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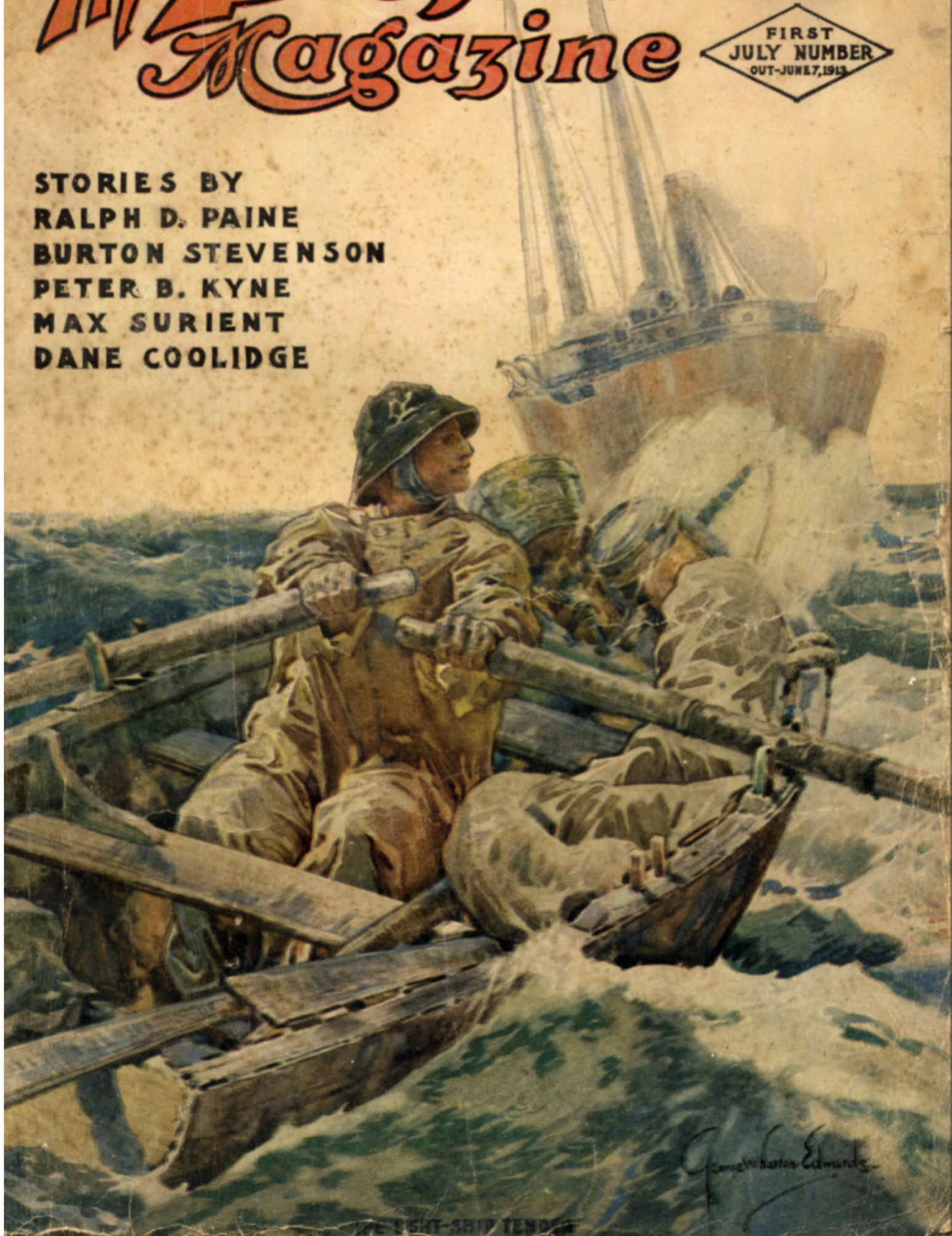
TWICE-A-MONTH

