Blanca willing to back Charlie—no matter what horse he might sit on.

So, as the day of the race came, I found myself sort of edgy. Not that I minded losing three hundred dollars in a lump—now that I was making so much money regular, but because I didn't want to see Charlie distinguish himself too much. I still wore that lump on my jaw.

The baron, it seemed to me, was getting a little nervous, too. It was said—and I don't know how true it was—that he had put ten thousand pounds—which means around fifty thousand iron men, if you don't happen to know—with a commission man in town, and that he had put it out at odds of anywhere from three to five to one.

And that gave the baron his tense look. He could stand a ten-thousand-dollar side bet, but fifty thousand maybe would strain even a baron a good deal. And you could hardly wonder.

This was the way that the stage was set when the day of the race came. And the baron and Charlie got on their horses with something like two thousand people to watch the race. Most of them had to watch from the outside of the circle, but there were about a hundred on horses inside of the circle, ready to ride in the short swing around the house and the grounds, and so keep a close eye on the pair all of the time. And nearly all of us had glasses—the Colonel had seen to that.

CHAPTER XVI.

SPECTATOR'S AGONY.

I GOT an idea of what the Colonel's thought was just before the race come off. And it was a real nasty idea, at that.

He came up to me and said, "You have a glass, Jacks?"

"I have, sir," says I.

"My daughter doesn't want to be bothered with one," he said, "because she wants to keep her hands free for managing her horse. And she thinks that she can see clearly enough. However, it may be that the race will turn out quite close. And, if old Cringle can manage to get up close enough to give Inverary a challenge, perhaps my girl will really want to see how Wakeness is riding. In that case, you might keep close to her and hand her the glasses to look through. You understand?"

I looked straight back at him and kept my eyes as blank as possible, because I could see what was in his mind.

He was a foxy one. In the first place, all the fuss about that race and the money that was bet on it, and the test of the Stockton stables, didn't amount to anything to him, though he pretended

that it did. What he wanted was to convince Charlie that the baron was a poor sport. And, after he'd convinced him of that, he had another idea—maybe he could show his daughter that her baron was not quite perfect.

That was why he wanted me handy with the field glasses.

I understood, but I tried to make him think that I wasn't bothering my head about such things at all. I just took the extra pair of glasses that he handed me and set sail to keep close to the girl.

It was a grand day for the race. The sky had some big, sailing, white clouds in it, that went voyaging across like ships, with all sails set. But—what was more important—the air was cool, with a little breeze setting in from the north and west. The baron had said that the hot Western sun might be too much for a horse raised in the bracing air of England, but he wouldn't have any excuse like that just now.

Before the start the baron came up and spoke to Olivia.

"I'm like the poor girl in *King John,*" she said. "I don't know which side I should put my sympathies on."

"Now, what might she mean by that?" says I to Dick Wace.

"Shut up, kid, and don't show your ignorance," Dick remarked. "That's Mr. Shakespeare that she's referring to."

And then Cringle went by and got a cheer from everybody. He didn't go fussing and prancing by as Inverary did. He had his head stuck out straight, was switching his tail at the flies and cocking an ear back now and then, to listen to what his boss was saying to him. Charlie was talking all the time!

They got down to the start, where the sheriff saw them lined up and fired the starting gun. The start didn't amount to much, but we couldn't help being pleased, even in such a long race as that, to see that old Cringle was away first, and on the inside of the circle. He floated across the first couple of fences in perfect style. And it seemed to me that, barring accidents, all that he had to do was to keep on like that, and the race would be over. Then I took a look through the glasses at Inverary and felt relieved a good deal, because I could see that the baron had him under strong wraps that were nearly pulling him double. And just then there was a squeal of excitement from Olivia, for the baron had taken off some of the wraps so that that long-legged English horse just floated up and past Cringle without half trying.

And there he went half a dozen lengths in the lead! The boys let out a groan, but the Colonel said, "It's a six-mile race, and it's not over yet!"

I fixed the glasses on Charlie. He was steady as a rock—his talking to Cringle going on all of the time. Then I looked at the baron just in time to see him glance back, laugh, and then take another pull at the head of his racer.

Cringle was a good horse. But here was the difference between a good horse and a great one.

They wheeled around the circle the first time—both of them turning black and shining with perspiration. And things were getting sort of monotonous, because their positions never changed a bit. When they came to fences they sailed over them like nothing at all. There was nothing that compared with Inverary getting over an obstacle, because he sailed high, wide and handsome.

But old Cringle, when he came along, just bobbed over each hedge and fence and ditch with barely enough to spare—dragging his heels through every place that it was safe to drag them, and fair brushing his belly on the tops of the thickets. He was over a fence and on the ground, running again so quick that you could hardly see what he'd done. It wasn't a beautiful thing to watch.

But I must say that it didn't look as though he was wasting much strength at the jumps!

Well, they had turned the first three miles and peeled over another mile and a half when Olivia cried, "There he goes!"

I looked, and there was the baron, with all the wraps off Inverary, just fairly letting him sail along.

You could see what he meant. He'd been sitting back, riding with a pull all of the time, but now he meant to go to work and show the Colonel just what sort of class there was in Inverary.

I laughed and then I heard Betty shout:

"Go it, Cringle! Good old boy!"

I looked at her and frowned. But she was too excited to notice me. Then a shout went up from the others and I stared back at the race.

Well, it was worth seeing just then, because, though Inverary was cutting loose, Charlie Lamb was sitting well forward, swinging himself with the stride of Cringle—the way that he had been doing all through the race. And that horse was keeping right up with Inverary!

By that time the English horse had an advantage of about twelve or fifteen lengths, but he hadn't been able to stretch it out any. And there was Cringle, plodding along the same as ever—not seeming to be running any harder.

But when you looked closer you could see a difference, all right. I never saw such strides. He was hopping along as if he had wings to help him between the spots where he hit the ground.

Yes, it was a right pretty thing to see.

But, in the meantime, there was only a last mile to go, and the fifteen lengths began to amount to something. Only one thing you could be sure of and that was that—with the extra pounds that he was packing—Cringle was not disgraced. Not by a long shot!

However, I let out a cheer for Inverary, seeing him clip along so fine. Flecked with foam and running with perspiration, still, he seemed to be going as strong as ever.

Also, his ears were pricking, which made my three hundred seem safer than in a bank.

However, the race wasn't quite over. No, along came Charlie Lamb and settled a bit lower to his work. He began to rise from the saddle and, as he did it, Cringle began to gain.

Yes, sir, it was a hard thing to see and to believe, but the old rascal was creeping up on Inverary with every stride. He had his ears back, but that seemed simply to mean that a fighting, mustang streak of blood was up in him. His mouth was wide open. And he would have been a mean horse to see charging down at you, at that time.

And still he ate up the distance until he was'nt more than two lengths behind Inverary.

And there was a good quarter of a mile to go.

Then the baron seemed to wake up. I suppose that he'd been sailing along thinking about the money that was going to be bulging his pocket before nightfall of that day. But now he jerked his head around, took one look at Cringle, and snatched out his whip.

I saw that the time had come when I was to do just what the Colonel wanted.

I handed the glasses to Miss Olivia.

"Maybe you'd like to see the baron ride it out?" says I.

She was so excited that she snatched at them without saying a word and clapped them to her eyes.

I turned and took a squint at the Colonel.

Well, sir, that old rascal was sitting up there on his horse with his glass cocked up against the pommel of the saddle, looking around over the field—something like a general at a battle.

And, from his face, you would have said that the battle was going just the way that he had planned to have it go.

And sometimes he smiled to see the way that the folks outside of the fence were hollering, because Cringle was making such a wonderful run. And sometimes he turned his head and let his hawk's eye rest for a minute on Miss Olivia.

And then there was just a trace of a frown on his forehead.

But the Colonel's frown meant the same as a smile, in any other man!

But, by this time, I didn't give a rap what other folks might be thinking, because what was commencing to worry me was whether or not my three hundred dollars were going to be safe.

And I clapped the glasses to my eyes and kept them there until the finish, while I watched that pair of horses strung out straight as a string and rushing for the flag.

To be continued in the next issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

WYOMING'S FIRST PIANO

AN interesting relic of pioneer days in Wyoming recently passed into the possession of the State University, when the first piano that had been brought into the State was presented to the university by Maurice C. Groshen. The piano, a Steinway grand, still in excellent condition, was brought across the plains by ox team in 1866, by the late Judge W. A. Carter, of Fort Bridger, Mr. Groshen's father-in-law. A portion of Judge Carter's library, which also had been brought to Wyoming by ox team, from Missouri, and which is thought to have been the first library in Wyoming, was donated to the university at the same time as the piano.

PEND D'OREILLE FOREST TIMBER SOLD

LARGE quantities of timber burned over last summer by the Meadow Creek fire in the Pend d'Oreille National Forest are being sold by the United States Forest Service. The A. C. White Lumber Co., of Laclede, Idaho, submitted a bid which was accepted and was awarded a good-sized tract of the timber land. This company bid $1.75 a thousand feet for eleven million feet of fire-killed white pine, and four dollars a thousand for one and a half million feet of green white pine. They offered $1.75 a thousand feet for one and a half million feet of fire-killed yellow pine, and $2.50 a thousand for six million feet of green yellow pine. Twenty-six thousand cedar poles, to be sold at the rate of one cent a foot for burned timber and two cents a foot for green timber, were included in the award.

The timber is located north of Bonners Ferry, Idaho, and the White Company, on receiving the award, at once began construction of six miles of logging railroad into the forest, so as to get their lumbering operations under way as soon as possible.

Other timber sales negotiated at about the same time by the United States Forest Service comprised four million feet of white pine on Beaver Creek, three million feet on Quarts Creek, and forty million feet on Kalispell Creek, all in the Kaniksu Forest.

Tabasco in Alaska

by Seth Ranger

Author of "Santa Holds the Cards," etc.

EVER since the steamer had whistled, "Poke" Tupper had been pacing the dock. "Can't hardly wait," he informed any one who would listen. "You see my old pardner's coming on that steamer. Ain't seen him for twenty years." He pulled a moose-hide poke from his pocket, and bit off a chew of tobacco from the generous plug that the poke contained. "We used to quarrel a lot, argue about this and that," he said. "Fact is that's what caused us to bust up. Seems like we couldn't agree on anything, and I was sure that I was right and he was sure that he was right."

"That's what starts wars," a traveling man from the States observed.

"It sure started a few with us. Still and all, me and 'Hardrock' got along fairly well. His real name is Ben Shipley, but they stuck Hardrock to his name on account of his once being a hard-rock miner." He glanced at the steamer again. It had slackened speed and was now moving easily up to the dock. "Yeah, we used to argue a lot—about everything, in fact, but that's all over. We're too old to argue."

"Don't know about that," the traveling man observed once more, "the older they get the more they think that they know and the louder they argue. I'll bet that your friend has a few choice contentions up his sleeve that he's been saving. Anyway it'll make the time pass."

"No, we won't argue," Poke declared, then suddenly let forth a yell. "There's the old tramp now. Hey, Hardrock! Here I am."

A red-headed individual peered over the ship's bow and grinned. His face was smooth, but around his chin there ran a fringe of red whiskers. The name Shipley might not sound particularly Irish, but Hardrock Shipley was certainly Irish. "Well! Well!" he shouted, "if it isn't old Poke himself! How be you?"

"Fine! And you're looking great yourself," Poke Tupper answered. "You don't look a day older than when we busted up twenty years ago."

"You're a liar!" Hardrock returned quickly. "I'm twenty years older, and I look and feel it."

"The argument is on," muttered the traveling man. "Haven't seen each other for twenty years and the first

words——" He stopped his comment, when he saw that Poke Tupper was about to speak.

"Well, you may look older and feel it, but after you've been in Alaska a while you'll feel and look younger. Boat's right on time, I see."

"There you go again. You never did get anything right, Poke. The boat's an hour late," Hardrock asserted.

"It ain't!" Poke firmly stated.

"It's nine o'clock. My watch——" Hardrock began.

"There's an hour's difference in time between here and Seattle. Set your watch back an hour," Poke directed him.

"That's a horse on me." Hardrock produced a heavy silver watch of the type that is wound by inserting a key, and set his time back. "It's not such a bad country at all where a man gets an hour more life than he had when he started," he commented.

"But you'll lose it when you go back."

Five minutes later Hardrock Shipley hit the dock. He shook hands warmly. Behind him stood a boy with two huge packs. "Set 'em down, son, my pardner and I can manage them," Hardrock directed.

"Ready to go?" Poke asked him.

"Not yet. They've got to get Tabasco off first."

"Dog? You didn't need to bring a dog, I've got a whole team of 'em," Poke objected. He drew forth another moose-hide poke, produced a quarter, and handed it to the boy as a tip.

"No, it ain't a dog, it's—there he is!"

Poke Tupper gasped in astonishment. The ship's hoist had drawn a mule from the hold, and it was now suspended ten feet above deck. "Look out below," shouted the first mate who was superintending the job of unloading. "Get back! Well back! He just put out two of my men, who thought that they were far enough away from his heels!"

The mule's ears were thrust straight ahead; the back was humped in an effort to get clear of the sling about the stomach; the heels were flying. The boom swung around, then the fall slacked away. With a clatter of heels the animal hit the dock and, an instant later, the crowd was scattering. Hardrock's short legs fairly flew over the planks. "There! There, now!" he shouted soothingly. "It's all right, Tabasco. All right!"

But Tabasco thought otherwise. His heels began splintering the planks. After a considerable time, however, Hardrock succeeded in quieting him. "He's an army mule," he explained, "and ain't used to ships."

"Never heard of a navy mule, did you?" Poke demanded. He produced a third moose-hide poke from which he took a pipe. A fourth yielded tobacco and a fifth, matches. Having lighted his pipe and given a full minute to smoking and reflection, he continued:

"He'll be no good in this country. Now down South, where you get lost on the desert and need something to lead you to water, a mule is all right. But up here we need dogs. Now a dog can live on salmon."

"Yeah, and what does a moose live on, salmon?" roared Hardrock.

"We'll finish the conversation at my cabin, where everybody can't hear," Poke growled. Then, much to the traveling man's disgust, Hardrock slung his packs on the mule's back and followed his friend off the dock.

The traveling man turned to others in the vicinity. "There's a continued story that I'm not going to learn the ending of," he said. "But, as a guess, I'd say that a red-headed Irishman and a mule can overcome most any obstacle in Alaska. This is going to be good and I'm sorry that I don't live here."

A Malemute dog was the first creature to make a costly mistake. Catch-

ing sight of Tabasco and mistaking him for a cow moose, which in some unaccountable manner had been tamed, he launched an attack. The next instant a pair of heels had lifted him ten feet into the air and dropped him over a fence into his master's yard. He howled once or twice and then limped away.

The mule was tied up in Poke's back yard, and the two entered the house. "Now," growled Poke, "a man can't argue with his own guest only about so far. So, you ain't my guest, you are my pardner—this is your place as much as mine. Is that understood?"

"Yep!" Hardrock asserted.

"Then we'll settle this affair right now. First I told you what the situation was, didn't I?" Poke demanded.

"Yep!" came again from Hardrock.

"What was the situation? I'm asking to see if you paid any attention to what I wrote?"

"I'm here, ain't I?" Hardrock demanded.

"That's so, I hadn't thought of that," Poke commented. "Well, to repeat—in case you've forgot some of it. Now listen:

"Kutak Park belongs to the government like a lot of other things in Alaska. Back in the mountains there's supposed to be copper deposits. The Markoff crowd that owns a lot of copper mines in Alaska has got its eye on them. Right here I'd like to say, what would a lot of people in this man's country be doing for a living, if it wasn't for the Markoffs developing mines too big for poor men to handle? Well, I ain't having any fight with 'em. If they make a move toward investigating what's there, then up'll go a roar. A lot of people will say one thing, a lot another; and the poor government, being dizzy, won't know which is right. It'll make sure by locking up the proposition for another ten or a hundred years. Has that sunk in?"

"It has. But what's it got to do with my mule?" Hardrock asked.

"The real question is, what has your mule got to do with this copper proposition? I can answer that now. The answer is, nothing! The Markoffs have let it be known that, whenever any group of miners—rich, poor, young or old—gets hold of those claims, they'll back 'em up to the limit, either supplying the money for development or buying 'em out. I just figured that I was cut out for a copper magnate. I knew that you weren't doing anything but knocking around the desert, so I sent for you to put this over. After it's done, we can live happy ever after."

"Then let's take Tabasco and do it. It looks easy," Hardrock commented.

"We'll get to Tabasco later. Also it ain't easy. First there's 'Dug' Haber. He works for the outfit that makes the sledding tough for the Markoffs. He'll be right on the job all the time. Two weeks from to-day, the district can be legally entered and mineral claims filed. But—and here's where the rub comes. Kutak Park has been set aside as a National game preserve. It is unlawful, at any time, for a man to hunt, pursue, take, kill, bribe or induce any game animal in that preserve to do anything that will lead to its death, destruction, injury or mental anguish. The law is about a yard and a half long. Boiled down, it means that you can't kill anything in Kutak Park under any circumstances. And, as a result, bears get into a man's camp; wolves prowl around; you can't live off the country, so it's a case of keep out or starve to death."

"And we're going in?" Hardrock questioned him.

"Yeah, we're going in and try our luck. You see, Hardrock, we'll have grief enough without having to protect a mule. Now with dogs——"

"I was bit by a dog once, and I've been afraid of 'em ever since."

"Well, I was kicked by a mule, and I'd sooner be bit than kicked any day, but I don't hold it against the mules. It's just one of the hazards of life. I'd use a mule, even Tabasco, for this job, if it was practical. But it ain't," Poke continued.

"It is!" came firmly from the owner of the mule.

"I tell you that it ain't."

"And I say it is!" This last was heard by neighbors four blocks away. "That mule can protect himself against anything. Not only that, but he can protect us, too," Hardrock asserted.

"You're crazy! I never saw a mule that had any sense. What'll he do, if wolves get after him?" Poke demanded.

"Unless somebody tells him different, he'll think that they're coyotes and act accordingly."

"Hah! H-a-a-a! I suppose that he'd have a chance against a bull moose, or brown bear? Blah! Hardrock, you're old enough to have some sense, but it seems——"

A half hour later a neighbor entered. "You boys are not getting anywhere. What is more, you never will. Let me settle this. Poke, will you agree to my decision?"

"Yep! If it's fair," the man asserted.

"And you, Shipley?"

"Yep! If it's fair, but how do we know that it'll be fair? I might be willing to argue——" Shipley slowly began.

"Same here!"

"If you do, either of you, I'll shoot you. Now here goes. If it's heads, you boys use dogs. If it's tails, you use the mule. How about it?" the neighbor demanded.

"Shoot!" came simultaneously from the two.

The neighbor tossed the coin up with sufficient force to hit the roof. It came down, glanced off the stove, and rolled under the bunk. "Hands off!" he snapped, "but every one get down on his stomach and look. Wait, I'll light a match. Can you see it?"

"No," Poke grunted. "Oh, yes, there it is. Kind of in the dust. Can't tell if it's heads or tails. Oh, yes, it's heads."

"It ain't," Hardrock snapped, "it's tails. We use Tabasco!"

The neighbor groaned, "Let me get closer!" He held the match up. "Hah!" he cried, "it's tails. Look, Poke, it's tails."

"Yeah," Poke grudgingly admitted, "it's tails." He turned to his partner and said: "Well you had your way, and that means that Dug Haber and his gang will trim us. We're protecting our own lives and the mule's as well."

"Shut up!" the neighbor remarked. "It's settled."

The neighbor departed. His work was done, but his imagination was not through working by a long ways. Personally, he was for Poke Tupper and dogs, but fate had decreed otherwise. And he feared the worst.

Dug Haber's team of Malemutes moved swiftly over a well-packed snowfield. First it had snowed, then rain had packed the fall. Then there had been frost and a light fall of fresh snow. The going was fine. As Haber mushed through the lower regions of the park, game of all kinds took flight. Ptarmigans as white as the snow itself moved away with a roar of wings; a young bull moose snorted angrily at the dogs and trotted into the nearest thicket.

For a time, only the sound of the sled runners broke the silence. Then a new voice came through the woods—a sound that caused the dogs to prick up their ears and adopt a nervous manner. "What in the world!" exclaimed Haber. "Sounds like a mule braying, but nobody would be fool enough to bring a mule here." He stopped the team and listened.

The thunder of hoofs grew louder and louder. Several caribou rushed madly from the vicinity—their delicate hoofs seeming to skim lightly over the snow, though the man knew that they were breaking through. The brush a hundred yards to the left parted and, to his astonishment, a galloping mule shot into view. Behind came a well-laden sled, on which was riding a small red-headed man. At the gee pole, utterly unable to guide the outfit in that manner, was Poke Tupper. His long legs were covering six feet at a step. Like the caribou, he presented a picture of skimming over the surface.

Dug Haber gasped, "Look at the time that they're making." Fear assailed him for the first time. Unless something were done and done soon, Tupper and Shipley would be on the copper site hours ahead of him. The first man there to stake a claim and get it filed in the land office won.

Dug started his team up a steep slope, one which no mule could hope to climb. Part of the time he dug his snowshoes into the snow and pulled with the team. On the other side, he lowered the sled and dogs by snubbing a rope about a tree. Hardly had he hit the lower country again before Tabasco galloped into view. His sides were heaving, and a fog seemed to follow just above his back. But he was going strong, no doubt of that. The mule had made it around, while he was cutting over the ridge.

Darkness found them in camps a half mile apart. Dug picked up his rifle. He had brought it along not for hunting, but to use as an argument with his fellow men in case of necessity. Nor was he adverse to using it, if there were a chance that a self-defense plea would get him off.

Crawling through the snow toward the rival camp, he presently stopped. "Told you that the mule would put it all over dogs!" Hardrock was saying.

"Race ain't over yet," Poke Tupper retorted. He was attempting to prove to his partner that a bed made in the desert would not do in the North. And this meant changing Hardrock's blankets into a sleeping bag, which he was now accomplishing with the free use of a needle and heavy string. Hardrock was cooking the evening meal—cooking being the same in both North and South.

Dug Haber crawled closer, then shifted his position until he could get a bead on the mule. Tabasco was eating grain from a nose-bag. Carefully Haber aimed, steadying the rifle on a convenient rock. Then he fired. The bullet clipped the rope that tied Tabasco to a tree. The mule reared almost over backward as the shot rang out, then took flight.

Both Poke Tupper and Hardrock Shipley jumped for their own weapons. Quickly they circled, but found only a trail. Whoever it was, who had released the mule, had taken speedy flight. The strides were long, the moccasin marks light.

"Now if you'd have had a dog team," Poke growled, "we'd have lost only one. It don't pay to put all your eggs in one basket, nor to put all your horse or dog power into one mule. While we're finding Tabasco, Dug Haber will be getting there. Right now it's kind of funny, but later on, when we get to thinking about what those claims are worth, it's likely to lead to gun play. Dug's men will be scattered about."

"What'll we do?" Hardrock asked.

For a wonder, he seemed in no mood to argue. His idea had not turned out as well as he had hoped, but they had covered a lot of territory the first day. Viewing a glacier for the first time, he had his doubts about a mule's skipping lightly over snow bridges.

"What'll we do?" Tupper scratched his head. "Eat and dig out. We're using legs against a dog team now. I

think that we can get there first. If we do, then we can hold 'em, or one of us can, while the other mushes for town."

"Well, all right, but if I had Tabasco——" Hardrock began.

"Huh!" Poke snorted in disgust. "That's another thing. A dog will stick to a man. Once in a while, he'll have his fling at a caribou and go running off, but he'll wear his feet down to the bone in order to find and join you. A mule—huh!"

"You don't know Tabasco, he always was different from most mules. In a way, he was like a dog; he inherited a great love of man from some ancestor —prob'ly on the horse side of his family," Hardrock commented.

Tabasco, free for the first time in days, for he had been taken from steamer to sled, so to speak, kicked up his heels and sniffed the cold air. It certainly did put pep into a mule. For a time, he galloped across country, heedless of direction. He was free of man and his restraining ropes. It reminded him of the days when he had roamed the range.

Late that night he looked down into a small valley. In the distance, there was a sound that resembled coyotes. Below him, there was something resembling, in general shape, mules. Feeling the need of companionship of his kind, Tabasco descended. He might have known that he was in the North where men are men. But how was he to know that, in the North, coyotes are wolves and that things that look like mules may be cow moose with jealous mates in the offing?

With ears thrust forward, Tabasco advanced. Once he stopped and brayed. The wilderness, a moment before so quiet, except for the wolf howls, grew even quieter. The cow moose withdrew to the shadows; a great bull, with widespread horns, came forth a few yards and peered toward the ridge. Nothing in his experience was just like the sound that he had heard. Ah! The cause of it all was descending.

The bull waited. Tabasco passed the bull without observing him. Now that he had gotten close enough really to view the moose he was puzzled. Certainly they weren't mules, nor horses, nor cattle. Both his ears pointed forward again, flipped backward, then forward, in order to be sure that all was well. Then he sniffed.