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The Popular Magazine

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OUT-JUNE 7, 1913

STORIES BY
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James Wharton Edwards

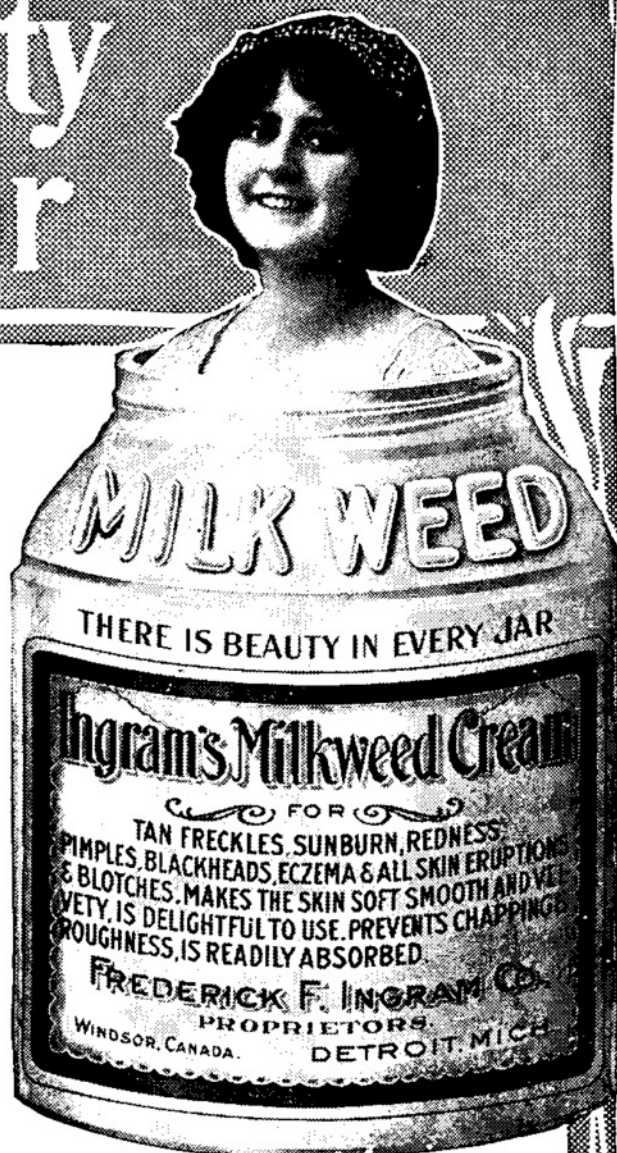
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The Popular Magazine

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. XXVIII.

JULY 1, 1913.

No. 6.

The Seal of Confucius

By Max Surlent

Author of "The Secret of Fort Hoodoo," "Brothers in Arms," Etc.

China may become a republic and adopt a modern constitution, but the heart of its ancient mystery—like that of Egypt—will ever remain a magnet to the imagination of man. Into that heart of forbidden sanctuaries, cruelty and intrigue, strange faith and sinister fanaticism, Surlent takes us in this mesmeric novel of his. As you plunge into the sweep and swing of the Yellow Maelstrom, you feel at once that the author has a singular and intimate knowledge of the Chinese character and of the centuries-long institutions, even if that institution, as in the present instance, is nothing but a piece of jade no larger than an old-fashioned fob seal. Not only the lives of his hero and heroine but the destinies of the Flowery Kingdom depended upon the recovery of that little jade talisman.

(A Complete Novel)

CHAPTER I.

STERNBERG, the American consul, gazed discontentedly over the railing of the broad club porch at the yellow water of the sluggish river.

"I suppose that I may get to like it if I live here as long as you have stuck it out, Uncle Charley; but just now I'm not calling down blessings on the head of our honored president for picking out this particular plum as a reward for my pernicious political activity in aiding to turn the Republican rascals out," he grumbled. "I wish that he had seen fit to make me ambassador to Tophet."

"Oh, I don't know; Chee Nung isn't so bad when you get acclimated," answered his companion, a lean, elderly man, who lounged comfortably in a long

bamboo chair beside him, seemingly oblivious to the heat and humidity which had caused the consul so far to forget his official dignity that he had discarded collar and tie, and sat unabashed with his unbuttoned tunic of white duck revealing that he wore only a singlet beneath it. "What's wrong beside the climate, Sternberg? Missionaries been kickin' up a bobbery?"

"No, nothing more than usual," replied the consul. "I reckon that it's just the heat and a touch of liver, and—oh, yes, there is something bothering me, too. Say, Uncle Charley, you've been out here so long that you're the recognized walking 'Who's Who?' of every foreigner, past and present, between Vladivostok and Manila, so you can surely help me out. Who's Macpherson?"

"Why?" demanded the older man,

with unaccustomed curtness, as he straightened up in his chair.

Sternberg was so surprised at the effect of his question that he momentarily forgot the heat, and the large palm-leaf fan with which he had unavailingly been trying to mitigate his discomfort dropped from his moist hand. Winton, familiarly known as "Uncle Charley" in every foreign settlement on the Chinese littoral, oldest American resident of the Flowery Kingdom, and only surviving charter member of the Chee Nung Club, was ordinarily garrulous, and a question of identity or a disputed point of ancient history which he could settle invariably precipitated a flood of reminiscences and anecdotes of the early days. Sternberg accordingly waited for a moment, unable to believe that the usual torrent of information would not follow; but Winton settled back in his chair, and remained silent, his eyes fixed on the glowing tip of his long Manila chee-root.

"Confound you! If you had remained here to see that the club was properly run, and the tiffins fit to eat, instead of philandering about Japan for the past six weeks, you wouldn't be surprised at the question," said the consul, when he became convinced that Winton would not answer. "It's one the whole settlement has been asking, and the womenfolks are so excited over it that they are losing their beauty sleep—which, you know, most of 'em can't afford to do. Who is he, anyway?"

"Go on; tell me what's been doing here during my absence," said Winton, ignoring the repetition of the question. "Remember that I haven't seen a soul since I landed; the boys had all ridden off to Miss Washburn's picnic at the Bubbling Spring Temple before my boat got in."

"And I'll wager that they will all forget the ordinary gossip of the settlement, and chatter of nothing but this chap Macpherson at that alfresco tea fight," grumbled Sternberg. "I'd have been out there myself, instead of sweltering on this cussed porch, if it hadn't been for him—or, rather, for his brat."

"Go on!" repeated Winton eagerly, as Sternberg elevated his white-clad feet to the porch railing.

The consul, fuming at the thought of the cool evening in the hills which the others were enjoying, and which he had missed because of his official duties, was aggravatingly deliberate.

"Well, you know about how much intercourse there is between the mission stations and the settlement, except during the periodical scares of a native rising," he said. "The elders seem to think that the settlement is inhabited by unregenerate sons of Belial—which is more or less true—and in peaceful times even the settlement youngsters and the sky pilots' kids don't forgather."

"Of course; I know all about that; I haven't lived forty years in China for nothing!" exclaimed Winton impatiently, as Sternberg paused and mopped his shining face with a grass-linen handkerchief, which in spite of its generous proportions had been transformed into a limp, moist rag by similar applications during the last hour.

"Yes, but I doubt if you have ever known of anything like this in all of your vast experience of the country," he continued. "This morning young Astly—John Wesley Astly, son of the missionary—climbed into a chair, and had a couple of the mission coolies carry him into the Chinese city. As near as I could make out, when they were passing through one of the narrowest streets the front bearer shouldered out of the way a youngster dressed in the most ordinary of native clothing—or, rather, he attempted to. Instead of standing for it meekly, as they usually do, and getting even by spitting at the foreign devil in the chair, the youngster turned on him, and, with unusual fluency, told him what he thought of his ancestors for a thousand generations, after the ancient and classical teaching of Confucius. Then he proceeded to emphasize his remarks by sending a right to the point of the jaw and a perfectly good left to the solar plexus, as practiced by Professor John L. Sullivan."