It was at that moment that the bull charged. The charge came suddenly, and the bull's momentum increased with each bound. Also, he was quicker at maneuvering in the snow than the mule —being accustomed to it. But for the fact that Tabasco was one of the largest mules that a skinner had ever cursed, he would have been injured if not killed on the spot. The bull's head struck him in the middle, and he went down with a mighty grunt. Half the breath was knocked from his body. Tabasco had a vision of a huge body and hoofs going completely over him. The impact had also knocked the moose sprawling. Each animal scrambled to his feet.

The moose had profited by surprise. It was now Tabasco's turn to profit by surprise, for each was unfamiliar with the other's method of attack. Again the moose charged, but this time the mule was ready for business. He shifted slightly, his back humped up, then his hind legs shot out. Had he caught the moose on the head or shoulder, it would doubtless have injured Tabasco's heels and crippled the moose. As it was, the moose had missed his charge, so his ribs and side were unprotected. The mule's heels struck squarely against the moose's left side. A tremendous boom filled the valley from the impact. Air rushed from the animal's lungs in a mighty sob, and a sensation that life was utterly futile

surged through him. His legs grew weak, and he collapsed in the snow. What he needed just then was prize-ring first aid—smelling salts and a fanning towel.

Tabasco was not surprised at the result. His heels had brought down angry bulls on the cattle range on several occasions. He was amazed, however, at the creature's build, now that he had a chance to get a good look. It was nothing short of astounding. Hair stood up along his back, his eyes were blazing with fury. He tried to get up, but it was impossible. It suddenly occurred to Tabasco that this formidable beast might eventually rise. With a snort of alarm, he galloped away. From the brush, the cow moose peered curiously at their fallen master. Presently he staggered from the scene. Some distance away he again lay down. He was a mighty sick moose.

The stuff beneath Tabasco's hoofs two hours later was not snow, but something new in his experience—glacial ice. He slipped and slid, but gradually worked his way upward for no reason other than that he wished to keep moving and enjoy to the fullest his freedom from man. In the course of time they would be after him with ropes and, experienced in such things, he knew that they would get him. He could get along without men very well, he decided.

Upward he toiled for a half hour without seeing any green stuff. Then he changed his course. For perhaps fifteen yards, he walked along the slanting surface, then suddenly his feet left him. Even his tremendous heels were of no avail now. Tabasco had the impression of standing still, while the world slid rapidly beneath him. Sometimes he was on his back, sometimes in the air, again on his side. For five hundred yards he rushed, then soared through space and crashed into a clump of brush. Two small spruces died that night, the growth of several smaller trees was set back for a year, and a porcupine hiding from a wolverine scrambled awkwardly into the open.

Tabasco had the idea that something had attacked him. Knowing nothing of the laws of traction—such as that of hoofs against slanting ice—he believed that some invisible force had picked him up and thrown him through space. By a miracle, he was undamaged save for a few patches of hair on his side. He leaped to his feet, looked about for something to kick and, finding nothing, experienced a sudden urge for the companionship of man. When a man was around, the things that had happened to him this night did not happen.

Something was moving away from the vicinity. He stooped and sniffed. It looked like a dog at first, then he decided that it must be a pig. Curiosity being one of his strongest traits of character, he lowered his head and sniffed. An array of barbs lifted at the same moment. He reared backward with such abruptness that he toppled over. Instantly he was on his feet, whirling. Twice his back humped up, twice his heels fairly whistled through the air. Then he looked back—the porcupine was waddling away. He had missed.

Tabasco lifted his nose and snorted again and again in an effort to remove the barbs that the porcupine had left. A beating with a club might have made the mule grim and stubborn. A kick would have angered him, but these barbs worried him beyond measure. The pain was not great, merely annoying, and it was something that he could not handle. The urge to return to Hardrock Shipley grew within him. Hardrock did many things that he didn't like, including the forcing of labor upon him; but, on the other hand, Hardrock was considerate—he fed and watered him with regularity, and things

that had been happening didn't happen when Hardrock was about.

Possibly it was scent. Perhaps it was some strange instinct. At any rate, twenty-four hours later Tabasco was moving in the general direction of Poke Tupper's camp.

The camp had been deserted some twelve hours. For a time, the two men had hauled the sled by hand. Then, fearing that Dug Haber would beat them over the remaining thirty miles to the copper site, they had cached their stuff and, with two days' provision, were pushing forward.

For several hours the camp was undisturbed. Later a brown bear, sniffing suspiciously, came into view.

This bear held mankind in contempt. It was a result of the protection that the government afforded all creatures in Kutak Park. He stalked into the open, after satisfying himself that objects of interest were in camp. At first, he tore things apart—an extra blanket, Tabasco's pack saddle, and finally the tent. He next reared himself upward and pawed at a pack suspended from a tree limb by a wire. It was just out of reach. He tried clawing at the bark without success.

Then he returned to his work of destruction. But, when this was completed, the odor of bacon held him to the spot. After a time, a wolverine appeared. The bear hated the creature, but did not attack. The wolverine eyed the cache also. Unlike the bear, he had no difficulty in climbing the tree and working his way out onto the limb. For a full minute he sniffed at the cache below him, then dropped. His claws curved into the canvas wrapping and held. Methodically he began to tear the pack apart. Presently he found the bacon. He was eating this, when it slipped from his claws to the snow below. Further tearing so opened the pack that canned goods, another slab of bacon, and a sack containing sugar slipped through various holes and thudded into the snow.

Silently the wolverine dropped after them. It was then that the bear moved forward. Snarling, the wolverine backed away, knowing that he was beaten, but hoping that something might remain. The bear turned his attention to the bacon, which he ate with the utmost relish. Then he sniffed at the sack of sugar. It was sweet, and his rough tongue dabbed at the broken sack, then slipped into his mouth well coated with the sugar.

It was at this moment that Tabasco walked into view. Had he been a horse, the sight of the bear would have put him to instant flight. But he was a mule of mighty proportions, so was willing to argue various questions. His nostrils caught the scent of sugar. On some occasions, usually as a reward, Hardrock Shipley had fed him sugar. And he loved it as the bear loved bacon and honey.

The bear growled and stood up. But, as he growled, his tongue licked the sugar from his jaws. Tabasco debated the question, but the sight of sugar within reach was more than he could endure. He approached within licking distance, stretched his neck as far forward as possible, blinked at the bear, pointed his ears, then shifted the greater weight of his body to his forelegs. Tabasco was willing to go fifty-fifty.

The bear edged nearer, Tabasco drew back. It was then that he showed his displeasure by laying back his ears. A tense eight seconds followed. There was no resisting the sugar. He leaned forward again. Suddenly the bear rushed for the attack.

Then, however, Tabasco did what Hardrock called "swapped ends." His heels appeared where his nose had just been, his forelegs serving as a pivot. The lightninglike dab of the bear's paw

caught one hoof and all but paralyzed it, but Tabasco's other heel struck the bear squarely on the jaw. He toppled over backward as the mule fell to his side. Honors were even, but it was the bear who made the noise. He roared, then he cried with the pain, but strangely he did not pursue the attack on the mule. Tabasco held but one thought to the exclusion of all others now. He needed Hardrock Shipley and Hardrock's sugar.

Half dragging his paralyzed leg behind him, Tabasco blundered up the trail left by Poke Tupper and his owner. The bear, his jaw temporarily paralyzed from the kick, wandered away. The wolverine came cautiously from his concealment and began sniffing at the remaining supplies.

Panting from their efforts, Poke and Hardrock Shipley hurried up a valley as rapidly as their snowshoes would permit. In an adjoining valley, they knew that Dug Haber was also speeding with his dog team. Four hours earlier they had seen him, accompanied by a tough-looking individual known as "Right Bower" Jackson. The dogs were on the verge of exhaustion, but Haber was riding, evidently saving his strength for the last final dash afoot.

Rounding a bend in the stream that they were following, Hardrock suddenly shouted. "Look at that! Copper!"

It was as amazing a sight as either of them had ever seen. The mountain blocked the valley. From floor to peak, it was covered with snow and ice. A dozen small glaciers clung to the upper levels and slopes. In the sunlight, they flashed green and blue. From half way up to the summit extended a ridge, the face of which was bare because of its steepness. Snow might cling to that face for a few moments, or even days; but the first wind started it moving, and the entire mass would then rush to the valley below, leaving the face bare once more. Copper stain had tinted the rocks green, which stood out sharply against the surrounding snow.

"That's our goal!" Poke cried. "Do you wonder that any outfit with money wants it? But it'll take money to handle it. A railroad will have to be built, then water power developed—hundreds of thousands of dollars spent before a cent returns. It makes panning a bar look sick. You take one side and I'll take the other. We'll put our monuments at each corner, though the upper corner will be three thousand feet above the lower. We'll meet at the top, size up the situation, and then let anybody take it if he can," Poke belligerently concluded.

A mile beyond they parted. Hardrock selected his corner, placed the necessary location notice in a bottle, constructed a monument of stone, then began climbing over the ice to a point three thousand feet above him. "Sure, and it's like staking the side of a wall. Wonder where Haber is, we couldn't have beaten him so very much." He put steel creepers on his feet and moved slowly over the ice. It was dangerous work. "Makes life worth living," he panted, "things like this. Now if I had this ice on the desert, I'd never need to stake a claim. Hah! There's Poke. A better man never lived, but he will argue," he reflected. Poke appeared to be some small animal moving over the ice, but he was moving.

The silence of the mountain was suddenly broken. Ice flew up a few yards below him, the peaks rumbled with echoes and reechoes of a rifle shot. Hardrock's eyes narrowed, but he speeded up. Twice more he was shot at, but always managed to keep under cover. "Wasn't as tired as I thought that I was with those bullets singing about. I'll have to go down and do a little shooting as soon as I get this side of the claim staked. Here I am!"

A vast country was visible from this point, but Hardrock spent little time viewing the scenery. Rapidly erecting a second monument—this one of ice blocks—he turned toward Poke. The latter was stretched out like a spider, working his way over a smooth surface in his efforts to reach his goal. "Easy, Poke!" Hardrock muttered. "I don't like that." Ice was new to him. Then he turned from his partner to the brush at the base of the mountain. A figure was skulking rapidly from cover to cover. Hardrock shifted his rifle and watched. They had taken their packs with them, lest the enemy find and destroy what little provision they had. He shifted his pack to a convenient spot, then rested the rifle across a ledge of ice. "If that man starts potting at Poke, I'll——" he began.

But the skulker dropped at that moment and fired. Hardrock did not wait to see what effect the bullet had. He fired himself. The figure crumpled. "One," he muttered. "Right Bower Jackson, I guess."

He was not left long, however, to reflect on his marksmanship. A rifle roared above him, and a bullet from Haber's rifle narrowly missed his head. In some manner, the man had gotten above and held the advantage. Not only that, but he was maneuvering for a shot at Poke. All this Hardrock took in with a glance. Then something else caught his eye. A new monument, like his own of ice, had been hastily erected. "Staking around us, dang him!" Hardrock risked his own neck to get a shot at Haber before the latter dropped Poke Tupper who was exposed as he worked his way upward.

Haber was not in sight. He waited a moment, then saw Poke reach a ledge and hastily erect his monument. Poke's voice came trailing over the ice in triumph. "Got our four monuments, Hardrock."

"Down, you fool, down!" warned Hardrock and, with the warning, came the sharp crack of a .30-30. Poke Tupper threw up his hands and started sliding down the slope head first. Twice Hardrock saw him go through the air several feet, then drop. Presently he vanished over a rim of ice.

The minutes passed slowly and Hardrock waited, his eyes watching every part of the mountain in view. It was an hour before he saw signs of Dug Haber, then the man was running in the valley. In some manner he had erected his fourth monument, worked his way into the valley, and was now on his way. Hardrock fired three times, then gave it up. The distance was too great, and the wind was doing things to his bullets.

Sadly he began the descent to aid his friend, if he were not beyond aid. A thousand feet below he found Poke Tupper, huddled on a ledge. He was wounded, but not seriously. Furthermore, he was full of fight. "Can you get that cuss, Hardrock?" he cried. "Get him! He's going to beat us in, sure. Another thing, he'll claim that what he did was in self-defense because we drew first blood."

"You bet we did. I got Right Bower while he was trying to pick you off. Let me look at that wound." Hardrock's attitude was professional. "H'm-m-m! It won't kill you, but you won't be able to travel on your legs for a while," he said.

"Don't want to. Fix me up, put that rifle in reach, and I'll hold the fort. Dig out and see if you can't beat him in. If we only had a good dog team!" Poke said with a sigh.

"Or that mule!" Hardrock looked down the valley. "I can't understand why Tabasco hasn't showed up," he added.

"He ain't like a good dog or he would. Now clear out! We've got to win. You know the way out." Poke pointed. "Crawl out on that slope and

start sliding. Nothing but soft snow at the bottom. You won't get hurt."

Right Bower Jackson was dying, and he knew it. He lay in the brush, where he had fallen—his eyes smoldering with hate, partly because Dug Haber had not taken the trouble to aid him, and partly because he had missed Poke Tupper, but mostly because Hardrock Shipley had wounded him. By sheer lust of revenge, he managed to retain consciousness. Then he saw Hardrock come sliding down the mountain at terrific speed and bring up in a snow bank. The little Irishman was traveling light, indeed. He had left sleeping bag and food with his partner. In his hands he carried a rifle. All but covered with snow, he was on his feet almost instantly. And, while he was adjusting his snowshoes, Right Bower summoned all his will power, aimed, then fired. He never lived to see the result of his marksmanship. The rifle dropped from his hands, and he fell back.

Hardrock Shipley went down, wounded. For a moment he lay there. "Nicked me," he muttered, "kind of dead around my shoulder, but it's legs that I'm needing now and not arms." With that, he was up again, much to Poke Tupper's relief.

"A man on legs against a man driving a dog team." Again and again Hardrock growled the sentence to himself. But he refused to admit that he had no chance. His left arm was numb, so he carried the rifle in his right for two hours. Tiring of this, he tossed the weapon aside—it was taking too much of his strength.

Long years in the open had given him the endurance and reserve strength to continue, when most men would have quit. Sometimes he fell and reopened the wound, but the chill of the wind healed it. But, even as the wind healed the wound, it carried the scent of the man's blood and spread it over the forest of Kutak Park. Animals of various kinds stirred themselves and sniffed.

A wolf crawled from his lair and took the trail. Presently he was joined by another. Later on a third, and a fourth appeared. Their trail joined one made by a group of three wolves ahead of them. They speeded up to overtake them before the prize had been devoured. The two groups made a pack of seven.

Presently they slowed down. A plodding figure moved ahead of them. The natural fear of man kept them back for a time, but the scent still intrigued them. Each moment they became bolder. Frightened the man began to run. Sometimes he forgot himself and swung his left arm, then the scent grew stronger. "They'll get me," he muttered, "haven't a chance. They'll get me."

Sometimes he turned, faced them, and shouted so terribly that they retreated. Had they been hungry, he would have been instantly torn down, but game was plentiful in the park. "Should have kept my rifle, but it got heavy. Wolves ain't like coyotes. Wolves have courage. There! I've fallen again. Look at 'em come." He suddenly turned and screamed once more.

As he turned something else caught his eye—the fresh track of a large animal. "Tabasco!" he cried. "Tabasco! He's gone along here just now. If I hadn't cut across country, I'd have met him." He quit the rush toward town, which he could not reach anyway, and followed the mule's trail. Another mile, then he stopped. The ring of wolves closed in. Their tongues were out, their eyes flashing fire, fangs dripping. If one would make a rush, the others would follow and overwhelm the man. He thrust his fingers into his mouth and whistled. For several sec-

onds he listened, then whistled again. Then he shouted:

"Tabasco! Tabasco!" Silence. "He can't be far away, his track is fresh." Again he whistled. A shifting of position among the wolves was his first warning. They looked away from him toward the timber. Then, the brush crashed and the mule galloped into view. Straight for the man he came and, in countless little ways, expressed his relief and joy.

"Tabasco!" Hardrock hated emotion, but something was choking him. He was glad that no one could see him, for he grabbed Tabasco around the neck and kissed him. Part of the rope was still trailing from the halter, but the feed bag had been worked off. Hardrock gripped the rope with a gnarled fist. Abruptly the mule reared backward as the man stroked his nose. "Oh, porcupine quills. We'll tend to that later. Now. Whoa!"

The pack was closing in. To them this animal was the same as a moose. Tabasco jerked so suddenly that Hardrock lost his grip. He fell sprawling in the snow, but the attack that he felt sure would come was halted. They had turned from the man to the animal. And there, under the moonlight, Hardrock saw one of the strangest battles that ever took place.

Two worried the mule in front, five rushed in from behind to hamstring the mule as they did moose—to bring him to his knees, helpless. And Tabasco acted as he would have acted had several coyotes worried him. He humped up and let go. The crushing of bones came distinctly, and two wolves went end over end from the terrible impact of those heels. Hardly had his hind legs hit the snow before he had swapped ends and let drive again. Another wolf got it. But they were closing in now, slashing at his sides, leaping at his throat.

He reared backward until his body was almost perpendicular, then came down. A wolf was clinging to his shoulder, but lost his grip and died beneath the hoofs. Knowing only the hamstring method of pulling down larger game, another was drawn in. Again those heels shot forth. Again a wolf crumpled to the snow to twitch a moment and stretch forth lifeless.

Tabasco galloped toward the man once more. With his good hand and arm, Hardrock dragged himself to the mule's back. "Dang it, I wish that old Poke could have seen that. It'd save a lot of argument in the future. Come on, Tabasco, we've got to hit the trail." He tossed his snowshoes aside, dug his moccasined heels into Tabasco's ribs, and galloped away.

Dug Haber stood on the runners of his sled and made up a story. Town was a mile ahead, day was breaking, and people would be about when he arrived at the land office. "I'll tell 'em that Hardrock Shipley shot Right Bower Jackson and killed him from ambush. I'll tell 'em that Poke Tupper ambushed me, but that I got him first. That leaves my word against anything that Hardrock may say. And"—this was the convincing part of his story—"Hardrock's bullet in Right Bower's body will prove the first part," Haber reflected.

For several yards he mused on the good turn that fortune had taken. He had rid himself of a partner with whom he planned to split fifty-fifty. The winnings were exclusively his. He would double cross his former employers and make them bid against the Markoff Copper Company. The high man would get it.

Galloping hoofs suddenly broke in on his reflections. A mule was coming down the trail. A white-faced individual, with a fringe of red whiskers about the jaw, was clinging desperately in an effort to stay on. "Hardrock

Shipley!" exclaimed Haber. He caught up his rifle, then lowered it. No, a man couldn't get away with murder in town.

His whip cracked over the backs of his dogs, and the tired team moved faster. But with each stride the mule cut down the distance. Some one in the street saw the odd race and shouted. People rushed to the walks and looked down. For a moment the two were abreast, then the mule bounded ahead. They saw Dug Haber, in a last desperate effort to stave off defeat, abandon his sled, and leap for the mule. For several seconds, he clung to Hardrock's leg, then the two of them rolled from the mule together. The Irishman was up first, running like mad. Through the crowd they raced. Dug Haber reached the land-office door first. his great hand clutched the knob and shook the door violently. "Open up," he roared, "open up, it's time!"

The clerk was reaching for the key, when the window suddenly lifted. A little Irishman fell through and onto the floor. He thrust some papers into the clerk's hand. "I'm first!" he panted, "file this—all proper. Send two men to Poke Tupper. No, don't mind me, I'm all right. but fix up my mule. Fix his shoulder, give him a good feed and a warm—stable." Then Hardrock Shipley fainted—something that he would remember with shame for the rest of his life. Dug Haber's big fist still clutched the door, still shook it, but presently the fingers relaxed, and he turned away. It had suddenly occurred to him that, when Hardrock was revived, it might be healthy if he were out of town. As he plodded up the street, a horrible noise filled the air. Of course, it might have just happened that way, but Tabasco was braying and, when Tabasco brayed, it sounded as if he were laughing at something.

RIO GRANDE CAUSES BOUNDARY CHANGES

OWING to the changing of the course of the Rio Grande, it sometimes becomes difficult to tell whether a certain piece of property is in the United States or in Mexico. One day a man will be the owner of a small ranch on the American side of the river; then one morning he is likely to wake and find that the uncertain stream has shifted its course and that he is on Mexican soil. There is a commission that passes on all international questions arising from this variability of the Rio Grande. It comprises seven Americans and six Mexicans. This commission has been in existence for something like seventy-five years, trying to define the course of the Rio Grande and determine questions of ownership of properties lying along its banks.

It is when the river is swollen to flood proportions by the flow of melted snows from the mountains that the variation of its course is most marked, and it is after these flood periods that the commission has its work cut out for it to determine the rights of the respective governments. One of the rules which governs their decisions is that in the original treaty which provides that small parcels of land with few inhabitants shall change nationality when shifted by the river's course, but that tracts of more than 625 acres or with more than two hundred people residing on them shall retain their original nationality, remaining the same as before the shift in the river bed.

Bar Heart Bar

By Clem Yore

Author of "Sudden Slim," etc.

CHAPTER XIV.

RESCUERS RESCUED.

GREGORIO received, as answer to his demand that the two men relinquish Billie's mother in return for their own safety, a loud and ribald laugh from Biloxi.

Out of the region of the gorge, upon which the room's window faced, there came the sounds of walking and talking men. Then far down—so far and faint that it seemed but an echo in the abyss—there crashed a falling rock. Jerry rushed to the window and, as he stood staring from it, emitted a loud hailing cry.

"What is it, cowboy?" asked Biloxi.

"The good padre of Querida is coming along the trail. And he's coming fast, I mean. The sound that you heard was rocks scattered by his Mexicans as they romp along with him. Talk about my being Per Schedule, if that old padre ain't got me nailed to the mast!" Jerry exclaimed.

"Hear that, Gregorio?" cried Biloxi.

"Hear what, hombre?"

"Bad luck knocking on your door! Listen, compadre, that's your finish, and it's coming in the cellar!"

The outer door suddenly crashed, and rushing feet rang throughout the old building.

"Heavens!" yelled Gregorio to his comrades upstairs. "These men have an army coming in at us from the trail-door!"

"Are you sure?" came back a question.

"Don't fire! we give up!" shouted Gregorio.

The voice of the priest sounded in the hall:

"Where are the two Americans, you beast?"

"Here we are, padre," said Jerry, opening the door, "and here's work for

you. Señora Lindell is a very sick woman."

"My son," said the padre, as the men with him rushed forward and made the Mexicans on that floor prisoners, "that wonderful horse of yours came back to the village and was caught by a sentry and brought to me. I exhorted the people; and, at three o'clock, I secured sixty volunteers to follow me."

"Rambling Red," said Jerry, "isn't much on staying where I ain't. I reckon that the old scoundrel just got lonesome and broke his tie-string."

"How about my horse?" asked Biloxi.

"He came also," said the priest.

"Then it's walk—walk for us, Per Schedule. And I'm near dead for something to eat and a lot of twenty-four carat sleep, all in one lump!" Biloxi exclaimed sadly.

"Your horses are down the trail, and we've food for everybody," announced the priest.

"Padre!" came the tired voice of Loreto Lindell.

"My friend," replied the priest, as he stepped to the side of the bed.

"Come on!" said Biloxi. "Let's get away from here and close that door! This ain't any time or place for a pair of bronc peelers to be standing around. We did all that we could for her."

"Up the stairs, boys!" directed Jerry, as he closed the door, "up the steps, you'll find a lot more of these scorpions."

With a rush of feet, the Mexicans in the hall ran up the worn old stones of the stairs. Toward the middle of the morning, the relief force departed with its prisoners. Then, the priest made a litter, and had four men carry Billie's mother out and along the trail, where, when the horses were reached, she was placed on a gentle old mare. Then, with Biloxi on one side and Jerry on the other, she was escorted slowly over the twelve-mile course to Querida. Arriving there, she was attended by the old doctor and then turned over to Catalina's care.

"You boys," said the padre to Biloxi and Jerry, "are to go to sleep in my house."

"No, sir," said Jerry. "I get no sleep till I organize a crew to ride with me to the Bar Heart Bar."

Biloxi's eyes were almost closed, but he opened them and stared at Per Schedule.

"You're sure a pup for punishment," he said, "but, if I didn't forget about that Bar Heart Bar, you can feed me mush. Since you spoke about it, I don't want any sleep, either."

"Men," said the priest, laying a hand on a shoulder of each, "you are to go to sleep and rest for ten hours. Last night, before the sun went down, one hundred of the best men of these hills took the trail for the Lindell ranch. They will wait for you before they attack Hatch and El Sabueso."

"Huh?" queried Biloxi.

"You see, I'm dead anxious to get across and get at that Bloodhound," Jerry said.

"Some time to-night, son, you may ride. Anyhow, your Rambling Red will need a rest, even if you don't," the priest told him.

"That's so, I plumb forgot about him!" Jerry exclaimed.

"Where's the hay?" queried Biloxi with a tired yawn.

"This way, boys! And, Jerry, you'll sleep between sheets that came from Ireland," the priest remarked.

CHAPTER XV.

PER SCHEDULE EARNS HIS NAME.

JERRY KERRY and Biloxi, in separate beds, slept the sleep of the dead for ten hours, back of drawn shades which admitted only the rustle of the pepper trees and the fragrance of blossoming plants from the yard.

It was a beautiful, star-lit night which greeted them, as they finished their meal and prepared to ride hard after the Mexicans, who had gone to the relief of the Bar Heart Bar. To the smiling, tired-eyed, gentle padre, they bade an affectionate farewell, and took their leave of Catalina and Carlos with welling tears in their eyes. Catalina drew down Jerry's head, as he was sitting in his saddle, and said in a mellow tone, "Catalina Del Gado is very grateful to the young señor, and, with her own hands, has stuffed his saddlebags with good things to eat. Tell Señorita Billie that her mother dreams the dreams of the good. Heaven is with her, and the village doctor says that, in a month, she may make the journey home. Farewell, my brave *Americanos!* The prayers of the women of Querida follow you like the starlight and the sun." Then, off rode the two men.

"If I'd stayed there another minute," said Biloxi, "I'd have blubbered all over the place. Those folks sure touched a spot in my make-up."

"Shut up, you sentimental old fool! Pound that leather and don't talk. Didn't you see how I had to bite my lip to keep from making a sissy out of myself?" Jerry exclaimed.

Smoothly clicking off the miles, Per Schedule rode in a maze of delightful thoughts. He was going back—returning to Billie! His eyes sparkled, his lips pursed in a quaint whistle. Biloxi, on the contrary, sank into a grave silence, which he did not break for miles. They came to the international border, one of its monuments looming, on a sandy knoll, like a somber and purplish sentinel of the night.

"Howdy, you old United States!" chirped Jerry with a glad cry, as the first of the American soil was touched, "I'm sure glad to see you! Biloxi, do you notice how sweet the air is? Son, we've got back home!"

"Cowboy, I'm not smelling sweetness —I'm thinking of what I'm going to tell the judge. What kind of alibi have I got when he says, 'Biloxi, do you plead guilty or not guilty?' Tell me that!" Biloxi demanded sadly.

"Boy, when you meet up with Old Bob Florrisant, after I tell him what you have done for me and Billie's mother, he is going to do the talking to the judge. Up at Sante Fe, Bob is it—always, and all ways! That's red-letter fact! Bob owns the judges. And, boy, I'd rather have one inch of judge than half a mile of justice, anytime. Don't worry, work! Work that old bronc of yours over and let's quit this loafing! When you go to jail, I'll be your valet."

Rousing day came, and a cluster of houses where strings of crimson chilli hung over roofs, and twin spirals of smoke told of gentle Mexican-Americans, who were cooking breakfast.

From the leather-faced patriarch of the ranch, it was learned that the relief force had passed that region some twelve hours before. And, by a rapid mental calculation, Jerry estimated that he and Biloxi were traveling two miles to one for the men from Querida. This cheered him. He'd possibly meet with the expedition before it reached the last leg of its journey. As they were saddling their ponies after breakfast, two young women leaned against a patio corner and watched Jerry out of smiling eyes. And, as he rode away, one of them said, "Good-by, cowboy, come back when the chilli is green!" Jerry doffed his hat in a salute that had in it a gesture that caught the flirtatious fancy of the maidens and sent them off into giggles of delight.

"Hound!" laughed Biloxi. "You sure know the women, don't you?"

"There it is!" shouted Jerry, ignoring the remark and pointing with a hand toward a low hump of purple haze showing over the rim of the distant horizon. "Come on!"

"What?" asked Biloxi.

"The spur that's west of the Bar Heart Bar. I'd know that old mountain, if I saw it in a looking-glass."

"Sure is," murmured Biloxi. "Now, boy, we got to go slow. Yonder's where the greasers, ahead of us, turned off. They're wise! There's only one way that we can head into that valley, safe. And the Querida Mexicans sure took it. We've got to come up Deep River and force Cortez and Hatch to carry the fight to us across flat ground. With them squatting in the trees, they'd see us twenty miles away. Anyhow, they'll have more men than we've got. But whoa! wait a minute! You remember a boy called Milk River? A fellow you beat up because he sneered at Billie Lindell and you?"

"I sure do! I knocked him loose from his boots that morning."

"He's working for Hatch and has four or five men with him. He was to hide out south of the Bar Heart Bar, when the rush on that ranch was to be made, and kind of keep all the south end covered. Of course, if he's at his position, when we come in, he'll see us and send a smoke-sign to Hatch. That'll make things bad for us. And maybe the entire scheme will be changed, and Bad Jack Hatch and Cortez will turn their attention to us until we're whipped. Boy, I sure wish that we could catch that outfit ahead in time to stop it from sliding down from the last hills that lay between us and where Milk River and his crew are standing!" Biloxi said.

"You figure, then, that El Sabueso and Bad Jack ain't moved yet, eh?" Jerry asked.

"Sure they ain't moved. Didn't I bust up the Bloodhound? And didn't you hurt Hatch, silly? They wouldn't be in shape under two or three days. Then I have an idea that they have figured by this time that you and I slid into the Bar Heart Bar. The way we shoved their broncs along ahead of us, when we beat it, sure wiped out any of our signs, and left them fellows lean and lonesome and up in the air as to just where we went and how we did it. They wouldn't think of our heading back into the country controlled by Cortez. No, sir, I'll bet that Hatch didn't get on the prod until last night or this morning. Florrisant, back of his stone house, couldn't be smoked out in this short time," Biloxi surmised.

"You're correct, I believe. What's that way over to your right? Looks like a cloud—over yonder, just shunting up on the edge of the first big mesas?" Jerry asked.

"It is a cloud—a cloud of dust. Per Schedule, that's those Mexicans, and they're heading for Gun-Barrel Water Hole. That means camp. It must be a good ten-hour ride from us to them, but, with any kind of luck, we'll get in on 'em late this afternoon. Too much daylight, sun and sand, for those soft ponies of theirs, I reckon," Biloxi told him.

Jerry was like a boy. His intensity of eagerness kept him bobbing from one side of the saddle to the other. Rambling Red felt the anxiety of his master and set a pace that Biloxi's pony had a hard time to follow. At five o'clock they rode up to a camp around which sat several scores of grim mountain men from Querida.

"Who is Jerry Kerry?" asked a tall cadaverous-looking Mexican who arose as Per Schedule and Biloxi dismounted. "From that red horse, I judge it would be you, señor."

"You're right, friend," replied Jerry. "Who are you?"

"Fernando Artesia. The padre sent us ahead of you, and we had hoped to make the Bar Heart Bar to-night. But many of our horses have tired, and we laid over at this water hole to rest up. It is but twenty miles from here to the Lindell ranch. And five miles away is a small Mexican horse rancher from

whom we can get relief ponies should ours not prove able to stand a fast ride on the morrow. We are at your service, señor, and now that you have joined us, your orders will be our pleasure. Boys," he turned to his men, "these are the Americans who rescued our friends, the Del Gados."

A vibrant cry of greeting arose from the gathered Mexicans.

"You had adventure in plenty at The House of the Ghostly Priests, I dare say," said Artesia, "tell us what you discovered."

Whereupon, Jerry launched into a rapid narrative of the action that had taken place in the monastery and its results. After this, he and Biloxi mingled with the men, discovering that many of them knew that region and all the section drained by the Deep River, as well, if not better, than he or his companion. Toward sundown, with Biloxi, he rode to the horse ranch of a Mexican named Ferez to put up for the night, after instructing Artesia to follow him in the morning.

After supper, while he was questioning some of Ferez's men, Rambling Red, who had been turned loose with Biloxi's pony in a lot, approached the gate against which Jerry was leaning and nozzled his shoulder. Jerry reached out and unconsciously patted the sorrel's head. Rambling Red insisted on more of the petting which attracted Jerry's attention.

And, as he stared, a sudden suggestion came to him. It crashed and boomed through his brain. It rendered him weak, and caused him to face Ferez in a sudden swing that startled the Mexican.

"How far is it from here to the Bar Heart Bar?" he asked.

"A little under fifteen miles," was the answer.

"What you thinking?" shot Biloxi. "Man, you couldn't ride up this valley with Milk River covering the narrowest spot. Where he's hidden, the bottom narrows to less than three hundred yards."

"How far is that place from here?" Jerry asked, while his eyes fairly danced. "I mean to where you think that Milk River is hiding out?"

"It's a good nine miles. There's a row of hills that come right down to the river and, on this end of that place, is the spot where you can bet that Hatch has planted Milk River and some more boys. Have you gone crazy?" Biloxi demanded.

"Ferez, I want a pony and a spare hackamore."

"*Si!* señor, you shall have both!" the Mexican promised.

"If you aim to romp that way," said Biloxi in a submissive tone, "then I see that I lose some sleep, for I must romp along at your fender."

"You stay here, old-timer, I'm following a hunch that was sent me by Heaven. And I want to ride it alone. I'll meet you, boys and Artesia, where the hills bust into the river, the first thing in the morning. Now I'm gone," Jerry said.

"What you intend to do? Ride alone? You will like——!" Biloxi exclaimed, his eyes flashing determination.

"Don't be a fool, old-timer!" Jerry smiled, as he laid a hand on Biloxi's arm. "I'm going to ride my Rambling Red up to where Milk River's on guard, and then, in the trees, take off his saddle and bridle, put on this hackamore, and, pinning a note to it, send Rambling Red to the Bar Heart Bar. I'll tell them of the good luck that's riding their way, and ask Billie how goes everything and where Cortez and Hatch are."

Biloxi fell back on a feed-box.

"He'll do it," laughed Jerry. "I've tried him out, and he's run to the Bar Heart Bar from a farther distance than he'll have to do to-night."

"But Milk River will kill him or rope him!" cried Biloxi.

Jerry withered him with a look of indignant scorn.

"He'll never lay a hand or a rope on my bronc," he said. "Ain't this whole country chockful of Ferez's horses? Ain't it now? Won't Milk River think, in this moonlight, that my pony is nothing but a stray horse going to the river for water? Stand aside, old partner, and let me use that box top to write this note on. Ferez, get me a piece of paper and something to write with."

The Mexican, electrified by Jerry's scheme, flew to the house and brought back paper and pencil. In a few moments, Per Schedule was riding Rambling Red away from the ranch while, at his side, he was leading a rangy-looking mustang loaned to him by the Mexican horseman. Biloxi stood and stared after him very much like a man in a dream.

It was eleven o'clock when Jerry, after working a furtive way through the timber, came out on the edge of the hills and beheld the river below him glistening like a ribbon of silver. With his usual precaution, he reconnoitered all the high ground, investigated the converging walls of the hills, where these broke off to admit the channel of the river, and was about to hurry back to his horse when, in the darkest spot of the timber, at the narrowest part of the cañon, he saw a flash of flame—a match! After this, from time to time, he caught a tiny ruby spark—a glowing cigarette. Here was a question!

Exactly below that spot of fading and glowing crimson, he saw the faint track of a rough wagon-road, which Rambling Red must follow to pass the sentry. The man behind that cigarette would be less than one hundred and fifty yards from the highway.

And that meant, possibly, the destruction of big-hearted, faithful, affectionate Rambling Red. But this thought died, as Billie's danger loomed in his mind.

That settled it! Rambling Red must take the risk. If he fell, then Jerry was there with the second horse. And he'd try to sneak up on the sentry and drop a bullet into him before he raced through the narrow river gorge.

He rushed back to his pony, unsaddled it, removed the bridle and put on the hackamore, which was made of sorrel horse hair that lost itself in Rambling Red's coat. Then, around the cheekpiece of the halter, he wound the note that he had written, binding it securely with a string. This done, he took the horse's head in his arms and fondled it as a woman would a child. All the while, he maintained a constant whispering in the ears that rose and fell with marvelous understanding.

He faced the horse down the hill, smacked it gently on a haunch, and was filled with delight when Rambling Red, tossing his head and sniffing the air, started off on a slow walk, increased it as he slipped down the hill, and broke into a trot when he came out upon the road. Then, as if destiny were guiding his movements, he broke into a loud and calling nicker which sounded like a stallion calling his mares about him. Tail up and mane flowing out in streamer style, his legs rising and falling, in that long road-devouring fox trot, Rambling Red approached the narrow opening of the hills, went into it like a fantastic mechanism, seen in a dream, and then vanished.

Per Schedule flopped to the earth, his throat throbbing, the perspiration pouring from his forehead, his hand twitching and tears watering his eyes. Overcome, he threw himself face downward and gave vent to tears. When the paroxysm of his frenzy had passed, he saddled the mustang and, mounting it, sought a high spot in the pines from which he could watch both sides of the spur. Here he waited, his mind filled

with unbelievable visions, joys, fears, doubts, plans and pains. Over on the far ledge, above the gurgling water of Deep River, an occasional match glare, followed by the ruby head of a burning cigarette, told him of a sentry who watched, and a danger that lurked there in the unfathomable gray of the night.

Up at the Bar Heart Bar a state of siege existed.

Humpy, the boy who had gone to rescue Jerry, returned with the unbelievable narrative that he had penetrated the line of the outlaws and had met, ridden with, and talked to Jerry Kerry. He told of Biloxi and of Catalina and Carlos. And he boasted that Per Schedule was going to Mexico to bring back a force, which would annihilate the brigands of Cortez and Hatch.

But, as the hours dragged into days and no sign of Jerry came, and yet no move was made by El Sabueso, Billie and Bob Florrisant were filled with a hideous fear that Per Schedule and his companions had been followed and murdered. But why didn't the bandits show themselves? Finally, came the very day that Jerry and Biloxi and Artesia and his men were riding through the desert on the short route from Querida to the Bar Heart Bar. At dawn, one of the men under Bob reported that Circle H riders were forming in the hills ten miles away. At noon, more than fifty of these had been seen. By two o'clock, they had forced in the outer guard line of the Bar Heart Bar, and Bob was furiously building sand and log abutments about the barn, where he had stabled the best of the horses.

At five o'clock, Bad Jack had waved a flag of truce, and Bob Florrisant had sent one of his men out to meet a courier from the outlaws. This man called on the ranch to surrender, giving a guarantee that all lives would be spared, except that of Per Schedule, and that all cowboys, women and children would be allowed to take their belongings and enough vehicles and horses to transport them to Alamogordo. When his cowboy returned with this ultimatum, Bob Florrisant sent him back with the curt reply, "No!"

After that, the outlaws wormed their silent way in a vast semicircle three quarters around the main building. The only part of the ranch, uncovered by them, was the Deep River bottom which led to the south.

Just as the sun went down, they opened a furious fire that wounded two of Bob's cowboys. Three of their men were seen to dash toward a clump of stones, but, before they had gone thirty feet, all three fell, picked off by the clever marksmanship of Florrisant's punchers. Then fell the curtain of night, decorated with the moon and stars. The hours dragged to the monotonous and fearsome punctuation of desultory firing. The women, led by Billie, cooked and carried food to the cowboys, hiding back of coverts around the main adobe. Midnight passed. Two o'clock came—two-thirty! And then a clatter of hoofs sounded from down the river, and Billie, hearing this, rushed to the south windows and, peering into the field of the moon's golden light, beheld a vision that stunned and choked her with emotion.

She recognized Rambling Red. And he was coming on the dead run—his pistonlike legs hitting the earth in long, quick strides, which brought him forward at an alarming rate of speed. "Bob!" she cried to Florrisant, who was sitting near the bunk house behind a wall of sandbags, "have one of the boys open that south gate!"

"What is it?" he asked.

"Jerry Kerry's horse is coming, and he is riderless."

Bob flung open the gate and Rambling Red came in. He stopped behind

the south wall of the house and pawed the earth, until Billie rushed out and flung her arms about his neck.

Her eyes took in the situation at a glance.

"Why, he ain't got a saddle!" exclaimed Bob. "I wonder! And that's a Mex hackamore! What's this, Billie?"

He untied the note that was wound about the cheekpiece of the halter. Billie snatched it from his hand. "You hold him!" she cried, "until I read this!" Into the house she rushed, placed the note under a candle, and read:

DEAR MISS BILLIE: I'm coming with an even hundred Mexicans from Querida. Right now, I'm laying up above Ferez's horse ranch, where the road passes through a narrow gulch alongside the river. We'll be hitting your place about ten o'clock. I've been to Querida, where we found your mother, who is well, and where the Mexicans are sure anxious to get a squint at El Sabueso. Let me know what is going on with you and which way is the best for us to bump into Cortez and Bad Jack. Just tie another message to Rambling Red, give him a little grain and a drink of water, and send him back to me. He may not get through, for there's a question about that river gorge. I have one of Bad Jack's men with me, who has thrown in with us, and he tells me that Milk River is guarding that gulch road. But, if Rambling Red is shot, those fellers will never find your note, for I'm within shooting distance of that road and will sure burn powder enough to keep them away from my bronc. Don't worry, little lady, I'm coming to you and coming fast, and I'll be at the Bar Heart Bar exactly on time. Gee whiz! but I'll be glad to see the old place and Bob Florrisant and—*you!*

PER SCHEDULE.

She trembled like a leaf. Again she read the note, then cried to Maria, "Get my riding clothes, my carbine, six-shooter and belt!" She stuffed the note in the front of her waist.

"What would you do, señorita?" the old woman asked.

"Maria, Jerry Kerry is down Deep River and wants to know how to bring one hundred Mexicans to our rescue. I'm going to him. He has found my mother—! Something tells me to go to him."

In a few moments, with the aid of Maria, Billie was fully dressed for the road. She looked half-child, half-woman, in her dainty, well-made, doeskin breeches, her brown jacket and cavalier's wide-brimmed brown sombrero. But she appeared like a boy as she strapped her belt and gun about her and slung a saddleboot with a carbine in it around her shoulders.

She kissed Maria silently, but fondly, then turned to the door.

"Bob," she said, "my saddle is hanging on the wall. Please throw it on Jerry's horse and have one of the men fetch a little grain and some water. I've just received a note from Jerry that he is only fifteen miles away with a hundred men. I'm going to him to show him the safe way to our relief."

Bob's old face twisted in utter agony. A groan escaped his lips. "Why, *chiquita,*" he said, "I can't allow you to take such a risk. After all these years, my dearie, suppose that something should happen to you. I'd never forgive myself."

A brisk tattoo of rifle shots awoke the stillness of the night. "They're edging around to the south!" cried one of the outlying Bar Heart Bar sentries.

"Stop 'em!" yelled Bob. "Slide out to the east, some of you boys, and pour lead into any of the hounds that try to make for the river! Run back of that wall!"

"Yes, hold them five or six minutes, Bob," said Billie, "till we can get a little water and grain into Rambling Red and let him blow a few moments!"

"Don't go, honey!" pleaded Bob.

"Bob, I've got to. Jerry Kerry tells me that he has found my mother and that she is safe. Something, Bob dear, deep down in my inner being tells me that Jerry Kerry is in danger and that

he needs me. I can't tell you what it is, but I must ride and ride at once."

The old man choked, but for his life, as he often told in days to come, he could utter no protest, offer no objection that would have counted, in the least, with the girl.

"He's come, at last, eh?" was all that he could say.

"Yes, Bob," Billie replied.

Bob Florrisant bowed his head, shouted to one of the boys, who brought a panful of grain from an outside cellar and, while this man fed and watered the horse, he saddled it. As Rambling Red refreshed himself, Bob stood off and fed his eyes on the face of the girl.

"Good-by, old friend," said Billie, "it's time to bridle him!" She extended her hand, but Bob swept her to his mighty breast and hid her face in his long whiskers as he kissed it repeatedly. Then he put the bit in the mouth of Jerry's pony, slipped a headstall over his ears, and assisted Billie to mount.

"Jerry Kerry has won his name!" she called back to him from the saddle. "He tells me that he will be here at ten o'clock in the morning. If he does, he's Per Schedule, isn't he?" Bob made no reply. But, as Billie touched Rambling Red with a boot heel and dashed away like a streak, Bob thought of how her costume exactly matched the wonderful color of the pony's coat. Less than two hundred yards from the gate, and Billie's form could scarcely be seen. So small it was, so slender and slight that, as she rode leaning along Rambling Red's flowing mane, she seemed to blend with the color of the handsome sorrel. Soon she vanished completely, and only the sound of a running horse came back to suggest the route over which she rode tearing through the night. Then this ceased and only the noise of the river was heard.

"Now, boys," yelled Bob Florrisant, as he picked up a long rifle, "come on! Let's give these fellows so much hot lead in their eyes that they'll never know what has happened."

"Tell us where to stand and shoot, old hand!" yelled a cowboy.

"Come on, then!" cried Bob. "It's up on this roof for us. When daylight comes, we can sure get a different slant at those fellows from the top of this old house."

With a rush twenty men surged into the patio of the adobe and crowded into the living room, through this, to a front hall from the floor of which a ladder reached to the roof. In a few moments, the roof fire had dislodged many of the lurking forms firing from the brush of the plain. Then a cowboy raised a sudden cry of alarm.

"Look yonder!" he shouted. "There are twenty or thirty men circling those first hills and burning a hole in the night as they head south!" A low groan escaped Bob Florrisant's lips.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHEN A GUN WENT WRONG.

JERRY KERRY suffered more in the first twenty minutes after Rambling Red had disappeared than he had ever before suffered in his life. But, as the moments passed, he set about examining the lay of the land around him. Scarcely three quarters of a mile stretched before him and the man back of the cigarette, on the cliff above the road.

He saw that this earth was a tree-covered tangle, an upheaval, and a breaking-off of some gigantic fault in the crust of the granite which had dropped into an amazing formation. And, while he stared, a grim resolution formed itself in his mind, the feasibility of which forged in upon him like a definite assurance of success.

Fancy, if you will, a spur which nature had twisted and ground into a

huge double letter S. And, then, imagine the crest of that ridge, gashed and bitten by the processes of decay, erosion and rain and wind, into a saw-tooth top upon which the trees grew in a thick formation not unlike a regiment of soldiers. That blinding, impenetrable, gloomy forest, wandering over the double letter S hills, was the ground over which Per Schedule, of a sudden, determined to ride his horse—to ride Ferez's mustang as far as he could, in order that he might be close to the sentry of Bad Jack, when Rambling Red raced out of the cañon.

Into the density of the trees he went, at once, depending, in case of his mount's progress being heard, on the hope that the guard would believe that it was some of the stock from the horse ranch feeding among the sweet high grasses of the spur. But the needle carpet, over which he passed, gave forth no sound, and the pine tops shut out the stars and moonlight.

It took Jerry nearly three hours to travel less than seven hundred yards. Then he dismounted, tied and muzzled the mustang, took his rifle, and began to edge a way toward the river rim of the spur. Staring through the trees, he saw a wall of light—it was the moon-swept region of the abyss through which ran Deep River. He was closer to the outpost than he had any idea. He tiptoed over the pine needles—his ears and eyes straining, his pulses pounding, his ears echoing the beat of the rushing blood that rang through his head.

Then he smelled the faint odor of wood smoke.

The camp of Milk River and his aids. Where was it? How was he to find out? He stopped, tried to tell the direction of the wind. But, in the trees and dark, this was a hopeless task. Jerry's spirits sank, and a huge and desolate helplessness assailed him. Why had he objected to Biloxi's society? Now, if Biloxi were with him, he could creep through those trees and try to find the spot from which that smoke was coming. But, as this regret surged through him, a slight whiff of moving air hit his cheek, and after it came the distinct smell of burning pine. It was being wafted to him directly from the north.

In this direction, he set his face and worked a tedious way, inch by inch, from tree trunk to tree trunk, until he had come upon the top of one of the many indentations of the ridge. Here he smelt the smoke readily, and once he saw its thin veils, sailing through a silver band of the sky light, as they filtered through a rift in the pine tops that opened and closed by some force of a vagrant wind along their crests.

"Huh!" he mused, "that sure told me something."

Once more torturing progress, down and up, to the top of another gash in that spur, and he saw a vision which froze the blood in his veins. It was a dying camp fire, around which he made out a group of sleeping figures. These he counted.

Five men! Could he do it? Would he dare to attempt such a feat?

Then he riveted his eyes on the camp site and, as it passed under the scrutiny of his far-sighted eyes, he detected another form, leaning against a tree trunk with a rifle across its knees from which the camp fire light reflected in a bewildering manner. If that man were asleep—or if he would just turn his face in some other direction!

The form at the tree vanished; the gleaming barrel of the gun faded from sight. Jerry was filled with a huge sweep of exultation. That man, whoever he was, had been posted as a guard, and now he had succumbed to early morning sleep and involuntarily had fallen from the support of the tree against which he had been leaning. Per Schedule did not linger a second in

doubt. Indecision left him, and a great definiteness raced through him.