"Young Astly, unaccustomed to having his coolies assaulted by mere natives, got considerably wrought up, and as he wriggled from the overturned chair he so far forgot he was a minister's son that he used several expressions in the vernacular which he never learned in the mission kindergarten, and announced his intention of removing the yellow hide piecemeal from the offender."

"Lesser incidents have led to massacres within my recollection," commented Winton gravely. "The young cub needs disciplining."

"Oh, no, he doesn't—he got plenty!" answered Sternberg, chuckling. "The chap whom he had announced his intention of flaying was about his own size, and he answered, in perfectly good English, that he could lick the son of any sky pilot that ever dealt out Bibles and free rations to rice Christians. Then he proceeded to demonstrate his ability to make his words good, and he made a human punching bag of the missionary's son until the other badly scared chair coolie induced the soldiers in the guardroom at the Water Gate to come to his rescue. But the original cause of all the trouble proved to be no Chinaman, but the Macpherson boy, who had been strolling through Chee Nung in native costume, so they brought them both before me at the consulate."

"The father is an American, then?" exclaimed Winton, relief very evident in his tone.

Sternberg shook his head. "I'm blessed if I know what he is; that's why I asked the first question. I've never set eyes on him, and the boy wasn't communicative on that point. I assumed that he was, and the kid didn't raise any question as to my jurisdiction, although he seemed perfectly familiar with the procedure of the extra territorial administration of justice. I did not take any action, for I didn't want to make a bobbery over a boyish scrap before natives, in spite of the fact that the Reverend Astly appeared at the consulate breathing an unusual amount of fire and brimstone."

"See here, Sternberg; let me get at the rights of this thing," interrupted Winton impatiently. "Commence at the beginning, can't you, so that I can get a lucid idea of why an American boy should be masquerading in that filthy hole in native costume?"

"Don't get all het up, Uncle Charley; it's bad for the liver at this season," answered Sternberg soothingly. "I defy you to make anything lucid out of this business—anyway, no one else has been able to. The beginning, so far as I know, was about three weeks ago, when a comprador by the name of Wong Tom came up from the coast, and announced that he was looking for a house in the settlement for his employer—name of Macpherson. It was essential that the place should be on the river, so some one sent him to me—you know that Mrs. Farley left the disposal of the bungalow to me when she went home after poor Tom went out."

Winton nodded assent, and Sternberg went on: "Well, the comprador seemed more interested in the condition of the landing stage and the compound walls than the domestic arrangements of the house, which was mighty lucky for Mrs. Farley. He pungled up the full purchase price in American yellowbacks, and gave me a memorandum that the deed was to be made to Richard Macpherson."

"Yes, that was the name—she called him Dick," said Winton absently, and half to himself; and then, leaning forward in his chair, he looked expectantly at the consul. "Go ahead, Sternberg; let's have the sequel. What is this chap Macpherson like?" he demanded eagerly.

"That's just what every one in the settlement would like to know; but no one has set eyes on him, and I don't even know whether he is here or not," answered the consul. "Wong Tom took immediate possession, hustled in a big gang of workmen to make some alterations and repairs, and when they had finished he locked the front gate. It's remained locked, too, so far as any one knows to the contrary.

"A week ago to-night, just as the

whole bachelor bunch was gathered out here on the porch for a good-night peg, we heard the chugging of an engine down riverside. The water was at full flood then, for there had been heavy rains in the hills all the week before, and the boat was evidently making heavy going against the current. Pretty soon we saw the reason for it, for while the steam launch which hove in sight was built more on the lines of a racer than a tug, she was towing a couple of heavy sampans. None of the crowd had ever seen the launch before, and you can imagine that it created excitement and caused a lot of guessing."

Winton nodded. "Yes, I know the crowd," he assented dryly. "It was no fool's job to navigate a launch with a tail like that on the old Yesat Kiang running in flood."