Less than forty yards stretched between him and the men ahead—and over this region many huge pines reared their lengths toward the sky. He slipped along at remarkable speed and, at last, but fifty feet more lay between him and the victims sleeping beside the fire. Out came his gun, his six-gun, and, grasping this in one hand, carrying the carbine in the other—finger inserted in its trigger guard—he stepped gingerly and swiftly to the last tree before the fire. He was staring down at the sleeping men around it, when a voice behind him snarled in a low tone, "Move, you sneaking pack rat, and I'll make a sieve out of you!"

That grating voice back of him sent chills racing up and down Jerry's spine —not so much the effect of fear as that of surprise. He swung around to stare directly into the vicious face and snaky, squinting eyes of Milk River. The sleeping men roused, and sat up in their blankets to blink across the fire and to see nothing, for Jerry and Milk River were lost, to their sleepy vision, in the shadows of the trees.

Of a sudden, every cell in Jerry's body was alert to some subconscious instinct. His eyesight became very keen, and, as Milk River advanced upon him, Jerry's vision centered on his gun.

He saw Milk River's thumb on the heavy hammer, and realized that this frontier model six-shooter, single-action .45 gun had its hammer notch filed, and that all that Milk River had to do was to draw back that heavy thing beneath his thumb and release it. But it wasn't the hammer, and it wasn't the rigid muzzle of the gun that held Jerry's attention. It was the cylinder. He was peering steadfastly at one chamber—the chamber that would revolve and fall under the firing pin of the hammer.

As a man, in a dream, sees every step of some horrible accident, so Per Schedule's magnified vision, by the aid of the light of the camp fire, saw five of the chambers of the gun. In four of these, there was a dull, gray object back of the cylinder front—bullets in front of loaded shells. But that fifth chamber, the one which must fall in place when Milk River used his thumb, was empty. Like a flash, Jerry recalled his own habit of wearing a dead shell, beneath his hammer, as a matter of precaution in case he dropped his gun out of its holster.

He waited for no more. He did not fire his own gun. But, with the snap of a rattler, his heavy, seven-inch barrel flew up, out and then down, and crashed across Milk River's face. There was an audible click, as the hammer of the outlaw's gun fell on its empty chamber, and then Milk River groaned as he slumped to the earth. Jerry jumped back of him and, leveling his gun at the half-wakened men, said in a rasping tone, "Sit where you are—the first to move out of his blankets gets shot!" Then the men jerked to instant wakefulness.

"It's Per Schedule!" cried a man whom Jerry recognized as having seen the night that he fought with Bad Jack Hatch at the Circle H.

"You," said Jerry, indicating the man who had fallen asleep at the tree, "you get up and drag Milk River to the fire. I want all of you in front of my eyes."

The man hurried to Milk River and dragged his senseless body to the glare of the fire. Some ropes were lying on the ground. And, with these, Jerry ordered the man who had brought Milk River before him, to truss up his companions. When all were securely tied to trees, Per Schedule made a slip knot and pinioned the arms of the bandit who had made prisoners of his pals. Then Jerry, having bound the hands of Milk River, dashed some water in his face, reviving him. Milk River sat up

and stared about him. "Who did that?" he queried, and everybody laughed.

"Next time," said Jerry, "you look at your gun before you start smoking somebody out. It's a safe thing to carry five shells only in a six-shooter, but you always want to know where that empty shell is laying."

The chagrin that flecked across Milk River's face was as though a butterfly had flown between it and the sun, casting its delicate shadow there. But the rustler's eyes roved across Jerry's face and form, as though they had caught the appearance of something supernatural or alarmingly strange. His lips moved, and a jerky flow of unintelligible words issued from his throat. His was the detestable visage of a craven.

"Louder!" said Jerry.

"I said," hissed Milk River, now clearly under the dominance of some tremendous fright, "that if you'll give me a chance, I can tell you something that'll be worth listening to."

"Can you get up?" Jerry asked.

The bleeding man staggered to his feet.

"Come into the trees!" ordered Jerry, poking his gun into his captive's ribs. Milk River walked head down into the forest. When they had gone about fifty feet, Jerry stopped his man and, facing him, spoke the one word, "Well!"

"El Sabueso is coming here," remarked Milk River in such a casual tone that it stunned Jerry.

"How do you know?" he asked.

"He just sent me word. Not over thirty minutes ago."

"How did he send you word?" Jerry demanded.

"Fire sign from that big signal chimney that the Apaches used to use the west of the Bar Heart Bar. I was up on a bald spot on this ridge, waiting for that sign, when you came along. That's how I was back of the trees and saw you. And that's how my gun was that way. I fell down and lost my Colt and must have spun the cylinder, somehow."

"Why is he coming here?" Jerry asked.

"Because he's following somebody that's coming down the river road. He told me to be on guard," Milk River explained.

"You're trying to run a sandy, fella! How'd he tell you all that?"

"We agreed on signals. Three flashes of long fire meant that Cortez would come to see me—two, that I was to see him. One long flash and two short meant that somebody was coming this way, and for me to stop him; and two long and one short meant that somebody had got by me and my boys. Just plain old Apache smoke and fire signs. The smoke signal by day was to be the same as the night fire flashes," Milk River said.

Then Cortez knew! Somebody was coming. Who was it? Rambling Red's flashing form, as Jerry had last seen it, pictured itself on his mind and, sequentially, Billie was suggested to his throbbing brain. Then he seemed to have a primitive intuition. Billie had chosen to deliver the note instead of sending it by his pony. She was coming down the cañon and must soon pass directly under Milk River's guard. And Cortez had seen her leave and was pursuing her. "Have you told any one of your men?" he asked.

"No. I was intending to, when you stepped out from a tree and was on top of that fire before I saw your face. Nobody knows anything."

"All right! This maybe means that you've saved your bacon. But you've got to go still further," Jerry told him.

"What do you want?" Milk River asked.

"Come on over with me to that place on the ledge and tell him to meet you.

I'll stand back of some trees so's he won't see me."

"No! I can't do that. It would mean my finish," Milk River protested.

"Why?"

"Because Uncompaghre Johnnie is on guard there, right now. And, in my condition, he'd scent something and plug a hole in me for turning yellow." His voice was raised to its normal tone and carried clearly to the camp fire. One of the tied men heard it.

"You bet that he'll plug you, and so will I as soon as I get a chance. Hi! Johnnie!" this man cried in a loud tone that awakened echoes throughout the trees.

"What is it?" came across the open space separating the ledge above the road from the rim on which Jerry stood.

"Get Milk River as soon as you see him. And watch this ridge! We're jimmed, over here!"

Then the sun came up with a rush, and the white light of the desert spilled its magic flood and banished the night as with a mighty erasing hand. The stars faded, and the moon hung like a ring of brass in the pale blue of the West.

There came the sound of a rushing horse galloping down the cañon. And the echoes of that ringing medley of hoofbeats bounded on the far cañon's wall, glanced back to Jerry's side of the river, and awoke him to instant action. He drove Milk River ahead of him and had just reached the edge of the timber, where he could glance into the gulch and see the road, when he caught sight of Rambling Red—his glossy coat a mass of muddy lather, his mouth flecking long ribbons of frothy white foam. Somehow, at that moment, he raised his eyes and saw Uncompaghre Johnnie. He recognized him instantly, squinting along his gun. Then a puff of smoke flew from Johnnie's weapon, and the tiny object on Red's back seemed to bend more fiercely than ever along the neck of the sorrel. Jerry recognized Billie's figure, though her riding clothes seemed strange. He never knew what prompted him to fling down his revolver and raise his carbine. But, before he realized it, he was drawing a bead on Uncompaghre Johnnie's head exactly as Johnnie was aiming a second time at Billie Lindell. Then he heard his carbine report, saw Johnnie leap to a half-erect posture, hang for a moment over the brink of the ledge, and then totter and fall to the white wheel marks of the wagon road below.

"Heavens!" said Milk River. "That was shooting!"

But Jerry did not answer. He was staring at Billie's hat with a huge rent through its crown, where Johnnie's bullet had plowed. He waited to see her lose her hold and fall under the flying feet of Rambling Red; but on she went, clinging to the noble horse, and riding well. Her little hands gripped the bridle reins far down under the throat of the horse; her legs were rigid—toes only in the stirrups; and her body was lifted from the saddle seat and held far down along the flowing mane of the sorrel. Jerry shouted her name, but on she went. Then he drew back his underjaw and, through his teeth, sent a shrill whistle into the air. Its effect was instantaneous. Rambling Red slackened his pace, jerked to a halt, and swung about. His ears lifted, his eyes roved the high hills till they centered on the waving arms of his master. Then Billie saw, and a thrill shot through Jerry as he caught her upturned face and the waving hand that she gestured so gracefully in his direction.

Then, when he was about to compel Milk River to descend the slope to the road, he caught sight of a band of horsemen swinging around the first bend to the south. Biloxi was in the lead, and he was handling his bronc as if he did not care what happened to it.

Artesia was seen back of Biloxi, and behind him the motley ponies of the mountain men from Querida.

"Look, Billie!" he cried. "Go meet that keg-built fellow in front and tell him to get to me pronto! After that you come up here."

"Are you all right?" Billie asked.

Was he all right? What was the anxious, wonderfully queer, motherly tone in that mellow voice? He was choking with its effect and, for a fraction of a minute, he stood as one stupefied with the wonder of involuntary delight. Then he drew off the spell, and shouted with all his exultant vigor.

"I'm as happy as if I was twins!"

Billie turned and rode abruptly to meet the onrushing men, enveloped in a cloud of dust. But, before going, she waved something mighty like a kiss.

"Which way will Cortez come upon this ridge?" Per Schedule asked Milk River, as his eyes followed Billie's figure.

"He'll come onto it from the west and, from that side, there's only one way that he can get to the top from north of this point. That's two miles from here, and just below a big clump of dead pine on a rocky outcrop, a trail drops off to the desert. There's where you'll see him first. Now will you say a good word for me? And will you keep me in white men's hands? If you turn me over to those Mexicans down there, I'll be dead the next time you see me."

"Boy," said Jerry kindly, "for what you done I feel like kissing you. And I'll sure see that you have a chance to get out of this country and make for your old Milk River in Montana."

"If I ever get back to Montana, I'll think a blizzard a blessing!" Milk River exclaimed.

"Come on till I get my bronc!" Jerry led his man back to the mustang that Ferez had loaned him, and here he was joined by Biloxi and Billie.

CHAPTER XVII.

CORTEZ BEGS IN VAIN.

JERRY was overcome with emotion in the presence of Billie, but all that he did was to smile his gracious and wonderful smile, doff his wide hat, exposing his tangled and curly red hair, and then, as though afraid to speak, center his attention upon Rambling Red, who was rubbing his wet face against Jerry's shoulder.

"Biloxi," he said, "this is Miss Billie Lindell."

Off came Biloxi's hat, and he mumbled something deep in his throat, but, with his eyes, told more than ever his lips could speak. Artesia's men were combing the hills. There wasn't time for Jerry to linger over the delight of that instant with Billie, nor to tell her how glad he was that she was safe. He did speak of the rent in her hat and, at his mention of this, she pulled the sombrero down and stared at it.

"I thought that it was the wind," she said. "My, what a narrow escape!"

Then Jerry thought to save her the horror, which would remain with her, if she viewed the remains of Uncompaghre Johnnie as she rode back up the cañon. "Billie," he said, "I've got to romp on top of this spur for a while, and maybe you'd kind of like to ride up with Biloxi and me. Then you can drop into the cañon and follow the road back home."

"I came to be with you," she said faintly, "and I won't be put aside now. I want to see how you and Biloxi and these Mexicans scatter Hatch's men." Biloxi smiled. Jerry caught sight of Artesia and, after changing his saddle from the mustang to Rambling Red, forced Milk River ahead of him and, with Biloxi and Billie, joined the leader of the Querida men. Reaching the camp fire of the outlaws, he posted a guard of five men, turned over Milk River to it, then whispered to Artesia

that the outlaw had been the means of his saving Billie Lindell's life and that, for this reason, he felt kindly toward him. "A life for a life!" he said to the Mexican. "And I wouldn't be bothered any, if you told your boys to let him take his horse and beat it out of this desert. Anyhow, he's got a broken arm, under that bandage."

"You are a good man, friend!" smiled Artesia. "It shall be as you wish. Milk River will go free."

"Get your boys all together, and send them after me! Cortez is coming this way and is about due," Jerry directed.

Billie, Per Schedule, Biloxi, Artesia and his men rode hurriedly away from the camp fire, setting a silent course directly for the spot where Milk River had told Jerry that El Sabueso would appear. And hardly had the entire band concealed itself in various parts of the forest before voices were heard and then the head of a horse appeared. Soon twenty riders, with Cortez, issued over the top of the ledge at the head of the desert trail, headed directly for the camp. Jerry's voice shouted in a loud command, "Hands up, and every man face this way!"

The excitement was high—the Queridans, flaming with white-hot anger at the sight of Cortez's face, rushed forward and, in the mêlée that followed, friends and foes were intermingled so that the hidden force in the trees was afraid to shoot lest it hit some of Artesia's men. This confusion gave Cortez his opportunity.

He struck spurs to his pony, dashed into a heavy clump of underbrush, which nearly scraped him from his saddle, and was lost to sight. But Jerry was on his heels. And, as Rambling Red leaped and turned and tore away, Billie swung her pony about and followed the big, foaming sorrel.

On the rim of the spur, a rapid battle was taking place, and no man had time for thought of Jerry, the girl, or El Sabueso. Anger and revenge raged in the hearts of Artesia's men, and Biloxi was surely a fiend in the short and terrible contest. When it was all over and the dead and wounded had been taken count of, Artesia sent his men under Biloxi's leadership off for the Bar Heart Bar. Then, with but three of his most stalwart mountain trackers, he took up Jerry's trail and pursued it through the trees at a fast clip.

When Jerry had torn away from the scene of the scrap at the head of the trail, he gloated over the fact that fate had presented him with this longed-for chance to square accounts with the Bloodhound. But he had gone scarcely a hundred yards before he realized that he had a genius at woodcraft to contend with. Cortez was using every trick known to desperate horsemen to put distance between himself and pursuit. He invariably had a tree somewhere behind him that screened his flight, and Jerry filled with a surge of exasperation as, time after time, he raised his carbine to fire only to see El Sabueso vanish as if by magic.

But Rambling Red was an unbeatable pony, and following a running animal was second nature to him. Jerry had nothing to do but give the sorrel his head, and take as many jerks and jars off his back as he could by clever and high riding. Soon the flight led him to the edge of the gulch at the bottom of which ran Deep River, and here he rode swiftly and seemed to gain on the man ahead.

He stared down into the savagely flowing river, and saw its muddy waters churning and slapping the rocky sides of the gorge with a ferocity that strongly suggested human anger. And, above the pound of his pony's hoofs, came the burr and gurgle of the stream. Cortez flashed into view, but was lost to sight again almost as soon as he appeared. A mile went by, then

another. Now the trees were thinning out, and the earth was falling away to the bottom land with its rushing water.

Twice El Sabueso turned in his saddle and cast a hurried glance at Jerry. But he made no attempt to use his gun, and contented himself with taking advantage of the fact that his pony was fresher than Rambling Red and was actually beginning to gain and to open wide gaps in the distance that lay between him and Per Schedule. But destiny was holding to the bridle reins of the Bloodhound, and was guiding that long-legged pony of Cortez straight as a line into a grotesque and tragic play, which would become legendary over all the region in the years to follow.

Now came the last of the hills—the very last of those curiously formed letter S hills, and there the ground slipped abruptly to the banks of the river. Down there, down along the broken and twisting river bank, ran the level road, for which, it was clear, that Cortez was heading. Once on that highway, his pony could leap ahead and outdistance the tired horse under Jerry's legs.

"Come on!" yelled Jerry to Rambling Red. "Old-timer, here's where you have got to show the stuff that horses are made of. Take him, Red, take him, and fly at him!"

The gallant horse responded, but it wasn't enough. Cortez still gained. Then Jerry's lips went in, his eyes narrowed, and, patting the mane of Rambling Red, he did something that he had never before done to that splendid animal. He stuck into its shanks the heavy three-inch rowels of his spurs, and felt his throat tighten in a sickening manner as a huge shiver ran through the pony's frame, and an audible moan escaped its mouth.

But Rambling Red leaped and burst forward in a frenzy of speed. At that moment, Cortez turned and saw what was happening, and here he made a vital mistake—a mistake which so many horsemen are prone to make in a race. He lifted his quirt, and, in swinging it, flashed it across the eyes of his pony, then brought it down, time and again, into the withers along the flank and about the neck and shoulders of his mount. It wasn't the beating that distracted his horse; it was that first fatal flirt of the long lashes. These had blinded him in one eye and had taken his spirit. The animal seemed to leap, to sunfish for a bound or two, and then, to quit—cold.

Ahead, and off to the right, there loomed an upheaved mass of shale, loose and slablike. Into this Cortez swung—his intent being, no doubt, to risk a fall in the hope of crossing the hump and gaining the river. But close on his heels came Rambling Red, and into that slippery footing Jerry guided him with a soothing voice and a taut line on his bridle. When the crest of the shale was negotiated, Cortez flew about and sent a bullet from his .45. But Jerry ducked, and the missile went wide.

Then the pony of El Sabueso stumbled, rolled, and slid swiftly toward the brink of the river's bank which fell for thirty feet sheer down to a sand bar. Cortez was left on the treacherous slope, his hands clutching at the shale, his feet digging in and sending masses of loose surface material after the horse, which was just vanishing over the edge of the precipice. Jerry leaped Rambling Red to the right, felt his feet slip, then hold, and the blowing horse was turned squarely upon the exact summit of that mass of stones. Here it held, for an instant, as Jerry dismounted, pulled it over to the road side of the hump, and sent it sliding to the bottom.

Then he stood and looked down at El Sabueso now edging his way toward the north end of the shale. And, as he stared, there issued from the bottom of

the pit, where the bandit's pony had vanished, an unearthly and chilling animal cry.

Jerry's eyes riveted on that abyss. Then he knew. That sand bar, which seemed so solid and so dry, was but a thin veneer of moistureless dirt that covered a seething and sucking bed of quicksand. A frenzy of fear rushed through him as he realized how closely he had escaped the fate of that horse. Then another fear stifled him. Cortez must not be allowed to succumb to that sand. He must be brought back to earth—dead or alive, he must be brought back, for, on his person somewhere or in his head, he held the secret to the lost gold.

Jerry stepped along the crest of the hill, until he was directly above El Sabueso, then he started down. And the nearer he approached the Mexican, the more deadly loomed the hate in the man's eyes. The mania of a moment ago, which had been aroused by fear of the riverbed, now had given way to hatred for the creature coming toward him. His gun had been lost when his horse fell and, save for his hands, he possessed nothing with which to defend himself. Step by step, his boots going down the shale sidewise, Jerry cut down the distance to his quarry, until but six feet lay between him and Cortez. Then he halted and spoke:

"I went to the House of the Ghostly Priests and rescued Loreto Lindell. She told me that you took a piece of paper from a locket that she wore about her neck. I want that paper."

Cortez smiled, his eyes working like those of an animal caught in a trap, and the fire that dwelt in their smoky depths was as an open window to the treachery of his mind. At that instant, he spoke, "I have the map, and I'll trade for it. What will you give?"

"I'm going to take it. And, if you know a man by the name of Artesia, who hails from Querida, and who has a hundred Mexicans with him, you know that you can expect but little mercy when they arrive. They are following me."

Once more the fear came into Cortez's face and eyes.

"The map to the Lindell gold for an assurance that you will not turn me over to these murderers! May I have your guarantee?"

"Sure!" said Jerry. "I'll take you in myself and surrender you to the officials at Sante Fe. You can depend on my word for this. Gimme the map!"

Lying flat on his stomach, his toes lodged in a mass of jagged shale points, El Sabueso watched Jerry like a hawk, as with one hand he fumbled in a pocket of his shirt. Slowly he brought out a buckskin bag, and slowly he lifted it along the surface of the slide toward Jerry who was stepping, inch by inch, toward him.

Jerry received the note and started back up the shale.

"That was not the compact!" shouted El Sabueso. "You said that you would take me with you."

"I'll get you," replied Jerry. "I'm just going after my rope."

He reached the top of the slope, where he saw Rambling Red standing on firm ground, staring at him. Down he went, uncoiled his lariat from its position on the front roll of his saddle, hurried back and flung the loop end to Cortez who fastened it under his arms. Jerry straightened, leaned against the lass-rope, and El Sabueso walked up the slippery shale. At the top, he joined Jerry and began removing the loop from his body. And, as he bent down, pulling the riata over his boots, he moved a bit closer to Per Schedule. Stepping out of the hemp, he gained another two feet, and, as the rope went clear of his body, he reached for and grasped Jerry Kerry's foot and hurled him down the river side of the shale. This contemptible action was accom-

plished at the exact instant that Jerry saw Billie Lindell, rushing toward him around a shelf of the cliff and heading onto the shale slope on the top of which he stood. He saw her face blanch and her eyes go wide as he felt himself totter and lean toward the river. Then he fell. But, even as he went, he clutched a leg of the Bloodhound and pulled him along and down and over the edge of the summit.

It seemed an eternity until his fingers, toes, knees, even his chin, digging in, reaching out, grasping, punching at the slate had eased his downward movement and brought him to a halt within four feet of the brink of the precipice. His eyes, out of their corners, saw El Sabueso fighting the moving surface of the deathly slide. Then the brigand ceased to move.

"Here, Jerry! Catch this!" Billie's voice sounded from above.

Per Schedule lifted his eyes and saw the girl waving the rope, which had been left hanging along the summit. Then she flung the end and expertly dropped it over Jerry's body. Per Schedule looped it under his arms, as Billie took up the slack and tried to pull him up the slope. But her tiny body did not have sufficient power to begin to overcome the pull of Jerry's weight.

"I can't budge you an inch!" she cried. "What will I do?"

"Hang on," yelled Jerry, "until some of our boys come this way! With this help, I can stay here till next Christmas!"

"But don't take any chances—there's the worst quicksand bed on the river directly under you!" she exclaimed. "Please don't move!"

"I won't! I'm just as silly as a fox! Don't you worry, Miss Billie, somebody'll romp by here soon, and then he can fold that end that you've got around a saddle horn and yank me out," Jerry told her.

At the mention of saddle horn, Rambling Red loomed into his vision.

"Watch my horse, Billie!" he cried. "I'm going to call him to me and, when he comes near you, grab his bridle and don't let him get on this side, or he'll slip into that sand!"

Billie signified that she understood. Then came Jerry's loud whistle. And soon Rambling Red's head showed above the summit of the slope. Billie, holding to the rope with one hand, caught the pony's bridle with the other and stopped him. Then, with what slack remained on the other side, she sprang at the saddle, dallied the rope quickly about the horn, and turned Rambling Red's head down the slope. The girl slipped along with the half-falling horse, who dragged Jerry up and out of danger and over the crumbling summit.

Just as he was about to lift the rope from his shoulders, Cortez emitted a fearful cry:

"Please, señor, please, do not let a man die like this! Throw me that rope and pull me out. Kill me when you get me on solid ground, but do not leave me here to die that horrible death! I beg you, señor, I beg you——"

Jerry's eyes popped from their sockets. He went chill all over, for he was staring at a wide part of the summit which had somehow started—perhaps, because of the force with which he had been pulled up the river slope—and was slipping with increasing speed and unbelievable weight down upon the cringing, piteous figure of El Sabueso, now clutching at an insecure hold on the utter edge of the cliff. Then the entire slope of the hump gave way. There was a long, increasing and then diminishing shriek, a crunching of rock, and after this—stillness.

Jerry waited for no more. He slipped to Billie's side—she was leaning against Rambling Red's shoulder, and said calmly, "We couldn't have

saved him, Miss Billie. I didn't have enough rope to have reached him in time. It just had to be, I reckon."

Something vastly tender, then appealing, crept into Billie's eyes as she stared at Jerry's face. Without a word she swayed a bit toward him, put out her arms and, as a little child flies to its father, in a moment of danger or fear, so Billie fell into Per Schedule's arms, lifted her hands to his head and held it tight as she snuggled into the comfort and solace of his wide chest. He patted her head and held her tight as he listened to a croonlike sound that was escaping her lips.

Far to the west, he saw the hurrying riders of Artesia and, twenty jumps before them all, rode the short-coupled pony of Biloxi. The Mississippian even at that vast distance could distinctly be seen. He was leading that band of horsemen straight to the lower end of the Bar Heart Bar.

It was after noon, when Billie and Jerry rode up to the Bar Heart Bar and learned the news of the fight which had been waging since ten o'clock. Bob Florrisant and Biloxi had ridden, side by side, into the affray, for Bad Jack Hatch had mistaken the relief force of Artesia for El Sabueso coming back after having caught Billie, and had allowed the Mexicans to cut in between him and the hills to the west. He and his men had fought valiantly, but the deadly sweep of the Bar Heart Bar hands, and the Queridans led by the bravery of Bob Florrisant and the desperate daring of Biloxi, frightened the outlaws to such a degree that they were easy victims. Hatch's men and Cortez's followers were shot down, or surrendered after but an hour's fight.

Kelly, Paducah, and others of the Circle H boys had been brought to the Bar Heart Bar wounded; but Bad Jack had been lost in the mêlée and escaped. That afternoon late, when the last of the Bar Heart Bar men returned to the ranch with exhausted horses, and reported that no trace of Bad Jack had been found, Bob Florrisant turned to Biloxi, with whom the old man had been talking, and for whom he had taken a sudden and violent fancy, and said, "I reckon that we drove him into that country west of Deep River. If he's in there, we might as well go to sleep, for he'll sure have to head back home or drop down this way, he can't get out."

"What's that coming yonder!" cried Biloxi, pointing to the west.

"Bad Jack!" grunted Paducah, who had raised himself from the improvised litter on which he was resting his wounded leg. "It sure is Bad Jack himself—but who's that back of him?"

Billie stepped to the scene that instant and, shielding her eyes from the sun, stared at the two forms trudging across the desert. "It's the little boy, Humpy!" she cried. "I declare! Think of it, Humpy capturing that great beast!"

But when Humpy came in—a deadly glitter in his eyes, his tiny hands gripping a huge long-barreled rifle—the amazement of the spectators turned into hysterical mirth. Bad Jack was a sight. And he seemed relieved, when he was surrendered to Bob and herded into an adobe where the rest of his gang were locked up.

"Lead your ace, sonny!" laughed Bob Florrisant to Humpy. "Tell us how you did it!"

"As soon as I saw those fellers come up from the south, I sure knew that it wasn't any of Cortez's men. I got a squint at that first fellow, and I knew that it was help. I slid out, when the fracas started, and got me a high spot over west and laid upon it. Directly I saw Hatch make a break for the ridge that leads to Deep River and, when he got on top, instead of heading north, he came west. I laid for him back of a stone pile and pulled down on him when

he rode by. Nothing will ever bother me near so much as the trouble I had keeping this right first finger of mine from yanking on the trigger to that smoke-burner I walked Bad Jack back home with. I wanted to perforate him, just to see what kind of stuff he's made of. That squares us for the beating that he gave me that time in Alamogordo. What'll you do with him, Bob?" Humpy asked.

"I'll turn him over to Sante Fe, and they'll punish him on the end of a rope," was Bob's reply.

And so it turned out. Bad Jack was hanged, and several of his important aids were imprisoned. But, because of Biloxi's testimony and his actions when with Jerry and during the last fight, he was granted immunity and went to work for Bob Florrisant. Billie hurried South and nursed her mother back to health. When she returned, she gave an enormous barbecue at which nearly all of Querida was present. Conspiring with Bob Florrisant, Jerry Kerry had withheld the news that he possessed a map that would certainly reveal the secret of Billie's ancestral gold.

But, after the great feast was over, and the Mexican girls and women and American and Mexican cowboys were about to race for the large barn where the dance was to begin, Jerry stepped out and, raising his voice, said, "Folks, follow Bob and Biloxi! Just before El Sabueso made his quick dive to his finish he gave me a map. That piece of paper had been concealed in a locket that belonged to the mother of Miss Billie's mother. I'm going to read it to all of you. Stand up close, for it sure is worth the ears of all of us. Then follow Bob and Biloxi!"

They crowded around him—Billie, in the front rank, stood astounded as she stared into Jerry's face. Her mother was as nonplused as she. Then Jerry read:

"Find four knots in the jamb of the door to the room, where a Prince of Spain once danced with the most beautiful woman who ever crossed the Rio Grande del Norte. Then, from the bottom of this jamb, measure four feet to the west and five feet straight out. There pull up a diamond-shaped pink quartz slab. Under this is what you seek!"

Bob Florrisant started to run, and after him tore Biloxi.

Then came Billie, her mother, Old Maria, Jerry and all the rest. "Which room is it, mother?" said Billie.

"The north room, my darling, for it was in that room that your grandmother danced with the second son of a king of Spain. She was said to have been the most beautiful woman who ever came out of Mexico.

When the eager crowd peeped over the shoulders of those that jammed the door, Biloxi was seen raising a huge pink slab.

Then he and Bob Florrisant bent over the place from which the flagging had been removed and pulled up a square stone into which had been set a ring bolt. After this, each of the men drew forth a square, heavy, ancient wooden box that strained their muscles to raise to the floor. In all, more than forty such miniature chests were ranged, side by side, when the men arose perspiring and announced that the treasure was all removed.

Billie's mother opened one of the boxes and exposed rows of dull gold coins filling it to the very cover. There were tears in her eyes, when she waved the crowd back to the dance and called for Per Schedule.

"How can I ever thank you, my boy?" she asked. "How can I ever hope to repay you?"

"Shucks!" he answered. "Just let me stay down on this land and romp around with my dad's old friend, Bob, and my buddy Biloxi, and build up this bunch of your cows till there won't be a brand like the Bar Heart Bar from

Brownsville to the Circle Dot. That's all the pay that I want."

He made as if to leave. Then he saw the padre from Querida talking to Billie at the door. Of a sudden, Billie looked in his direction and smiled. Then she broke open an envelope as the padre smiled into Jerry's eyes.

"I know it's treason," said the priest, "but all is fair—you know, don't you, Jerry Kerry? That aphorism was coined by one of your Irish ancestors."

Jerry waited, wrecking the rim of his hat as he crunched it in his hand. Then, when Billie raised her eyes to his, and he saw the startled look that she wore, he rushed from the room and sought a bench which was far from the house under the limbs of a pepper tree.

Here Billie found him a little later and sat down by his side.

"I have read the letter that you gave to the padre," she said. "What have you to say now, cowboy?"

"I reckon that all I can do is to unsay what I said to your mother. I was hoping that I could stay on here and be around Bob and Biloxi. But, Billie, after what you've just read, I couldn't any more work around you and look you in the eyes than I could pull a bead on you and throw one of my .45s into you. I can't help it, I reckon, but I just lost my head and went crazy over you, and that's all that I've got to say," Jerry told her.

"It isn't all that you've got to say, either!" she said, leaning her shoulder against his. "If you haven't any nerve, then I haven't any shame. You great booby of a boy, put your arms around me and tell me just one tenth as much as you wrote in that letter!"

From the barn came the crooning music of the concertinas. From above the two forms on the bench, now blended into one, there drifted down the golden-throated notes of a nightingale. And when, a long, long time afterward, Billie and Jerry entered the barn and were greeted with cheers by the dancing girls and high-heeled cowboys, Biloxi jumped out on the floor and cried at Jerry, "Didn't I tell you? Now didn't I?"

"Sob on, old hand! sob on!" laughed Jerry. "I don't want to be near anything that looks like you. Man, I'm going to try to dance, but I'll bet you my month's wages that neither one of my feet will touch the earth from now till the next fourteenth of February."

"Hi! *compañeros!*" yelled Biloxi, "Miss Billie and this old hound here, before me, are to be married by the padre of Querida at this ranch on St. Valentine's Day! No invitations necessary! Just ride up, and we'll sure have a romping good time!"

Bob Florrisant had Rambling Red all spruced up—ribbons wound in his tail and mane, his hoofs blackened and polished, Jerry's silver-mounted bridle strung with flowers. And now, at this precise instant, a back door to the barn was opened and Rambling Red was led into the glare of the lights and the madness of the music. At sight of him, the musicians stopped playing, and dancers halted on the floor.

The great sorrel raised his magnificent head and, looking at Jerry Kerry, sent a shrill nicker of joy into the echoing timbers.

"Come on!" cried Jerry, pulling Billie toward the door. "Let's go back to that amiable old bench, under the pepper tree."

As they ran out of the barn, Humpy said to Biloxi, "Say, Biloxi, Jerry may be plumb shy on finding out things as fast as some people I know, but pull my wisdom tooth if that hombre ain't just Per Schedule any old way that you want him to take the hurdles!"

The concertinas burst into a rollicking, jolly dance.

The High Grader

By Reginald C. Barker

Author of "The Key Log," etc.

STANDING in the darkness behind a set of timbers in a dripping, wet stope of the Golden Penny Mine, "Big Pete" Burns watched "High-grade" Hawes drop some specimens of rich gold ore into his dinner bucket. To all appearances he had stolen them from the vein upon which he had been working. Not until the miner had replaced the cover of his dinner pail and turned back to his work, did the big foreman light the cap lamp he had extinguished, and step forward.

"Well, Hawes," he said, "so that is the way you do it?"

The miner turned sharply at the sound of the foreman's voice, but there was no sign of fear in his eyes as he looked up. For a moment he seemed about to speak, then suddenly he scowled and the corded muscles of his huge, bare arms swelled as he clenched his fists.

"Hello, boss!" he said "Yeah, she's breakin' good to-night; but how come I didn't see your light as you entered the stope?"

"Because I extinguished it," replied Burns easily. "Seems that's about the only way to catch you high graders. You can go on top. You're through."

"Do you mean that I am fired?" asked the miner threateningly.

"We've no use for high graders in the Golden Penny," said the foreman.

Stooping quickly, High-grade Hawes caught up a short length of drill steel which leaned against the wall of the stope.

"You dirty skunk!" he exclaimed. "Think you can work the same game on me that you worked on my dad a few years ago, do you? For less'n two cents I'd crown you with this steel. You dirty four-flusher to sneak up on me without a light!"

"I'm here to see that no high grading goes on," Burns informed him. "For a long time I've been trying to find out who has been stealing high-grade ore.

Better put that steel down and take your medicine. You know it is a prison offense to strike a man underground."

In the flickering light of the carbide lamps the two men glared at each other; only the fact that they were more than a thousand feet beneath the surface of the ground prevented them from coming to grips. Around them was the heavy silence of the underground, punctuated only by a distant thudding of the machine drills in other parts of the mine, and the tiny, talking noises made by the tremendous pressure of the ground against the heavy timbers. The drip, drip, drip of water seeped through the roof overhead.

A drop of water struck the tip of the carbide lamp in the foreman's cap, and he raised a hand as the flame sputtered. Then he cursed, for his fingers had encountered a fishhook which was stuck in the rim of his cap, left there upon his return from one of the evening fishing trips to the river. A faint sneer crossed the face of High-grade Hawes as he watched the foreman disengage his fingers from the tiny barb.

"All right, Burns," he said, controlling his anger. "I could tell you something if I wanted to; but you ain't worth it. I'll go on top; but just you remember this; I'll get you good for sneaking up on me without a light."

"Meanwhile," said Burns ignoring the threat implied, "suppose you empty your dinner pail and leave that high grade here."

With an oath, High-grade Hawes jerked the cover off the bucket and threw the rich specimens of ore on the floor of the stope. Yellow with gold, they gleamed beneath the white flare of the carbide lamps.

"Remember, Burns," he called back over his shoulder, as he slouched away, "I'll get you, and I'll get you good!"

The big foreman shuddered at the menace in the high grader's tone, for he knew that he had broken an unwritten miner's law, which forbids a boss extinguishing his light for the purpose of watching a man at his work.

By just what chain of reasoning a miner arrives at the conclusion that taking rich ore is not stealing, none can say. Yet few among high graders would dream of helping themselves to the gold or silver once it has been converted into bars or coin.

For years it had been well known to his fellow workmen that High-grade Hawes sometimes helped himself to any particularly rich specimen he encountered while at work; but what he did with his high grade was the cause of much conjecture. Some were of the opinion that he sold it to one of the illicit buyers who maintain offices in many of the Western cities; others thought that he was "salting" it down for a time when he should become too old to follow his calling.

Still others were of the opinion that somewhere among the maze of mountains which surrounded the mines, High-grade Hawes cached his rich ore in a cave, to which sometimes he would retire and gloat like a miser over his ill-gotten treasure. Yet this seemed improbable if credence could be placed in the high grader's own statement that he only wanted one or two rich specimens from each mine in which he worked. As to what he wanted them for, he never told. Neither the good-humored banter of his fellow workers nor the innuendoes of the shift bosses under whom he labored ever elicited any information from him. Silent for the main part and strangely aloof from his companions, he kept the secret of what he did with his specimens.

As High-grade Hawes stumbled along beneath the dripping timbers of the big stope he was filled with rage against Pete Burns. Yet, strange as it may appear to those who have never worked

underground, the high grader's anger was not directed against the foreman because he had caught him taking ore; it was mainly because Burns had sneaked up on him without a light. A trivial cause for anger, perhaps, but one that caused the high grader's heavy features to twitch in the semi-gloom at memories which he would have forgotten, but which he could never forget.

A miner and the son of a miner, High-grade Hawes had a vivid memory of the day they had brought his father home severely hurt by a heavy blow over the head. It had been inflicted by Pete Burns in a fight which had occurred because he had sneaked up on the old man without a light. Since then, High-grade Hawes' father's only pleasure in life seemed to be to sit alone, turning over and over in his old hands the rich specimens his son brought him from the various mines in which he worked. High-grade Hawes could have told the foreman that, had he chosen. Perhaps he would have done so had it been any one else but Big Pete Burns, whom he had never forgiven for having brought upon his father the tragedy of his life.

"Tried to work the same game on me, did he?" muttered High-grade Hawes under his breath. "I'll get him for that and get him good."

Brooding over what he considered to be his wrongs, High-grade Hawes tripped. He dropped his lamp and pitched forward so that his forehead struck one of the heavy timbers that helped to support the walls of the stope. Dazed by the injury he sank to the ground, and, for a few moments, did not know where he was. When he came to himself his lamp was out: but at the end of the stope he could see the glare of the foreman's lamp as he knelt at the foot of the rich vein. For a moment High-grade Hawes stared, then he caught his breath with a sucking sound. The foreman, evidently having concluded that High-grade Hawes had left the stope by way of the ladders which descended to the level below, was filling a sack with specimens of the high-grade ore.

High-grade Hawes' first impulse was to return and confront the big foreman; then he thought better of it, as he realized that by virtue of his position Pete Burns had the right to take samples of ore from any vein in the mine for assaying purposes. Yes, the foreman had as yet a perfect alibi against any charges of high grading that could be brought against him. Yet, somehow High-grade Hawes had a suspicion that the specimens the foreman was putting into the sack would never see the inside of the assayer's office.

Moreover, he knew that if he could prove that Pete Burns himself was high grading, their score would be even. But how could he prove it?

The day shift was still underground, and the night shift was still sleeping. High-grade Hawes was ready to leave the Golden Penny Mine for his thirty-mile trip to Rocky City, from which town the rich ore was shipped by rail to the smelter at Salt Lake. As he passed the cook house he saw the cook's helper, "Slim" Burrows, seated on the step in the sunshine peeling potatoes for supper. He looked up as the miner passed.

"Quitting?" he asked.

"Got mine made," replied High-grade Hawes, that being miners' vernacular for "I've made enough money here."

"Why don't you wait and ride out on the truck in the morning?" asked Slim. "Pete Burns is going into Rocky City to-morrow, he'd be company for you."

"Him and me don't hitch," said High-grade Hawes shortly. "No, Slim, I'd rather walk than to ride with

Burns. I'll camp at the bridge tonight. Heard how the fishing is?"

"Good place to camp at the bridge," said Slim. "If you've any tackle with you, you might catch a mess of trout. Caught some myself on Sunday. And Pete Burns, he runs down to the bridge in his car nearly every evening. Said he was going down again tonight."

"Did he?" commented High-grade Hawes thoughtfully. "Guess I'll try my luck. How about some bread and a little coffee to go with my trout, if I have any luck?"

"I don't know about that," protested Slim. "We've got orders not to give out any lunches. But—say, you don't happen to have a bit of high grade in your pocket, do you? There's a girl who asked me to bring her a specimen. But, shucks! you know how much chance I have of getting underground. Thanks, guess I can fix you a bite of lunch."

It was sunset when High-grade Hawes reached the bridge which spans the North Fork of the Payette River, ten miles below the Golden Penny Mine. Leaning over the rail he gazed down the cañon through which the river wound its way beneath the setting sun. Directly below the bridge the water formed a deep eddy which seemed a likely place for trout. Removing his blanket roll from his shoulders, High-grade Hawes untied it and took out a steel rod of the telescope variety. While he was adjusting his tackle a big trout leaped high out of the eddy below the bridge; gleamed for a second like a silver bow, then fell back into the green water with a splash.

"Guess I'll try a spinner," murmured High-grade Hawes. A moment later it splashed into the depths to be followed by the thin, high song of the reel. Down into the green depths of the eddy the spinner scintillated; then, suddenly as the current caught the line it tautened, and High-grade Hawes struck hard.

"Caught a snag the first cast," he muttered wrathfully when the rod bent double and the line refused to give. "Now ain't that just my luck!"

Absorbed in trying to disengage the hook from the snag, he did not hear the pur of a car coming down the grade; nor did he notice it until it stopped on the bridge. Then he glanced up with a scowl, for stepping out of the roadster was big Pete Burns.

"How's the fishing?" inquired the big foreman, ignoring the trouble he had had with High-grade Hawes.

"None of your business," snapped High-grade Hawes, laying down his rod. "The flunkey told me you'd be along this evening, so I've been waiting for you. This will be a good place to teach you not to sneak up on a man underground without a light."

"Forget it, Hawes," advised the big man. "You know as well as I do that you wouldn't stand any chance against me in a fight."

"Yellow!" sneered High-grade Hawes. "But what could be expected of a boss who'd sneak up on a man without a light?"

"All right," said Pete Burns as the sneer struck home. "If you will have it, I'm not the one to stop you. Can you swim?"

"Bet you!" snapped High-grade Hawes. "But what has that to do with it?"

"Because," explained Burns, "I'm going to throw you over the bridge into the river and give you a chance to cool off."

High-grade Hawes' answer was a straight left to the foreman's mouth that knocked loose two of his teeth and sent him staggering. Regaining his balance, with a roar of rage he rushed with flailing fists; but High-grade Hawes ducked beneath them, jabbing at the big man's face with short-arm

blows, then dancing back out of the way of the big man's pile-driver smashes. But though High-grade Hawes landed repeatedly, his blows seemed to have little effect on the huge frame of Pete Burns. With battered lips tightly set and his harsh features framing a savage scowl, the big man bored his way in and forced his adversary backward toward the wooden railing of the bridge. In vain High-grade Hawes tried to dance out of reach; whichever way he turned he found himself confronted by the two hundred and twenty pounds of Pete Burns who seemed to possess remarkable agility for his immense weight.

"Ready to quit?" he growled through smashed lips.

High-grade Hawes grinned in derision. Then he feinted quickly with his left, following it up with a terrific right-hand drive to the solar plexus. Had the blow landed, it would have ended the fight. But it failed to land, at least, where High-grade Hawes expected, for Pete Burns lowered his head and took the full impact of the blow on top of his skull. With a howl of pain High-grade Hawes dropped his smashed hand. The next thing he knew Burns had wrapped both huge arms around him. Raising his enemy above his head Pete Burns pitched him clean over the trail, head first, into the swirling depths of the big eddy below the bridge, believing himself to be finally rid of him.

Almost as much at home in the water as an eel, High-grade Hawes felt no particular alarm as he shot down through the green depths. As is commonly the case with good swimmers, he had opened his eyes as soon as his head had become immersed. In the green mistiness of the water he saw below him his silver spinner twirling around above a snag to which the hook had become attached.

Thinking that he might as well take the opportunity to retrieve the hook, he gave a couple of violent kicks which propelled him downward. In this way he could catch hold of the snag and keep himself from being swept downstream by the current while he disengaged the hook. This took but a second, but in that space of time he saw something that caused him almost to swallow part of the river before he could shoot to the surface in search of air.

As his head shot out of the water his first glance was toward the bridge. The foreman's car was gone; above the roar of the river High-grade Hawes could hear it purring its way back to the Golden Penny Mine. With a few powerful strokes High-grade Hawes swam ashore where he seated himself on a boulder for a moment to regain his breath.

It was past sunset, and the chill of evening in the mountains crept through the sopping wet clothes of High-grade Hawes. In a few minutes he arose to his feet and shivered his way back to the bridge where he had left his blankets. In them were his "digging clothes," soiled with the mud of the mines, but dry and warm. High-grade Hawes was grinning broadly as he took his miner's waterproof match box from his soaked clothes, and with his blanket roll on his shoulder clambered down the bank of the river. He built a fire among the rocks out of pieces of dry driftwood.

For a little while he sat beside the fire eating the lunch the cook's helper had provided him; then he arose to his feet, and, gathering his things together, cached them in a cranny among the rocks. That done, weary and bruised though he was, High-grade Hawes doggedly tackled the ten-mile grade back to the Golden Penny Mine. It was past ten thirty p. m. when at last he saw a light shining in the superintendent's office.

Loaded with sacks of high-grade ore a five-ton truck left camp a few minutes after eight o'clock next morning. Seated next to the driver, Big Pete Burns was on his way to Rocky City to see about the shipping of the ore to the smelter; and, incidentally, to see that none of the high grade was stolen before it was placed in charge of the railroad company. During the few hours he was away the miners were left in charge of the shift bosses, of whom there was one to each mine level. Apparently the foreman was glad to be away for the time from the darkness of the underground, for there was a satisfied expression on his battered features as the truck rolled down the mountain grade through the clear air of the early morning.

Groaning under the immense weight of the high grade the big truck rolled down the grade to the bridge across the river. Pete Burns regaled the driver with the story of his fight with High-grade Hawes and how he had pitched him into the river.

"The funny thing about it," said the foreman, "is that the superintendent told me that he had given Hawes permission to take a few specimens of high grade. I guess Hawes was so mad about me sneaking up on him without a light that he didn't choose to tell me so himself. Anyway, it's a good thing it happened, for it sure put me solid with Superintendent Willis."

"Bet you!" said the truck driver as he brought the truck to a stop right in the center of the bridge. "Gosh!" he exclaimed as he looked down at the green water of the big eddy. "I'd sure hate to be thrown in there." Then he winked at the big man as he clambered down from his seat. "Guess we might as well get ourselves a drink," he said. "There ain't no more water this side of Rocky City."

Grinning broadly Pete Burns followed the truck driver down the river bank; then suddenly he stooped and picked up the end of a rope which lay concealed among the rocks.

"Give me a hand," he said. "It'll take both of us to haul them in."

Like a slender, brown, wet snake the rope came out of the river as the two men hauled in the slack; then suddenly it tautened and it took all their strength to haul in a heavy sack which was fast to the other end of the line. At last it lay among the rocks. Six more sacks the two men hauled from the bottom of the big eddy; then, panting from their efforts, they grinned at each other as the water swirled past.

"Five thousand dollars' worth of the best high grade in the Golden Penny!" exulted Pete Burns. "And old Willis, the superintendent, doesn't suspect a thing. Here, pick up the other end of one of 'em and we'll get 'em on the truck."

Staggering beneath the weight of the dripping sack of rich ore, the two high graders stumbled up the river bank. Fifteen minutes later they had the last sack of stolen ore on the truck. Then suddenly their hands shot above their heads as a quiet voice spoke behind them. They turned to find themselves looking into the muzzle of a revolver held in the hands of the sheriff of Trinity County. Behind him stood Superintendent Willis of the Golden Penny and High-grade Hawes.

"I told you I'd get you," said High-grade Hawes as, at the sheriff's command, he snapped handcuffs on the wrists of the dumfounded high graders. "Maybe this will teach you not to sneak up on a man without a light."

Pioneer Towns of the West

Roswell, New Mexico

By A. V. Strope

Author of "Austin, Minnesota," etc.

THREE weather-beaten shacks and a blacksmith shop, forming the center of operations for that far-famed desperado, Billy, the Kid, were the nucleus of what is to-day the second-largest city in the State of New Mexico. The first rude buildings which, in 1880, marked the beginnings of Roswell, have been supplanted by beautiful homes; the dusty road, that ran before them, has given way to broad, tree-shaded avenues. And the tiny cattle-trading point has grown to a modern city of nine thousand people, with all the conveniences and luxuries of a prosperous Western community.

Tracing the history of the metropolis from the first settlement in 1880, we find it blazoned in the crimson of the frontier tales of the entire surrounding country. Closely linked with the notorious Lincoln County war, characterized by all sorts of wild escapades, it is surprising that the little village quieted so soon to law-abiding respectability and dignity. Nevertheless, in 1885, the first business house was under construction—though it was not until 1894 that, with the coming of the railroad, the town assumed proportions of any commercial or industrial importance. Until that time, freight and mail were hauled by slow teams over the long two hundred miles from Las Vegas, which was a great disadvantage to the more progressive element in the community.

In 1890, artesian water was discovered; and, though for over fifteen years its value to the Pecos Valley was not realized, the water supply was utilized for the growing of many shade trees. Captain J. C. Lea, who once owned most of the land which is now Roswell, plotted the city and planted along its streets thousands of leafy sentinels which still stand guard over the homes of the present generation. And engendered by this early evidence of a love for beauty, the spirit of civic

pride persists in the children of the pioneers. It is shown to-day in the well-paved streets, attractive public buildings—not least among which is the imposing Chaves County courthouse—the carefully planned parks, and the colorful flower gardens. Indeed, Roswell has the reputation of being one of the cleanest and loveliest cities in the entire West.