"Then there was no fool running her, for he brought those sampans alongside the bungalow landing stage as easily and quietly as a Liverpool captain docks a liner," continued Sternberg.

Winton rose from his chair, and, walking to the railing, looked up the river.

"There are not a half dozen natives on the river who could do it, even with the current as sluggish as it is now; no, not three," he said thoughtfully. "Let's see—the moon must have been even brighter a week ago?"

"Yes; it was a perfectly clear night, and we could see the whole thing pretty plainly," answered the consul. "Not plain enough to satisfy Tommy Marsh, though. You know what an infernal little rubberneck he is."

"His shortage of brains and excess of curiosity have kept him in trouble ever since he came out," agreed Winton. "What happened?"

"Well, he got a bad case of fidgets for fear he might miss something, so he went down to the club landing stage and routed out a couple of sampan boys. They rowed the sampan, with Tommy as a passenger, up to within hailing distance of the launch, and Tommy was just about to get off one of his brilliant witticisms like 'Welcome

to our fair city!' when the launch hailed first. Tommy isn't strong on the vernacular, and he didn't understand what was said; but it took immediate effect on the boys. They didn't rest on their oars; they just dropped 'em as if they had been red-hot, and went overboard like mud turtles sliding off a log, leaving Tommy adrift on the Yesat in flood in a clumsy sampan that no one but a heathen Chinese could navigate."

"Well?" said Winton interrogatively, as the consul paused and chuckled.

"Tommy got back to the club in time for breakfast—just—and neither his appearance nor language was fit for publication," continued Sternberg. "A friendly eddy had finally enabled him to get the sampan to the edge of a mud flat about ten miles below the Baptist compound. He wanted me to ask the mandarins to have the coolies bastinadoed; but they swore that it was all an accident—that they had just happened to fall overboard, and that they had heard no hail from the launch."

"I'll talk to 'em later," said Winton grimly. "What's the rest of the story?"

"Mighty little, so far as I know," answered Sternberg. "The launch waited at the landing stage only a half hour, and then went downstream as silently as a white ghost, and a good twelve knots faster than the current. The sampans must have floated off during the night; at any rate, they had disappeared in the morning. A small army of coolies was busy unloading them and carrying stuff up to the bungalow when I turned in. Tommy Marsh told me that a young chap, evidently a foreigner, was standing on the landing stage, bossing the job, and that he saw a half dozen women walking up the pier to the house."

"White or native?" asked Winton sharply.

"He wasn't close enough to see; but he assumed the latter," replied Sternberg. "He's probably right, for white women wouldn't stay cooped up in the compound walls, and no one else has caught sight of them. In fact, Wong Tom and the boy are the only ones who ever leave it. The morning after

the arrival of the launch the comprador bought a couple of Priestly's best ponies—he knows a horse, and even Priestly couldn't fool him—and since then the youngster has spent a lot of time in galloping around the country. He never draws rein until he is outside of the concession limits, though, and no foreigner has heard him speak until he told young Astly what he was going to do to him. He wasn't communicative with me when he was brought to the consulate; just announced that he was willing to pay any fine I might impose. I asked him when he expected his father, and he answered that he didn't expect him, his tone implying that it was none of my business. That's the full bag of tricks, so far as I know it, Uncle Charley. Now perhaps you will answer my question. Who is Macpherson?"

"Wait a minute, Sternberg. How old is this boy?" asked Winton, after a little hesitation.

"Fourteen or fifteen, I should say, and rather uncommonly developed for his age. He knocked that coolie out stiff, and although young Astley is a good two years older, and a husky youngster, too, he thrashed him to a fare you well."

"Not a half-caste, then? They never have stamina."

"No; straight Caucasian; there can be no doubt of that," said Sternberg positively. "But see here, Uncle Charley, I'm tired of the witness box, and I wish that you'd take my place. Who the deuce is this chap Macpherson, anyway?"