In 1900, with a realization of the extent of the artesian water, began the development of the territory about Roswell. To-day land, which, a few years ago, was believed available only as pasture for a few head of cattle, bears immense crops of alfalfa, cotton and so forth. The forty thousand acres, which are under cultivation in the vicinity of the city, yielded last year an average of sixty-six dollars and seventy-nine cents to an acre. In addition to all of this, Roswell is annually the market for over one million dollars' worth of wool and lambs. And this prosperity is reflected throughout the county—three banks with a capital of over three million dollars attest to the well-being of the citizens.

Situated in Chaves County in the southeastern part of New Mexico, Roswell is blessed with a most unique and desirable climate. Especially to the health-seeker, the Pecos Valley promises beneficial conditions. With an average sunshine percentage of seventy-two and an average humidity of forty-nine, the winters are as bright as the summers, and as dry. In regard to altitude, Roswell occupies an ideal position, for the Pecos Valley is three thousand feet high at its lower end and four thousand feet at the upper end. The city, set midway, is three thousand five hundred and sixty feet above sea level.

New Mexico, on the whole, has excellent highways—and those about Roswell are claimed to be even above the high standard of the State. The most important are the Ozark Trail, the Southwest Highway, and the well-known Lee Highway which leads to and through the marvelous Lincoln National Forest. Here it winds among huge groves of fir, pine, and spruce, over towering mountains, by gorgeous cañons, thus affording the tourist many moments of wonder at vistas of breath-taking beauty. The crests of the Capitan Mountains reach ten thousand feet to the domed sky, while Lincoln Peak, in the White Mountains, rears its head twelve thousand and three feet in the air. Both of these are plainly visible from Roswell and, on clear nights when the moon is full, their jagged outlines loom black against the purple-dark horizon. In the lower part of the Pecos Valley, are the famous underground Carlsbad Caverns, which may be included in an interesting circuit trip from Roswell. Also, within easy motoring distance of Roswell, are the eight Bottomless Lakes which nestle in the bluffs east of the Pecos River. These, with their peculiarly formed walls, crystal-clear water, and remarkable coloring, are a never-ending source of wonder to the nature lover.

Aside from the highways, Roswell is linked with the outer world by the Santa Fe Railroad. The Mountain States Telephone Company provides excellent local and long-distance service. And, through the medium of visiting artists, concert singers, and the like, the community keeps in close touch with the cultural movements of the country.

Chaves County is rightly proud of its educational system, for a high standard is maintained in the teaching personnel and in the study courses. The fact that two of the four high schools in the county, one of which is in Roswell, are accredited in the North Central Association of High Schools and Colleges is ample evidence of the ideals at which they aim. The city

schools of Roswell are housed in eight buildings; they are equipped with a good library and have many facilities for the pursuit of athletic recreation. Also located here is the New Mexico Military Institute, which has ranked for many years as one of the honor schools in the War Department of the United States of America.

We have spoken before of the artesian water in and about the town. And, from this source, the municipality furnishes pure water to the citizens at a reasonable rate. The water and sewage systems are both in the hands of the city government.

Under the leadership of Sylvester P. Johnson, the mayor, the affairs of state in this flourishing community move smoothly and prosperously. Among those still active in Roswell, who were largely instrumental in the development of the town, are Mr. G. A. Richardson, a prominent lawyer, and Mr. E. A. Cahoon, president of the First National Bank. An efficient Chamber of Commerce maintains complete quarters in the business district with a competent staff constantly in charge. President Austin D. Crile, Vice President C. Hobbs, and Secretary Claude Simpson oversee the manifold activities of the other coöperative members of the lively organization.

GIVES LAND TO ROCKY MOUNTAIN PARK

THROUGH a deed recently accepted by the department of the interior, the Rocky Mountain National Park, in Colorado, has acquired rights of way over three connected tracts of land for park road purposes. The deed conveys rights of way for portions of the Highdrive, now in course of construction, and the Fall River Road, and also a strip of land, one hundred feet wide, to be used for the Fall River entrance gateway, which had to be relocated in accordance with the boundary adjustment effected during the last session of Congress. The donor of these tracts of land is Pieter Hondius, of Larimer County, Colorado. A condition of the deed is that, should the highway to be constructed on any of these lands be abandoned for a period of one year, the land shall revert to the grantor.

FARM UNITS FOR HOMESTEADERS

THE opening to homestead entry of forty farm units within the Pavillion division of the Riverton Federal reclamation project, in Wyoming, was recently announced. Veterans of the World War were given a preference right to make entry up to March 3, 1927. After that date, any of the forty farm units remaining unentered were to be subject to homesteading by any person. In addition to the usual charge, an entry man would be obliged to pay a dollar and a half an acre Indian land charges in five annual installments.

The farms thus opened to entry on the reclamation project were of various sizes containing from twenty-five to one hundred and twelve irrigable acres, situated in Fremont County, Wyoming. The nearest town is Riverton. In addition to the qualifications required by the homestead law, persons applying for these lands were obliged to satisfy the examining board appointed for the Riverton project that they are possessed of certain qualifications as to industry, experience, character and capital, so as to give reasonable assurance of their success as prospective settlers. Applications had to be filed with the superintendent of the Riverton project, at Riverton, Wyoming.

OH! YOU, UTAH!

By
James Edward Hungerford

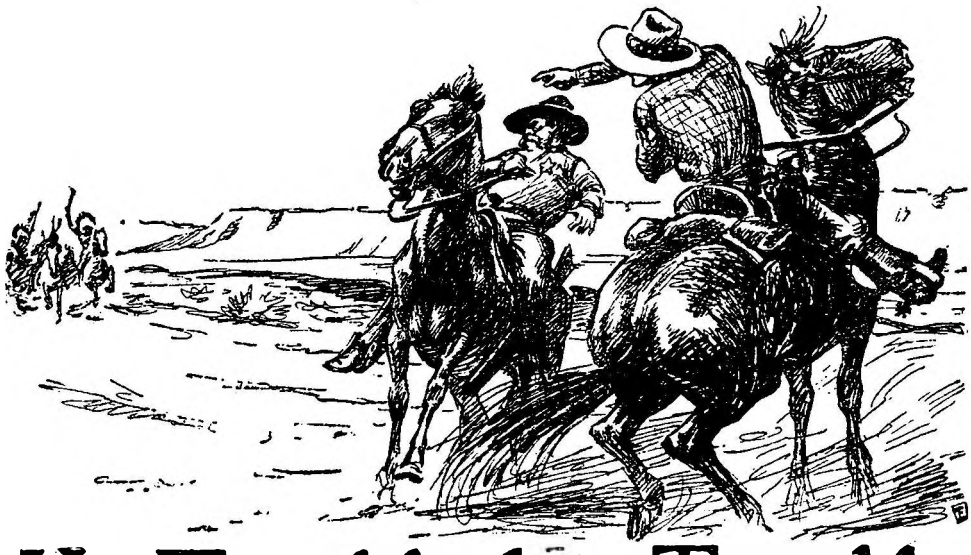
FEELIN' fine, an' sittin' pretty—
Life to me is shore first-rate.
Here, ten miles from Salt Lake City,
On my ranch in Utah State!
Scenic wonders—A-1 climate—
To its beauties I'm not blind,
But when I attempt to rhyme it,
I'm some "shy" on *words,* I find!

"Pa" came here, a "Fifty-niner"—
Overland, by wagon train,
Couldn't find a country *finer,*
So decided to remain!
Built a shack, an' sent fer Mother,
An' one bright September morn
In that shack appeared *another*—
Yep, in *Utah* I was born!

I was "brought up" in a saddle,
An' o' hosses knew no fears,
An' wild bronchos I could straddle
When a youth o' tender years!
Loved a good ol' buckin' battle,
With a bronk that had some "git;"
Loved to round up "outlaw" cattle—
An' my friend, I love *yit!*

"Pa" was shrewd, an' he succeeded,
An' his flocks an' herds increased;
Simple rules o' life, he heeded,
That he'd learned at home, back East;
He was honest, frugal, savin'—
Played the game, an' played to win!—
Ev'ry t[redacted]n' hardship bravin'—
Com[redacted]rough 'em with a grin!

On the "ol' ranch," I'm still livin',
In a big house built o' brick;
World to me its *best* is givin'—
An' right here I aim to *stick!*
Feelin' fine, an' sittin' pretty—
Life ain't got a single flaw,
Here, ten miles from Salt Lake City,
In the heart o' ol' Utah!



He Tumbled to Trouble

By Ray Humphreys

Author of "Mist on Squaw Pass," etc.

THE Piutes are on the warpath! They've left the reservation, headin' fer Piñon Mesa!"

Sheriff Joe Cook hung up the telephone receiver in his office in Monte Vista, and great beads of perspiration broke out on his bronzed forehead. The fear that had shrilled in the voice of Joe Watson, the rancher who had just called him, was contagious. There was a similar tion now in the sheriff's voice as he boomed a summons.

"Hey, 'Shorty!'"

But there was no answer from the outer office, where Deputy Sheriff Shorty McKay was supposed to be. The sheriff leaped to his feet, overturning his chair in his haste, and ran out, whooping.

"Oh, Shorty; hey, Shorty!"

"Hello!" cried a voice from the corrals.

"Shorty!" yelled Sheriff Cook, making for the corrals in jack-rabbit bounds. "I been callin' you until I'm blue in the face. The Piutes have broke out, headin' fer Piñon Mesa, an' thar's heck to pay. Joe Watson says they're broke through his fences, ridin' like a thousand devils, an' a dozen head o' his hosses is missin', either stole or stampeded by 'em."

"Sure enough?" cried Shorty.

"Yes, sure enough!" roared Sheriff Cook. "An' ef you'll quit curryin' that hoss along enough to lissen——Say, whose hoss is that, anyhow? You ain't been buyin' another hoss?"

"Yep," said Shorty, "goin' to sell 'im, though——"

"Lissen!" cried the sheriff excitedly. "You git goin' right now fer Piñon Mesa an' head off them Piutes. You know 'em all so well they'll lissen to you, especially that ol' chief, Talkin' Waters. Tell him he's gotta go back."

Shorty dropped his currycomb.

"I bet five dollars he ain't with 'em!" exclaimed Shorty. "An' ef he ain't, them Piutes are probably followin' Young Moon, an' I ain't got no influence with him. Fact is, I reckon ol' Talkin' Waters will be in town here purty pronto."

The sheriff's eyes popped.

"An' you think we kin stick around here waitin' fer him to show up, mebbe, while them Piutes is cuttin' a wide path to Piñon Mesa?" cried Cook. "Say, Shorty, you're dead from the eyebrows up! I say you gotta git goin' right now, you kin head 'em off."

"Not me!" he announced emphatically. "I'm positive ol' Talkin' Waters ain't with 'em, an' I ain't got no more chance o' turnin' that red tide than a chipmunk has o' stampedin' a bunch o' steers. By waitin' right here fer the ol' chief I kin do more than by hightailin' it out to Piñon."

The sheriff snapped out his watch.

"We'll both go then," he roared. "Seein' you've takin to comparin' yourself with a chipmunk. Saddle up!"

Shorty protested.

"We better find the old chief fust."

"Saddle up, I said!" cried the sheriff. "We'll probably find him with them Piutes, as usual. They're out on a huntin' trip, likely, huntin' fer steers to shoot an' horses to steal."

"But——"

"Saddle up!"

So Shorty saddled up. He made fast time, too, and he had his pinto, Lobo Loco, ready before the sheriff had saddled his black Morgan. Shorty passed a noose around the neck of the snow-white horse he had been currying when the sheriff had interrupted him. They flashed out of the corral, Shorty leading the white horse, and that brought another outburst from Cook.

"Why the extra hoss?"

"I—might need 'im," cried Shorty. "I was figgerin'——"

"Come on, you galoot!"

They went as fast as their horses could gallop. They took the Alamosa road to Pine and then swung off up the Elk Creek trail that would bring them to the bad land, the front door to Piñon Mesa. They rode in silence, for the most part, for every time Shorty mentioned detouring, in the hope of running across the old chief of the Piutes, the sheriff cut him short angrily. Again and again, in the interests of better time, Cook suggested that Shorty cut the white lead horse loose, but Shorty refused. When it was evident that the white horse couldn't travel as fast as the black and the pinto, Shorty let out a yell and slid off the pinto. The sheriff pulled up.

"Pinto's gone lame!" he howled. "I was afraid o' that; now I kin use the white hoss to good advantage!"

Shorty literally tore the saddle from the pinto, placing it on the white. He was up and off in a jiffy, after slapping the pinto on the flank and ordering him to head for home. The sheriff, bouncing off in the lead again, was too busy to notice that the pinto didn't limp in evidence of any lameness.

They rode through the cool cañon of the Elk as fast as the white horse could travel, and that wasn't fast enough to suit the sheriff. At the first isolated ranch they came to, the sheriff urged Shorty to stop and borrow a [redacted] horse, but Shorty was obstinate. [redacted]clared he couldn't part with the white, so they went on, the sheriff mumbling dire threats of revenge.

They reached the bad lands and stopped several times to look for Indian signs, but failed to find them. They cut through, then, galloping around the high piles of red rock that gave the region its unsavory name. It was desolate country, too wild for even the toughest range cattle. High grass carpeted great areas of the flat lands between the jutting rock formations, and

the going was rough and dangerous, so much so that Cook finally slowed down, expressing the belief that they were behind the Piutes.

"Ef Watson called as soon as they cut through his place we're ahead o' 'em," said Shorty wretchedly, "an' that don't lissen well to me. Like as not that Young Moon has them warriors wrought up to a high pitch an' they're liable to——"

"How about ol' Talkin' Waters, your friend?"

"He ain't with 'em, boss," explained Shorty. "I'm sure o' that. Why, I kin tell you that——"

"Holy smoke!" interrupted Cook, pointing. "Thar comes something; looks to me like Injuns or a stampede."

"Piutes," said Shorty, "an' comin' fast!"

"We'll flag 'em down!"

"You can't flag down a flood!" declared Shorty, standing up in his stirrups to get a better view of the rushing tide of Piutes. "Them babies are on the warpath an' don't recognize flaggin'. I say we better cut an' run ef we want to see sunset; we gotta git the old chief or else gather up a posse."

The sheriff laughed in derision.

"How you talk!" he cried. "I'll stop 'em durn quick! Run! That would be great business. I'll bluff these hombres."

The sheriff turned and rode straight at the approaching Indians, waving his hat at them as a signal that they come far enough. However, instead of stopping, the Piutes let go a concerted whoop and came on, headlong, waving rifles defiantly.

"Boss," cried Shorty, "we better run fer it. They're ugly; they'll pot us in a minnit. We better run while we got a chance."

"Pot us!" cried the sheriff. "Why, they wouldn't dast——"

Bang! Bang, bang!

The bullets sang close to the sheriff's ears, and one ripped his hat off as though a strong breeze had lifted it. The sheriff said no more. He swung his Morgan and dug his spurs home, and he and Shorty went hightailing it across the bad lands as fast as the two frightened horses could run. The Piutes came on, yelling, and it was evident that they were in ugly mood, as Shorty had said. They were out for trouble.

"We got one chance," howled Shorty to the sheriff, "an' that is to git to the rim o' Piñon Mesa fust. We kin hold 'em off thar, but they'd starve us out sooner or later. You go on an' hold 'em off, boss, an' I'll try to cut back fer help."

"Cut back!" yelled Cook desperately. "You can't do it; you'll be shot down; you better stick with me."

There was another fusillade of shots, and more bullets zipped overhead. Shorty began to seesaw on the white horse's reins, and the sheriff forged ahead. They cut the tall grass at breakneck speed for a short distance, then Shorty's mount slowed up. At the next volley the white horse went down suddenly, carrying his rider with him. The Piutes whooped and turned their fire on Cook, who was riding like mad, unaware that he had lost his companion. There was no movement in the tall grass where Shorty and his horse had tumbled. The Piutes exchanged significant whoops and went on after the sheriff, who had made up his mind that he was going to get to Piñon Mesa first if it took every ounce of strength his Morgan had. It was fully ten minutes after Shorty had fallen that Cook glanced around to see that he was alone.

"Shorty's ducked," he muttered, "or else——"

The sheriff outran the Piutes to the mesa trail, and, although he offered a splendid target as his black scrambled up the slope to the mesa rim, he made

it in safety. Once there, he flopped down behind a breastwork of rocks and unlimbered his six-gun, sending a few shots over the heads of the Piutes who had halted below.

"Git back, you red devils!" yelled the sheriff from his ambush. "What's the idear o' playin' the fools——"

"We go hunt, nobody stop!" came an insolent reply.

"Is that so?" asked the sheriff loudly. "An' who says that?"

"Young Moon—he say that!" came the angry retort.

"Chief Talkin' Waters!" exclaimed the sheriff. "I want to talk with him; trot him out, I want to talk with him!"

"No here," said Young Moon, "you talk me!"

"You go back to the reservation," ordered Cook hastily, "or you all be sorry. This ain't no joke. My man's gone back fer a posse."

The Indians jabbered at that.

"Your man—he go happy huntin' grounds," howled Young Moon brazenly. "He shot—hoss shot—no get up—see?"

The sheriff gasped. Shorty shot! He himself at bay on the rim of Piñon Mesa, and two hundred young Piutes below in angry mood!

"You'll pay fer all this," cried Cook, although he knew that it sounded like an idle threat. "I'll shoot to kill the fust Injun that tries to come up this trail. You get me?"

"We get—later," called Young Moon; "we rest now!"

One thing was certain, the sheriff knew, and that was that the Piutes would not risk a daylight attack on his natural stronghold. He held the trump card there, but, after dark—that would be another story. He might escape across the mesa, if he could sneak away for a good start, but that would be almost impossible. And the mesa was twenty miles across and nothing at the other side but more bad lands and no help. He was in a desperate hole, and he knew it. He swore softly.

"That danged white hoss o' Shorty's did it," he said, gritting his teeth. "I never saw such a slow beast; Shorty lagged behind, an' they plugged him good an' proper. I'll swing some of 'em fer that, ef I ever git out o' this myself—but——"

The sheriff peeped over the rocks, to see the Piutes at ease below. They had turned their horses loose to graze, and the warriors were clustered in a knot, where Young Moon was addressing them. They simply ignored the man on the rim above them. They looked up, now and then, to satisfy themselves apparently that he was still there, but that was all. They would not risk an attack in daylight.

Young Moon harangued his companions at great length, and the sheriff could only guess at what he was saying. It was evident from the Indians' demeanor, however, that they did not fear pursuit. And that, in turn, meant that they must have accounted for Shorty, or else they would be fearful of the posse he might bring back. The sheriff's eyes dimmed with tears as he thought of Shorty, and again he solemnly cussed the white horse.

"Ef that pinto hadn't gone lame," growled Cook, "Shorty would be here now. That pinto was fast; that ol' plug o' a white hoss——"

[redacted] finished his remarks in blazing words.

Then it became a game of waiting. The Piutes appeared to be in no hurry to rush him. They loitered about at the foot of the mesa while Sheriff Cook sprawled behind his barricade of rocks, trying to figure out what to do. It was useless, he made up his mind, to attempt to argue with the Piutes. It was also useless to attempt to escape across the mesa, for there was nothing but wilderness beyond. That left but one alternative—to remain where he

was and await the attack that must come unless the Piutes had a sudden change of heart, and that was not very likely.

The hours passed slowly, and still the situation remained the same. Young Moon had withdrawn a short distance and gone to sleep, evidently preparing for an active evening. The other Indians lolled about, casting glances up now and then at the waiting sheriff. They seemed to sense that he was not going to run. That meant an attack, after dark, and plenty of excitement. With him out of the way, they could go on up on the mesa for their hunting—hunting which had been denied them through the years on the reservation.

"I got one chance in a million," moaned Cook as he waited, "an' that's ef somebody happens along. But who would? Thar ain't a ranch in ten miles or more, and, even ef somebody did chance along, the Piutes would probably do fer him like they mind to do fer me. Nope, I guess my chances are slimmer than one in a million!"

The sun sank behind the hills to the west, and the sheriff scented the aroma of cooking meat. A Piute gathered up the horses and drove them in toward the fire. It would soon be dusk, then night, and after that——The sheriff shook his head and groaned.

There was a shout from below.

Across the bad lands came two [redacted] loping riders, and the sheriff raised himself on his elbows to peer at them. More Indians, most likely! As they came closer he saw that the tall rider in the lead was an Indian, with elaborate headdress. He rode a white horse, and again the sheriff groaned aloud. The Indian was mounted on the white horse that Shorty had been riding. The Piutes surged out to meet the riders and then, rubbing his eyes in surprised happiness, the sheriff recognized the second rider. It was Shorty!

The Indian on the white horse raised a hand, hushed the voices of his tribesmen, and then spoke hoarsely to them. Young Moon raised his voice in argument but quickly subsided. The Piutes went for their horses, and the Indian on the white horse and Shorty rode quickly toward the base of the mesa, signaling.

"Come on, boss," cried Shorty, "it's all over. Chief Talkin' Waters is here, an' he's ordered the Piutes home; they're goin'!"

"Good enough!" roared the sheriff, running back to fetch his waiting horse. He came down the mesa trail in great strides, leading the Morgan. He grasped Shorty's outstretched hand, and his voice broke as he tried to express himself.

"Shorty, they tol' me they'd shot you down." cried Cook, "an' I believed them. That danged ol' white hoss you was ridin'——"

Shorty shook his head.

"Sheriff, don't say a word agin' that white hoss," said Shorty. "I bought him off a circus fer Chief Talkin' Waters here, an' I knew the chief was comin' fer him. When he left the reservation the Piutes skipped, an' when you wouldn't wait in town fer the chief I took the white hoss along, hopin' we'd meet the chief. That white is a circus hoss, an' I remembered it in time to have him tumble, sudden, like he was shot. We laid thar in the grass until the Piutes swept on after you. Then we scooted fer Monte, got the chief, an' here we are—right——"

The sheriff nodded.

"Right, right along, Shorty," he said, "an' I guess I owes an apology to the white hoss, eh, chief?"

"White hoss cost $65" said Chief Talkin' Waters impressively.

Miner's Potlatch

By J. A. Thompson

WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE desires this department to be of real assistance to all who are interested in the practical side of mining. Questions pertaining to field conditions, mining equipment, mining territories, mining laws, prospecting and general geology will be answered.

Address all communications to J. A. Thompson, mining expert, care of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

FROM H. S. P., in Seattle, comes a pertinent question for experienced prospectors as well as for the novice. H. S. P. says that he is fairly familiar with the hard, brassy appearing iron and copper pyrites, commonly known as fool's gold. "But," he asks, "are there any other metals or minerals besides the much-discussed fool's gold which may, on even a close examination, be mistaken for the genuine article?"

Yes, there are. In the first place, it should be remembered that gold, placer gold, runs to various shades of gold-yellow, from an almost glitterless dark yellow to a very pale shade of the color. When much silver is alloyed with gold, the result is a nearly silver-white metal. Moreover, gold will, if hammered, flatten into a thin sheet.

Leaving the brittle fool's gold out of the calculations, the two most confusing minerals, with which the average prospector will have to contend, are golden mica and native copper. Assuming that the specimen under examination is just a tiny speck in a rock sample chopped off some ledge or outcropping, turn it slowly around in the sunlight. If the color remains unchanged in any position, the speck in question is probably gold. Fold your hands over the speck so as to shut out the direct sunlight, and again turn the sample in various directions. If the color of the speck still remains unchanged, it is gold.

If your specimen shines and sparkles as the sun's rays strike it from different angles, you most probably have nothing more valuable in your hand than a bit of stone, flecked with golden mica. All micas can easily be split into thin sheets—a property that gold does not possess.

Should your suspected gold specks have a reddish tinge, they are apt to be native copper, which occurs free in many highly mineralized areas. Copper, like gold, will also flatten under the hammer. A few drops of nitric acid may be necessary definitely to determine your find. Copper will dissolve in nitric acid, but gold remains unchanged in that or any other single acid. However, a mixture of one part by volume of nitric acid to three parts by volume of hydrochloric acid will dissolve gold. This is *aqua regia,* one of the strongest solvents known. Fusion is another simple and effective way of distinguishing between true gold and free copper. Both metals melt at a red heat. Upon cooling, gold will be found to have been unchanged, whereas copper will have turned black due to the formation of a black copper oxide.

For those, who may still be bothered at times by the distinction between gold and fool's gold, the following differences will prove helpful. Iron pyrites—fool's gold—is brittle and brassier in appearance than real gold. As a rule it is also shinier. It is too hard to be scratched by a knife point. Gold can be scratched by a copper coin. Also fool's gold should yield sulphur fumes upon heating intensely.

Remember one thing, however, before you throw away your bright specimen of fool's gold as an entirely worthless find. Iron pyrites sometimes contains within it, or is an indication of, gold or silver, or some semiprecious metal in payable quantities. Keep right on prospecting in the vicinity of your first find of fool's gold. If there is a quantity of it that you can uncover, have it assayed by some reputable firm. You may have discovered something that will lead to a paying proposition.

One of the strangest things about fool's gold or iron pyrites is that, although it is often mined for the gold and copper associated with it, it is never used as an iron ore because of the large amount of sulphur it contains. Its chief use is to furnish sulphuric acid and copperas. Important deposits of the mineral occur in Prince William, Louisa and Pulaski Counties, Virginia; in St. Lawrence County, New York; in various places in California, and at the Davis Mine, near Charlemont, Massachusetts.

Here is a letter from the Pacific coast with a request for some information about one of the more recent gold strikes in the West:

DEAR MR. THOMPSON: There are two of us—my side-kicker and I. We have just hit Seattle after a disastrous two seasons in the Seward Peninsular section of Alaska. We tried the Kougarok section, mostly, if you know where that is. It is about a hundred miles in from Nome. A few colors here, and a few colors there, were all that we could raise. We didn't even locate a dredging property—let alone a paying placer claim for a two-man outfit.

We are down on the "outside" again now, and wondering where to head next. That strike, made last spring in the Kramer Hills territory of California, sounds good to us. We understand that it was opened up by two men, named Edward and George Herkelrath. Is this so, and what value is the ore running out there? Thanking you in advance, we are, T. J. AND M. K.

Seattle, Washington.

You are right on your names. The Herkelraths are credited with the discovery of the new field last April. At the time they were reported to have uncovered a rich gold vein at the fifty-seven-foot level of a shaft in an abandoned placer claim that they were working for a grubstake.

Shortly after their discovery, some of the ore that they had uncovered, was declared to have run three thousand dollars to the ton.

The Herkelraths' strike started one of the most amazing and motley stampedes in the history of this country's gold rushes. Most of the old-time prospectors of the West, eager to be a participant in one more last bonanza, got out their old gold pans, their prospector's hammers, the long-handled No. 2 shovels, and their camping outfits. Off they went, hitting the trail for the Kramer Hills which are in the Mojave desert some miles to the south of Randsburg, California. The faithful little pack burros were once more seen upon the trail, though they constantly had to give up their right of way to countless tooting flivvers and other autos, which rattled past them in the race to reach the diggings early. And, when they reached the field, prospecting was frequently delayed while groups of old-timers gathered to discuss the booms and bonanzas of former days in California—some of them even recalling the days of the Yellow Aster strike in that selfsame territory.

Yet, despite the furor that the discovery started in the spring, few reports have come from there recently concerning mining activities in that locality.

To J. M., Fresno, California: First discovery of gold on the beach at Nome, Alaska, was made in 1899.

BLAMES IRRIGATION FOR STORMS

A NOVEL theory with regard to the effect of the extensive irrigation now in vogue throughout the West was propounded recently by Elias B. Dunn, of Orange, New Jersey, who was at one time official weather forecaster of New York City. Mr. Dunn's view is that the irrigating of vast arid areas causes storms to come eastward, doing immense damage. His theory was set forth in a letter to President Coolidge as follows:

"By unremitting stimulations of an irrigation program, you are, Mr. President, adding ammunition to nature's destructive forces, killing or impoverishing the man at the productive plow, filling the maw of the one who writes of roses that bloom in December, and incidentally changing the climate of this country."

In his letter, Mr. Dunn went on to explain that heat and moisture make a storm or increase the energy of one already formed, and that storms from all the West are drawn to or breed over the hottest, moisture-laden areas. Hence, as there are now about nineteen million acres under irrigation in the Southwest, where the water evaporates faster than it soaks into the soil, these vast areas constitute the incubators of atmospheric disturbances that make havoc in their eastward paths.

The Round-Up

HERE at the Round-up, not so very long ago, we had occasion to mention those intrepid women who took so valorous a part in the development of the West, and we may add, are still doing this noble work. It was with regret that we had to call attention to the fact that, although deeds of women were so noble and their sacrifices so great, these deeds and sacrifices were not of the spectacular type, and therefore had not been signally commemorated. We want it plainly understood that the women did just as much as any of the men, but the very nature of their acts is not of a type known as valorous. The reason of this is that their duties were so many and so arduous behind the scenes that seldom was there any opportunity for them to step on the stage and do some outstanding concrete, spectacular act of bravery.

Mrs. Anne B. Searles was here at the meeting that night and took it upon herself to look into this matter, with the result that she is here to-night with something to say about Betty Zane. Listen now to what Mrs. Searles has to say.

"The first streaks of dawn brought a lull in the fighting. All night long the tiny band within the walls of Fort Henry had battled bravely against the howling, shrieking, red devils who besieged them. Now with the growing light came a chance to take stock of the toll paid during those horrible hours. The little force had been sadly depleted during the last few days of terror. Only eighteen men remained of all the gallant group to protect the fearful, grief-burdened women and the frightened, huddling children. Only eighteen! And hundreds of the foe. It seemed just a matter of hours when the last shot should be fired, the last defender fallen. And then the savage red horde could wreak its cruelty unopposed on the helpless survivors. If any aid was to come to the beleaguered stronghold, it must come soon.

"The commander of the fort stood alone, a little apart, watching a few of the women who were talking together in one corner. Among them was his young sister, Betty. How different this harsh life from that she had so recently left! Two months before a fashionable boarding school in Philadelphia, and now——

"'Colonel Zane!' There was a sinister note of alarm in the man's voice.

His grimy visage was marked with a deep anxiety, and there was a hint of new trouble in his clear, blue eyes.

"'Yes, what is it?' snapped the colonel, turning hastily.

"'The powder, sir! It's all but gone. There's scarce enough for two more rounds.'

"The colonel frowned, his grim face seeming to grow more haggard and drawn than ever, if that were possible.

"'There's a keg in my house,' he said at last, almost as though talking to himself. 'That might be enough to last us till help comes. And without it—— But it would be death for any one to venture out the gate. I——'

"'But, colonel,' broke in a new voice, 'if it's our only chance, it looks like we've got to risk it. If you call for volunteers, I'll try for it.'

"'And I!'

"'And I!'

"By this time every soul in the fort was pressed into the circle about the commander. Every face was eager, tense. Every man was ready to lay down his life to save these comrades. A woman sobbed softly. A fusillade of shots rang from the ambushed Indians, thudding against the log walls or whining over the heads of the group like angry bees. Still the colonel deliberated.

"At last he spoke. 'One man can go,' he said. 'We can afford to lose but one man!' A clamor of voices broke in upon his speech.

"Then like a silver bell one rose above the rest.

"'We cannot afford to lose *one man!*' proclaimed the clear girlish tones. 'Let me go!'

"'You! Betty! Never!' cried the colonel harshly. 'Even if we were willing to let you take the risk, you wouldn't have a chance! It's preposterous!'

"'' 'Tis not for nothing that the same blood runs in our veins, brother,' Betty responded. 'I'll carry it through or die! I know the house and can find the keg as well as any one. Besides, the Indians won't waste shots on a white squaw. They'll think I'm sent as a decoy to draw their fire. I'll be safer than a man.'

"A storm of protest rose. But at last the fresh enthusiasm of the girl overruled every objection.

"The gates were opened a crack, and she stepped out from the protection of the walls into the shot-swept open—a space of sixty yards.

"Over her head the new-risen sun smiled brightly; somewhere a chickadee sang; a tiny breeze twisted a curling tendril of her hair across her flushed face. She dared not run. She must seem sure, sure! From all about she sensed the peering eyes that watched her progress. Then she was at the door—within the safe shelter of the house.

"Her heart pounded heavily, but she did not falter. Straight to the storeroom she went, and seizing the keg of powder that meant salvation to the fort, she hurried back.

"As she appeared again the redskins realized at last what her errand was. A chorus of wild yells broke the warm stillness. A hail of lead fell about her, and she began to run. The blood sang in her ears. Who would have thought that little cask could be so heavy? A bullet pinged against the iron hoop that bound the barrel. God! If a flying bullet should strike the wood—pierce through to the powder! Despite the thunder of sound about her, she could hear in her mind the crash of the explosion that would result. Blown to atoms! She stumbled over a twisted root. If she should fall! Blown to atoms! Sixty yards? Miles! Miles! Her feet were weighted. Her breath was torture!

"Ah! The gate, and the little opening to safety. With her last ounce

of strength she staggered through the portal. Eager hands seized her burden; tender hands caught her as she fell. Help came to the weary white men that night, and the red peril was driven back. Another pioneer epic was written in the annals of the making of America. And Betty Zane's name stands high to-day on the golden honor roll of our heroic women."

We thank you, Mrs. Searles, and we hope that others will tell us of heroic deeds of women who made the West.

From Battle Lake, Minnesota, comes Miss B. to speak of several things.

"DEAR BOSS AND FOLKS: Once before I was made welcome at your camp fire, so here's hoping I can make myself to home once more. I've been reading with no little interest all horse talk that's been brought up, and as I hail from a farm, please make room for me with the rest of the horse lovers who aren't afraid of steppin' on Miss Mexico's toes, even if she does get riled. Now, folks, I don't lay any claim to being any professional around horses, but I must say that my collar got hot on the underside when I read of her methods of breaking them. She wants to stick the dickens into a horse by jerking, spurring and beating. I say, smooth it out with kindness, and firmness. Maybe her way gets quicker results, but as to its being any better, I have my doubts. A horse broken by cruel and unfair methods is watching for his chance, because, deep down in his breast, there slumbers a hate that sometimes must be let loose. When that time comes, I think the horse is justified in getting even.

"Here is a yarn that I want to unravel before I say any more. A neighbor of ours who lived a scant three miles from my home on the Dakota prairies once owned a young horse, an outlaw in every respect. All who tried to ride him first had to look around for a soft place on which to land. After many futile attempts every one admitted defeat, and the horse was given up in disgust. They tied him in his stall, and left him alone.

"The owner of the horse had two nieces staying with him. They were twelve and thirteen years of age. Up to this time, they had merely been interested onlookers, but now, without their uncle's knowledge, they every day climbed up in the outlaw's manger and petted him. Naturally, since the horse was wild, he did not at first take kindly to this treatment, but the girls gradually drove away his fears and hatred of man. By keeping persistently at it, they soon had him eating out of their hands, and after this in an amazingly short time they went fearlessly into his stall and even climbed on his back. Their uncle's surprise knew no bounds when one day he saw the 'outlaw' trotting about, obedient to the commands of the two little girls seated on his back! So, folks, here's one case where kindness got results when all other methods had failed.

"While you are all digesting this, I want to put in a good word for the writers of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE. To my mind, they are the best group of authors any magazine has ever corralled. Brand, Gilbert, Horton, Case, Buckley, and Haycox are my favorite authors, but the first things that I look for when I open the WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE are Hungerford's poems. His 'Heart o' the Hills' was my favorite until he wrote 'The Trail to the Santa Fe' which has since been unrivaled. Lester Yost's poem was also good, as are Kramer's. Yes, boss, your authors are good, but I doff my hat to your poets.

"The smoke from the fire is a-blowin' right into my eyes, so maybe I'd better take the hint and hit the trail back to my North Star State."

Miss Helen Rivers, who conducts this department, will see to it that you will be able to make friends with other readers, though thousands of miles may separate you. It must be understood that Miss Rivers will undertake to exchange letters only between men and men, boys and boys, women and women, girls and girls. Letters will be forwarded direct when correspondents so wish; otherwise they will be answered here. Be sure to inclose forwarding postage when sending letters through The Hollow Tree.

WHEN The Owl espies an old-timer comin' up the trail to The Old Holla, he gives a joyous flap of his wings, for there's only one thing that he likes a little better—to see 'em comin' in pairs. And that doesn't mean that they must necessarily be grizzled prospectors, or that they must be hombres of any particular gun-totin' design. It may mean, as in this instance, that one of the old-timers of the trail is a member of the fair sex. And doesn't the old Owl hoot his welcome, though, when he sees 'em breakin' the trail together, a-swingin' along side by side!

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Will you let a fellow of twenty-five and his wife, aged twenty, join your Gang? We are very lonely 'cos we've both been accustomed to the free and open spaces—and to live in a city is just like being buried alive.

As a boy, I lived in the province of Alberta, Canada, and, since starting on my travels, I've visited Russia, Mespot, Norway, Italy, India, and the Island of Ceylon. My wife has spent most of her life on the North-west frontier amid Pathan raiders. In Calcutta, we seldom hear the sound of a gun, unless it be during a Hindoo-Moslem riot. In fact, I have had men to dine with me who have been afraid to handle a six-gun!

Now, hombres, we'd like to meet up with the shootingest hard-riding members of The Hollow Tree—those who live on ranches and have adventured some. If there are any of the real old-timers among you, let's hear you roar. We're a-cravin' a little excitement from the good old West of U. S. A. And should any of The Gang be contemplating an expedition into the wild fastnesses of nature, anywhere, and crave company, we would appreciate putting in our bid to go along. Let's hear you a-comin' our way, folks!

ALLEN J. HARCOMBE,
PHYLLIS M. HARCOMBE.
Marine Club, 13 Strand Road, Calcutta, Bengal, India.

Home-seekers.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: We are planning to go to northern California, or possibly Washington, some time in the near future. We will go with the idea of making our home there, if we find that we like it. We would appreciate it very much if the friends of The Tree would inform us concerning the climate, working and living conditions in these States. We would like to hear from some one who lives in Long View, Washington, if there are any of the Gangsters who hail from that place.

I am twenty-four, and have two little girls, one four and the other two. I would also like letters from married sisters who are about my own age. MRS. FRIEDA MCKENZIE.
69 West Concord Avenue, Orlando, Florida.

Lonesome city miss.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Is there room for one more? I get very lonesome for the country here in the city of Oakland. My greatest pleasure now is to think and write about the places I've been, and that includes four trips by motor and four by train to Vancouver, British Columbia, from San Diego, California. I've also been all through Idaho, and lived there for two years.

My pleasantest memories are of the year I spent in a little logging town by the name of Payette Lakes, Idaho, or McCall, as it is called on the railroad map. It is up in the mountains, one hundred and twenty-eight miles from a town of any size. There are three lakes, all of them about seventeen to twenty miles long, and to circle them by horseback is the greatest pleasure imaginable.

In the fall of the year the sheep are shipped from this place, as the railroad ends there.

I have much more to tell about McCall to any one who will write to me.

ARNETTE GIBSON.

4096½ San Pablo Avenue, Oakland, California.

"I am twenty, and my trade is repairer of engines on lake boats and power houses," writes Fred Fuller, 385 Whittemore Street, Pontiac, Michigan. This gangster has been in British Columbia and Northern Canada on a trip that has netted him quite a bit of adventure. He would welcome the opportunity to tell his experiences to hombres who'd care to listen.

Ralph Morse, 4 Garden Street, St. Johnsbury, Vermont, is eighteen and would like especially to hear from those interested in golf. He would like to exchange score cards, as he is making a collection of them.

Get busy with your old fountain pens and typewriters, folks, for the gangsters sure are crowdin' for attention.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Well, here I am, away down below the Mason-Dixon line. I dreamed, once, of the South, and I strove to get here—down here where fish are fish, and plenty of them! I've caught one or more of all the common one hundred varieties—I've gaped in awe as a sailfish left the water in his frenzy to escape, and I've had thrills galore when he has taken three, four, five hundred feet of line in his surging runs. But I'd give them all—all of these fighters of the deep, for one little trout taken on a dry fly in some cool stream in the shadow of a tree-clad mountain, with the smell of spruce and pine about me.

Perhaps some one who has these things that I now dream about, at his very door, will answer my letter. I have always been interested in the States of Oregon and Washington, and would appreciate hearing from folks in or about that locality, where one can see the snow-capped peaks and where there is a chance for a man to make a fair living. I am married and have a young boy that I would like to have grow up in that country. So come on, folks, and let's hear from the lovers of the mountains.

A DREAMER.

Care of The Tree.

"I will wear my Hollow Tree pin on the band of my Stetson," writes a cowgirl, of Denver, Colorado.

Don't you want one of our Hollow Tree emblems to wear, too?

Send twenty-five cents in stamps or coin to The Hollow Tree, Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, and state whether you want the button style for your coat lapel, or the pin.

This sister offers us some information about the State of South Dakota.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Some time ago I had the opportunity of traveling through South Dakota, and, incidentally, make some careful investigations as to conditions in that State.

South Dakota is an all-year-round State—there is something for every season of the year. Land is cheap and plentiful, and the great need of the State, it seems to me, is more people on the land.

The Eastern part of the State presents conditions very similar to Iowa and Nebraska—cultivated acres, good crops, and prosperous conditions. Prices in the central part of the State are very much lower and within reach of those who would find it impossible to se-

cure land farther east in the State. Sweet clover, alfalfa, hogs, and poultry offer interesting possibilities to those who are able to secure land at a low price, and who are willing to work hard for the first few years. In the central part of the State, the dry seasons which appear now and then make it inadvisable for the man with very small means to attempt dairying or the raising of small grains, and the latter require more acreage than he could handle.

I believe that South Dakota is a State where a poor man can procure enough acres of ground to support his family—where a middle-class family can find a comfortable home and "grow up" with the State. It is an ideal place for tourists of moderate means, for they can spend many weeks there without seriously depleting their modest budgets.

The Custer Battlefield Highway leads through the center of the State, through the most attractive scenery in and about Spearfish, through the Hills region, and across the boundary into the oil region of Wyoming and on through Glacier and Yellowstone Parks to the north Pacific coast. Rapid City, at the entrance to the Hills, is a progressive community, the State School of Mines being located there. The Lead-Deadwood vicinity is crowded with historic associations as well as modern activity. Hot Springs and the surrounding territory are replete with places of interest; the scenery of the Harney Peak and Sylvan Lake region are unsurpassed, and the roads are excellent.

Those interested in what remains in our country of frontier life will find remnants of it when going through the Indian reservations in the southern part of the State.

WELL-INFORMED.

Care of The Tree.

There's many an hombre as envies you, Gangster!

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I received my Hollow Tree badge to-night when I went to the post office after my mail. You'll be interested to know that our post office is in the rear of one of the two general stores that Sprague River boasts of, and that besides the general stores we have a pool room, one hotel, a restaurant, and a garage! Some burg, you'll say, eh, hombres?

Sprague River is on the Klamath Indian Reservation, and is forty miles northeast of Klamath Falls, Oregon. I am working for the lumber company here. The company furnishes bunk houses for the men they employ. We are two men to a bunk house. There are also quarters for married men and their families, as the ones I have described are for us single hombres. We roll out of our bunks at six o'clock; eat, and get to work by seven. We work nine hours, from seven to twelve and from one to five. It is sure a great life.

Come on, Gangsters, and keep me busy reading and writing letters, for our evenings are long. EDWARD D. HARMER.

Box 612, Klamath Falls, Oregon.

Another one of the fortunate folks.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I live on a stock farm on Tawas Lake, East Tawas, Michigan. Tawas is a little town of about two thousand people. We have several large fisheries, and we are quite well known for our tree nursery, where we raise trees to set out in the national forest.

Tawas Lake is known as the "home of the wild duck," and every fall the wild ducks congregate to feed on the wild rice.

I'll gladly tell about northern Michigan to any one writing me, as I've lived here all my life. C. L. DRUMM.

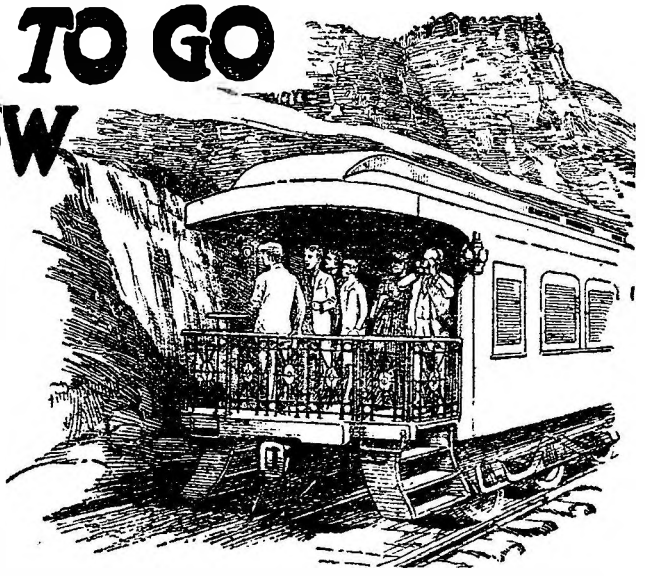
Tawas Lake Stock Farm, East Tawas, Michigan.

Harold Zedwick, 1676 Belmont Avenue, Toledo, Ohio, wishes that some boy or "waddie" from the "great outdoor West," would write to him. He is thinking of going West next summer, and wants to feel that he has some pals there before he starts.

"I am night clerk at a hotel in Youngstown, a small place in southern Alberta, Canada," says F. Schroder, "and I would like to hear from young men about my age, twenty-five, who live in the West. If any of the Gangsters have Western poems, I would be pleased if they would send them to me, as I'm making a collection of them. I will send views of Western Canada in exchange."

W. Ferguson, 143 Muir Avenue, Royal Oak, Michigan, was born and raised on a horse ranch in Western Canada and wants to correspond with some one who can appreciate his lonesomeness now that he is living where he has no saddle horse to ride.

WHERE TO GO AND HOW TO GET THERE



by John North

It is our aim in this department to be of genuine practical help and service to those who wish to make use of it. Don't hesitate to write to us and give us the opportunity of assisting you to the best of our ability.

Address all communications to John North, care of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

RIVERS OF THE WEST—THE SCENIC YELLOWSTONE

THE Yellowstone River rises in the Shoshone Mountains of northwestern Wyoming, traverses Montana, and joins the Missouri River, of which it is the largest tributary, at Buford, on the boundary between Montana and North Dakota.

This wonderful river of the West is one thousand miles long. It flows through Yellowstone National Park into the lake of the same name, whence it spreads its course over basaltic lavas to the towering falls. From this point down to the Grand Cañon of the Yellowstone are some of the most remarkable scenic effects produced by erosion to be found on this continent. The upper fall is 112 feet high, the lower 310. Then for a distance of ten or twelve miles the cañon is cut from 600 feet to 1,500 feet below the adjacent margins of the plateau.

For centuries the Indians were the only voyagers along this stream. Then came the eventful years when the red man and the white shared together the perils of its turbulent waters. And then again there were times when the two races were not so friendly and many skirmishes took place between them, with loss of life and increased hostility on both sides. In 1875, the merchant citizens of Bozeman, Montana, sent an expedition to the head of navigation on the Yellowstone for the purpose of opening up a wagon road. It took six months to cover six hundred miles, and these months were not without their thrills. Four fights with hostile Indians relieved the monotony of the trip, with a loss of three men and thirty-seven horses. Fifty Indians were killed in these encounters, and over a hundred more were wounded.

In the Grand Cañon of the Yellowstone, from the lower falls for three

miles down the river, abrupt walls on both sides of the river present a dazzling array of colors from the brink of the cañon to the water's edge—a depth of a thousand feet. It is said that the Indians gave the river its name, because of the yellow which is so conspicuous in the various colors of the walls of the gorgeous cañon, which display a brilliancy and mingling of hues beyond the power of description. There are varying shades of red, purple and yellow which are irregularly blended in confused masses, with yellow, from the palest tint to the deepest orange, predominating.

Yellowstone Park derives its name from the river. It contains more geysers than are found together in any other part of the world. It has innumerable boiling springs whose steam mingles with the clouds; petrified forests with trunks standing upright like the pillars of ruined temples. Some of these trunks, which are from two to four feet in diameter and from twenty to forty feet high, appear just ready to fall, while niches mark the places from which others have already fallen. It has been computed that these forests were alive and flourishing anywhere between three and twelve thousand years ago, for it has taken many centuries to bring them to the state in which we see them to-day.

The Continental Divide, separating the waters of the Atlantic from those of the Pacific, crosses the park plateau from southeast to northwest. On both sides of the divide lie several large bodies of water, which form so marked a feature in the scenery of the plateau that the region has been designated the lake country of the park. Yellowstone Lake, through which the Yellowstone River passes, is the largest lake in North America at this altitude, 7,740 feet, and one of the largest in the world at so high an elevation above sea level. It presents a surface area of a hundred and thirty-nine square miles and a shore line of nearly one hundred miles.

The scenic beauties of the Yellowstone River are unsurpassed in any part of the world. Those who expect to see all its wonders in a few days can have no idea of the extent and variety of its attractions. To appreciate it fully one should follow the trails, climb the mountains, row on the water, camp in the woods or on the river banks, watch the moose, the mountain sheep and the deer. These are wild but tame, because they are no longer afraid of man, and while they can roam as freely as ever they did, they know they are safe, for the only shot permitted here is the camera snapshot.

In next week's article I shall give a short account of the service which the waters of the Yellowstone River have been made to give to the settlers within its area.

FROM A HOMESTEAD "FAN"

DEAR MR. NORTH: I have been reading your homesteading articles published some time ago, and would like to tell you of my experience. Our place was in northern Minnesota. We had three cows, three calves, one hundred and fifty chickens, and one horse, all the good pasture we wanted, lots of wild hay—what we didn't have we could buy at five dollars a ton—and no hardships of any kind. It was fifteen miles to town over good roads. There was no poverty; any one who wanted to work could make a good living. There were all kinds of wild game, fish in the spring to last one all winter, if one salted them down, and plenty of berries. The small Tamarack River went right through our land, full of fish, with a swimmin' hole, and water for the cattle.

One family came from Montana. They had lots of money and stocked up their farm completely—everything you could think of in fowls. They built a good log house and barn and had plenty of ground cleared for the garden. Then the men went out to harvest in North Dakota, and the woman was supposed to take care of the place. Whether she couldn't do it or didn't care to is hard to tell, but when the husband got back only the cows were left, and they were running wild in the woods. The foxes took the ducks and

geese, and there were plenty of other animals to take them—skunks, weasels, mink, hawks. I was visiting there one time, and the weasels took three in ten minutes.

People like that couldn't get along if they stepped right into a ready-made ranch, with cowboys and everything. It's not the country, it's the grit in the people that makes them succeed at homesteading. We had to give ours up because my husband was working at his trade in Chicago, and my son and I couldn't clear the land ourselves or hire help to do it for us.

I hope you will have more to write about homesteads. I love to read about other people's experiences, and I would take a homestead again if we had our rights.

Solon Springs, Wisconsin. MRS. A. N.

I sure thought I'd exhausted the homesteading topic some time back, but here's one enthusiast hollering for more.

NEVADA CAVE RESERVED

A TRACT of public land in Nevada has recently been withdrawn from homestead entry and reserved by the government because it contains Lovelock Cave. The tract is situated in Churchill County and comprises about forty acres. The withdrawal was made for the purpose of affording opportunity of scientific study of interesting prehistoric material found in the cave.

According to the secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, articles taken from Lovelock Cave are in a remarkable state of preservation and are particularly valuable on this account. With its temporary retention in public ownership, the site will be the subject of further archæological research.

THE DESERT'S ENIGMA

A STRANGE mystery of the desert was recently presented for solution to Sheriff Thomas, of Nye County, Nevada. One day an orchardist on his way home from Tonopah came across an automobile bearing a Montana license plate. The machine was standing alone in the midst of a desert region twenty-five miles north from Beatty, where a detour from the highway is taken by experienced drivers. A factory-made mattress was stretched on the ground and an overcoat of good quality was fastened around the radiator. Three miner's candles were disposed at regular intervals close to the mattress. There was nobody in sight, and the orchardist who first saw the car, supposed that its owner was somewhere near by prospecting.

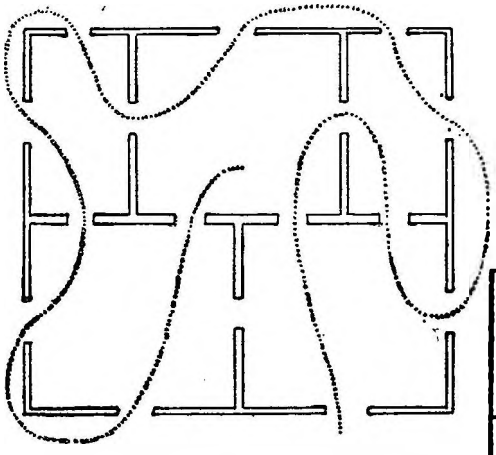
However, when, on returning that way eight days later, he saw the deserted car in the same spot, he investigated, but without finding any trace of the missing person or persons. The only evidences of human presence were footprints leading off into the sagebrush, but there were no returning signs. The orchardist, therefore, on his return to Tonopah, reported the matter to the sheriff, on the theory that the owner of the car had become demented and had wandered off, while in that condition, to die in the waterless region where his car had been found.

PUZZLING TRAILS

by Prosper Buranelli

After the Round-up is over, each week Prosper Buranelli will select for readers of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE a couple of tricky problems that will make them get out their pencils and go to it. What kind of puzzle do you like the best? Write and tell us. Send in a puzzle and show us. Maybe you can concoct the one that will make WESTERN STORY readers quit cold.

YEP, it had to come sooner or later. There's one headbreaker that seems to be bothering people all over the country. Ask anybody running

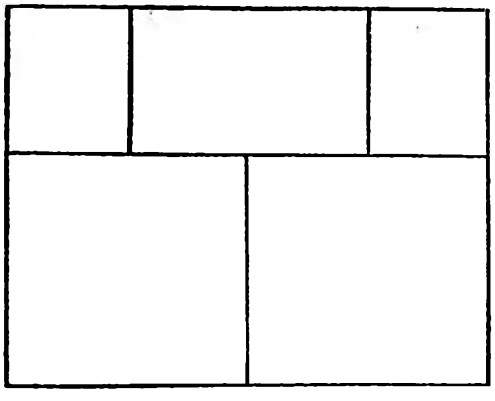


a puzzle section, and he will tell you that inquiries are always coming in about this particular puzzle.

There are five rooms, each with two doors. You must pass through each and every door and through no door more than once. Get out your pencil and try it. Draw a line that will pass through every opening and through no opening more than once. Of course, you cannot cut through a wall.

Mr. C. D. Stanley of St. Petersburg, Florida, writes asking me if this puzzle can be solved. No. It cannot. It would do a lot of people a lot of good to know this. It would save them a lot of useless perplexity.

A more usual form of the puzzle is thus.



Here you are required to draw a line which will cut every wall and no wall more than once. This can be done, but only with a quibble. I don't think it's a fair quibble. Anyway, unless you can figure it out meanwhile, you will find it in next week's answers.

I'm trying out a new stunt on you. See the row of animals around the heading? Well, each stands for a word. Write these words down and their first letters will spell out a Western city. Thus, you might spell Reno in his way:

RHINOCEROS
ELEPHANT
NIGHTHAWK
OWL

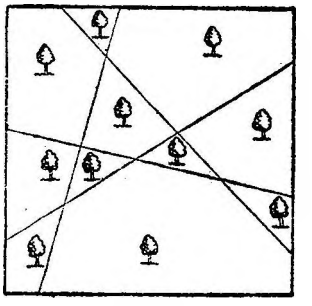
These pictures make up a picture acrostic. With the ordinary kind of acrostic you give definitions, and from these you guess the words whose initials spell out the answer. Here's one. It represents a famous man.

Wagon
South American mountains
First mother
Powdered stone
Common insect
Small, annoying animal.

All right. Guess the words defined and read their first letters.

LAST WEEK'S ANSWERS.

Lines and trees



Square of musical instruments:

Piano, violin, banjo, tom-tom, organ, fife, cello, flute, trombone, clarinet, lyre, oboe, cornet, viola.

Hidden animals:

Horse, gazelle, caribou, coyote, tiger, tapir.

MONTANA DISCOVERY STIRS SCIENTISTS

THE discovery some weeks ago of a fossil human tooth in a coal mine near Bear Creek, Montana, has caused a great deal of discussion among scientists and may lead to the formation of new theories as to antiquity of the human race. The coal deposit in which the tooth was found was said to belong to what the learned in geology and archæology designate as the Eocene period, but this Eocene period dates back twenty million years or more, according to the scientists, at which time there were no human beings or anthropoidal apes or anything resembling the human species on earth.

If, therefore, it can be proved beyond question that the tooth is that of a man—even though it be only the most primitive savage—the geologists will have to revise their theories altogether. The West abounds in scientific remains of past ages, and there are probably many discoveries still to be made there, which may revolutionize present ideas of the early history of the human race. The find of the tooth was made by Doctor J. C. Siegfriedt, who was collecting fossils for the University of Iowa.

MISSING

This department conducted in duplicate in DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE and WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, thus giving readers double service, is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send us a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found."

It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

PUTNAM, ARNOLD.—Sometimes called "Sunshine." He is about five feet tall, rather chunky in build, twenty years old, and has brown hair. If you see this, please get in touch with your dad or your Aunt Myrt. Have you heard the sad news? We broadcast for you. End our worry by writing to us or by coming home. Your dad wants you. Aunt Myrt, 3023 Forty-first Avenue, South, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

ADAMS, JOSEPH.—He was last heard from on the U. S. S. "Argonne" in 1922 when discharged. Any one knowing his whereabouts will please communicate with his sister. Mrs. Mildred Curran, 227 W. B. Street, Casper, Wyoming.

DAVIS, "BONY."—He was working on State Game Reserve at Portsmouth, Ohio, in July, 1926. Please write to your old buddy at once. Carl Workley, 2310 South Federal Boulevard, Denver, Colorado.

F. F. C.—Will you please send me your address? Bernice Riley, Box 291, Monterey, California.

SLOAN, CLYDE and **ROBERT.**—They were last heard of in Los Angeles, California. Communicate with your mother at once. They were formerly of Rupert, Idaho. Any one knowing their present whereabouts will kindly write to Mrs. Ida Sloan, 1533½ McCadden Place, Hollywood, California.

DEAN, LEONARD.—He is about forty-five years of age, short and heavily built, has gray eyes, and was last heard from at Casper, Wyoming, in 1923. Write to your mother, Mrs. J. B. Poole, Box 121, Montrose, Colorado, or sister, Mrs. J. C. Lambert, Burke, Idaho.

CONNERS or **O'CONNOR, BERT.**—He was last heard of in Seattle, Washington. Has black hair, blue eyes, is five feet six inches in height, thirty-six years of age, and his left index finger is crooked. Please write to Mrs. Nellie O'Shea, 1065 Shipping Street, Salem, Oregon.

ATTENTION.—I would like to hear from some of the boys who served in the 6th Company, C. A. C., Fort Howard, Maryland, also from 47th C. A. C., Headquarters Company in France. Send all news to Frank Byers, Standard, West Virginia.

CRAMPTON, EARL.—Your old buddy who was with you at Fort Howard, Maryland, 6th Company, C. A. C., would like to hear from you. Frank Byers, Standard, West Virginia.

DANIELS, JOHN A.—He was last seen in West Springfield, Massachusetts, in 1912, and is now about fifty-five years of age. Is five feet ten inches in height, has dark hair, brown eyes, and had four front upper teeth missing. At one time he was working in the mines in Pennsylvania. Please write as there is a settlement to be made. H. C. Martineau, 406 West Avenue, Pawtucket, Rhode Island.

HOFFMAN, C. W.—He was living in Great Bend, Kansas, in 1888. Was a locomotive engineer on the A. T. S. F. Please write to J. T. Hoffman, Box 53, Earlsboro, Oklahoma.

TUMMARELLO, GIUSEPPE.—Son on Salvatore Tummarello. At the age of twenty he left his home town, Campobello di Mazzara, Italy, in 1910, and came to America, to Bristol, Pennsylvania. Later he went to Philadelphia, and then to St. Louis, Missouri. His parents have died and there is a settlement to be made. Any one knowing his present whereabouts will kindly write to Mr. Jasper Tummarello, Box 105, Benld, Illinois.

ZABORUWSKI, ALBERT.—Please communicate with Frank J. Thomas, 626 South 5th Street, La Crosse, Wisconsin.

COOK.—I would like some information about the relatives of Charles H. Cook. He was in Kansas in 1885. He has two brothers, Fred and George. Mother's name was Mary Neighman. Send all mail to C. H. Cock, R. 1, Box 87, Bourbon, Missouri.

ALLEN, ZELLA.—She is thirteen years of age and has bobbed red hair. Her sister is very anxious to get in touch with her and would appreciate all available information. Mrs. Gladys Wade, 315 South James Street, Rome, New York.

MATT.—I have never received your last letter. Please let me know how I can reach you and your mother, Mrs. Ray Manley. Buddy.

SANFORD, CHARLES and **GEORGE.**—Please write to your old chum and playmate of Elsworth, Wisconsin. Allen J. O'Brien, Box 651, Marfa, Texas.

DANIELS, WILLIAM.—He is forty-three years of age, six feet in height, has light complexion and weighs about one hundred and eighty pounds. Was last seen in Montreal, Canada, in 1913. Information will be gratefully received by his son. Everett Daniels, Box 51, South Chatham, Massachusetts.

NUTTALL, Mrs. STELLA.—She has been missing for eighteen years and was last heard of in Texas. Her son is anxious to get in touch with her. Please write to F. P., Box 485, Frederick, Oklahoma.

GODDEN, JAMES HOWARD.—He is six feet in height, has blue eyes, auburn hair, fair complexion and quiet disposition. Please come back or write as we still love you. Your wife, Helen.

KANE, HAZEL.—She is about twenty-five years of age, has dark hair, blue eyes, and worked as a waitress in the old Rock Bakery, Broadway and Luceras Street, St. Louis, Missouri. Lived on Madison Street near 10th Street. Please send information to E. V. H., care of this magazine.

TREKELL or **CRAIG, LOREN.**—Last seen in Marysville, California. Please write to your brother, Carl Trekell, 298 East 40th Street, Portland, Oregon.

ALLEN, OMIE.—He was last heard of in Missouri. Has black hair and eyes. His home is at Cumberland City, Tennessee. Any one knowing his present address will kindly write to Mrs. Vida Maddox, Box 381, Melbourne, Florida.

GODDARD or **BAKER, TONY.**—He was in Texas in 1920. Is forty years of age, six feet in height, has auburn hair and gray eyes. His daughter is anxious to get in touch with him and would appreciate news. Opal Goddard, General Delivery, Doyle, Oklahoma.

PETERS, HARRY S.—He was in Geary, Indiana, in 1924. Please write to E. J. Reese, 800 Dana Avenue Ext., Warren, Ohio.

JIM.—Please let us hear from you. Mother is sick and it might make her feel better to hear from you. Mrs. O. D. Thompson, 1101 Lawrence Street, Denver, Colorado.

WELLS, HILDA.—She lived in Columbus, Ohio, in 1916, and attended Spring Street school. Has a brother named Harold. Write to an old friend, Mildred, care of this magazine.

HIPKINS, ALICE.—Write to Frances and me. Lost Perville address. Helen, care of this magazine.

BILLY.—Your father is very anxious to hear from you. Would also like to know where Sarah Joe is at the present time. I saw Henry in Alabama in 1924. Please write. Private Frank Roberson, 20th Infantry Band, Fort Sam Houston, Texas.

KUBOVY, JERRY.—He was with the 1st U. S. Cavalry, C Troop in 1919 and 1920. His home is in Chicago, Illinois. Ray K. Stevens, care of this magazine.

FLOWERS, LOUISE.—Please write or wire me as I have important news for you. Joe Pleasant, Box 3691, West Palm Beach, Florida.

HENRY, J. C. or **JIM.**—He left his home October 13th, 1926. He is forty years of age, five feet ten inches in height, has dark-brown hair, gray eyes, a dark complexion and weighs about one hundred and fifty pounds. Return home to your wife or write to this magazine as there is a letter being held for you. Mrs. Pearl Henry, 121 G. C., Thomaston, Georgia.

NOIA, JACK.—He left his home in Antioch, California, in 1905. Is about forty years old. His father and sister, Rose, have died recently. Any one having any knowledge of him please write or wire collect. Mrs. Bessie C. Noia, 42 Allen Street, Brockton, Massachusetts.

REEP, "CHICK," formerly of McKeesport or McKeesrock, Pennsylvania. Was stationed at Barracks 66, Tour, in 1919. Mary B. died a year ago. Would like to hear from you. Bess and "Pud," 42 Allen Street, Brockton, Massachusetts.

BUDDIES.—Any ex-patients of French hospital in Barle-duc, Evac. 114th at Fleury, Camp Hospital 27, Tour, or any of the boys who remember Rose and Bessie on the U. S. S. "Manchuria," which sailed on May 11, 1919, for home with a New Jersey outfit, please write to Bessie Carr Nola, Nurse, 42 Allen Street, Brockton, Massachusetts.

AUBREY.—Please get in touch with your sister as soon as you see this. Mrs. Minnie Aubrey, Phoenix Park, Tourist Camp, Jacksonville, Florida.

PRIMMER, CRAM and CLOSSON.—I would like to get in touch with R. S. Primmer, formerly of Butte, Nebraska; Mrs. E. M. Cram, of Butte, Montana, and Avery Closson, formerly of Witten, South Dakota, but last heard from in Casper, Wyoming, where he was working in the oil fields. Any information will be gratefully received. W. E. Bridgman, Witten, South Dakota.

MAGONANES or MONOGNES, ANTOME.—He was stationed at Camp Wheeler, Georgia, in 1917. He was one of the first New York City boys to be sent to Montgomery, Alabama. He and his brother came from Norway and settled in New York City. He is twenty-seven years of age, tall, and fair complexioned, and did not speak clear English. Write to Evelyn Akins, 2820 North Nyrtlewood Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

BOYD, DANE.—He is six feet three inches in height, forty-nine years of age, has dark-blue eyes, a ruddy complexion, and weighs two hundred and twenty pounds. Was last seen in Dunlap, Tennessee. His mother is ill and wishes him to return home. Everything is forgiven. Leona Morgan, Box 181, Wolfpit, Kentucky.

CLEMENCIA.—She once lived at 417 North Figueroa, Los Angeles, California. Has a sister named Santos. Please write to S. P., care of this magazine.

LANGEL, JAMES.—He is about twenty-five years of age, five feet six inches in height, dark-brown hair, brown eyes, and was last heard of in New York City. Please write to Private John George Medwetz, Battery B, 11th F. A., Schofield Barracks, Hawaiian Islands, T. H.

MYRA or "JACKIE."—I would like to hear from you, as there is important news for you. A. H. F., 112 Lakeside Avenue, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho.

DESKIN, WILLIAM.—He left his home in Avery, Iowa, forty-two years ago. His daughter is anxious to hear from him and will appreciate all important news. Mrs. Cora Deskin Johnson, 1011 Herkimer Street, Joliet, Illinois.

A. H. B.—Mother wants you to return home. Everything will be O. K. H. L. B.

STROM, ELROY A.—Please let us heer from you, as we are worrying about you. Things have changed since you left us, so please come or write. Lily Strom, Henriette, Minnesota.

WHITESIDE, CHARLEY.—He went overseas during the World War. His leg was injured in an automobile accident on Armistice Day. He was at one time in Cleveland, Ohio, but was last heard of in Brooklyn, New York. Please write to your brother, as he has news for you. I. H. Whiteside, care of C. W. Hussey & Co., 10 North Front Street, Memphis, Tennessee.

ATTENTION.—I would like to hear from some of the men that were in the engineering force of the U. S. S. "Nevada" during the World War while the above ship was in European waters. Remember our stay in Ireland. Drop your old pal a line. "Pop" Wangerien, 358 Bainbridge Street, Brooklyn, New York.

RUSSELL, HOMER E. or JACK.—He is thirty years of age, has blue eyes and light hair. When last heard of he was with Odell Brothers, of Hoise City, Oklahoma. His sister is very eager to hear from him and would appreciate information as to his present whereabouts. Marian E. Stevens, 340 Essex Street, Beverly, Massachusetts.

SICKLER, JOHN.—He left home sixteen years ago. Any one knowing his present address will confer a favor by writing to K., care of this magazine.

GRANT, JOSE, and HAMILTON, LILLY.—Jose lived in Stockton, California, and Lilly worked for the Bell Telephone Co. in San Francisco, California. Walter Chamberlin, 209 Garfield Avenue, Jersey City, New Jersey.

REYNOLDS, J. H.—He was last heard of in Idaho twenty years ago. Any information concerning him will be appreciated by an old Spanish-American War comrade. John H. Reid, Box 1053, Picher, Oklahoma.

MacDEARMON, E. P.—He is a boilermaker and was in the Brooklyn navy yard about six or seven years ago. He formerly came from Lebanon, Pennsylvania. An old friend would like to hear from him and would appreciate his present address. S. A. R., care of this magazine.

MacDONALD, ALAN.—He met with an accident in the Metropolitan Theater, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. Please write to your old pal, who is eager to hear from you. Harold Kennedy, 294 Polson Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

WHITEROCK, HENRY.—He is partly Indian. He is thirteen years of age, has black hair, brown eyes, a tan complexion, and left his home in Springfield, Missouri, in September, 1926. His parents are worried over his absence and would like to hear from him. Mrs. Eleanor Whiterock, 1724 East Atlantic Street, Springfield, Missouri.

JOHNSON, CLYDE.—He has red, wavy hair, and was last heard of in Fresno, California. Please come home if you still love me. I live on State line. H. A. W.

KERWIN, SUSIE.—She is the adopted daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Thaddeus Chambers. She is sixty years of age, and was last heard of in Atlantic City, New Jersey, nineteen years ago. Any one knowing her whereabouts will confer a favor by writing to Harry Parker, 15 East Washington Avenue, Pleasantville, New Jersey.

LAWSON, DONALD.—He is fifty-eight years of age and has been missing for thirty years. He was married to Emma Nightingale. His son wishes to find his father or his father's relatives. Any information will be appreciated by Harold C. Lawson, 1013 Sheridan Avenue, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

KING, GEORGE.—He was last seen in Chicago, Illinois, in 1925. Please write to your half sisters, Ruth and Martha Fones, Lincoln, Illinois.

EMMA.—Please let me know where you are and I will come to you. Mickey D., Chicago, Illinois.

LEO.—Please come home. Edward misses you, and I am heartbroken. M. I.

BURCH, BURT.—He was employed by the International Harvester Co. of Denver, Colorado, about six years ago. Please write to Laura Clausen, 1221 Division Street, Davenport, Iowa.

HAMM, "BILL" LEE.—Will he or any one knowing his present whereabouts communicate with an old friend? Box 38, Bethel, Maine.

ALLEN, DICK.—He is known as "Shorty" and was in Duluth, Minnesota, in July, 1926. Please send all information to his brother, Chester W. Allen, 28 Oakridge Avenue, Nutley, New Jersey.

HYDE, MARTHA.—At one time she was in East, Texas. Please write to me. Joseph Drake, Storks, Louisiana.

FINLEY, CLARENCE.—He was last seen at Las Vegas, New Mexico, but was last heard of in Lidgerwood, North Dakota. He was an ex-champion cowboy at Cheyennne, Wyoming. Please write to Doctor Davis, College Point, Long Island, New York.

LEMBACH, C. L.—Please get in touch with me, as I am worried. I love you. Try to disregard what has happened. Adele, 10727 One Hundred and Twelfth Street, Richmond Hill, Long Island.

J. A.—I need you. I am at St. Vincent's. Please come or write. Lazy Lou.

POP.—I always have to think of the baby first, even though he costs all my pleasure and health. Trust.

STANLEY, MRS. BEN F.—Please write, as there is important news awaiting you. Mrs. P. K. Sampson, 817 Jackson Street, Vicksburg, Mississippi.

OTTENI, LOUIS J.—Please write to me at once. C.

McFADDEN, FRANCIS JOHN.—He was last heard from in Los Angeles, California. Found all his credentials for navy and life-boat service. Have them in Bethlehem. Write to your sister, Agnes, 23 West Morton Street, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

HOYLE, ETHEL.—Please write to me and send me your address. Bill, 440 West Forty-eighth Street.

HERRICK, FRANK, SIDNEY, and JARRED.—Sons of Franklin Herrick. They are believed to be in Dakota or Manitoba. Any information will be appreciated by a brother, Walter E. Herrick, Sattler Building, Manistique, Michigan.

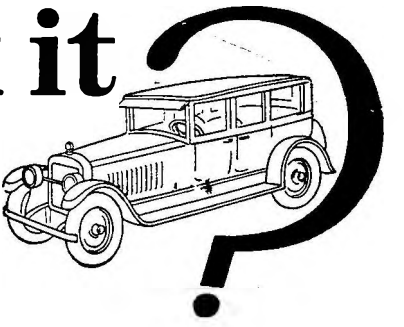
BAGLEY, ALFRED GEE.—Any one knowing where any one of my relatives are please communicate with me through this magazine. I am married now and have a son two years old.

TED.—Please write to Nell and "Slim" at the same address. We are very anxious to hear from you.

SHIPMATES.—"Lime" of the old "Fighting Fourth" Division, U. S. S. "Oklahoma," 1916 to 1918, would welcome a letter from some of his former buddies. Also from any who remember "Boats" of the U. S. S. "Stephen R. Jones," during 1918 to 1919. N. E. Hilton, 238½ Main Street, Oshkosh, Wisconsin.

KIES, EDWIN.—He is known, also, as "Kay" and Eddie Saunders. Last seen in St. Louis, Missouri, March, 1926. Will explain everything you wish to know, as I still love you. Write to "Chickadee" Scarboro, care of this magazine.

Can you fix it



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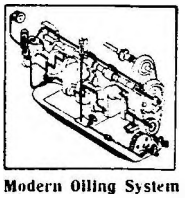

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