Again Winton hesitated as a man might before plunging into icy water, and before speaking a mutilated left hand from which three fingers were missing was raised unconsciously to his chin, where a white imperial imperfectly concealed a livid scar.

"Sternberg, that's a question which I asked a good many times, until I gave it up as a bad job about fifteen years ago," he said; and the consul felt that Winton was speaking with the greatest reluctance of a subject which brought up the most painful memories.

"My long residence in China hasn't been without its little excitements. I've stood three sieges by the Chinese mob, and I've seen a whole lot of things which I don't care to recall. The last years have been quiet and untroubled ones except for the ghosts of the past, for it's fifteen years since I went through the worst of all, and lost these fingers and won this scar on my chin. I have always believed that I was the sole survivor of the Lang Tun massacre."

Sternberg straightened up like a man who has received a galvanic shock, forgetting the heat, his perplexities, and everything but the man before him. It had been long before his time, but the mere mention of Lang Tun was enough to make even a brave man shudder.

"But I have always understood that there was not a single Christian survivor," he stammered, as soon as he could find speech.

Winton shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps I am not a Christian—the missionaries all say I'm not," he said grimly. "In any case, I am a survivor, although for many a long, painful day and horrible, sleepless night I wished there had been none—that I had shared the most painful of the deaths, as I did a part of the fiendish tortures, which were meted out to the others. I have kept my share in that awful business a profound secret, Sternberg; this is the first time that I have ever mentioned it to a living soul. I wanted to forget it, and not be reminded of it by idle questioning. Through all these years I have never been able to guess why I was spared, but now I begin to suspect, as one sees through a glass dimly. I find the clew in what you have told me to-night."

He leaned forward in his chair, and even in the moonlight Sternberg could see that the usual ruddy color had left his face. It was set and stern, and his eyes were fairly blazing, and when he spoke his voice trembled with emotion.

"Sternberg, if your Richard Macpherson is my Dick Macpherson, *I was not* the sole survivor, for my Dick Macpherson was at Lang Tun," he said.

"God help me—I can't believe it's true; but if he is the same, and this fifteen-year-old boy is his son, and a Caucasian, there must have been still another—a woman."

"Pray Heaven there was!" exclaimed Sternberg, with a shudder. "I know little enough, and yet almost too much, of the details of that tragedy, Uncle Charley. One of my predecessors investigated it, and in going through the archives the other day I stumbled across a copy of his confidential report to the secretary of state. I only glanced through it, for I felt that if I read it I should take my revolvers and run amuck in the native city; but I saw enough to make me hope that you are right—that at least one woman was spared."

"Call no man happy until he is dead," quoted Winton gravely. "Death—even a painful one—is not the worst thing which can come to a man; and as for a woman——" He stopped abruptly, and for a long time the two men sat silent in the moonlight, Winton apparently lost in bitter memories of the past, Sternberg consumed with curiosity, but too considerate to ask that it be allayed at the cost of another's pain. It was Winton who finally broke that silence, and there was a strange tenderness in his voice when he spoke.

"Even now, after fifteen years, I cannot bring myself to speak of the last days of Lang Tun, and it would serve no useful end in any case," he said quietly. "I was there only a very brief time before it all happened—business at the little trading station the pretext, a girl at the mission the real reason for my having made that awful journey from the coast to the interior. Don't think that I'm too much of an old fool, Sternberg; remember that it was fifteen years ago, and each one of those years since has counted double with me. I was returning from a business trip to the States, as I thought to wind up my affairs out here and go back permanently, and we were fellow passengers on the old *China* from Frisco to Hongkong.

"Never mind her name, and don't try to picture her from the women at the stations here now. Lang Tun and the many minor tragedies have at last taught them a little of wisdom at home, and they don't send quite such tender sacrifices to the heathen as they did then. She was a young girl from a small New England village, and had about as much idea of the life which was really before her as she had experience of the world to fit her to swim safely with the lot of fish which made up the cabin list of the old *China*. She was traveling alone; in the captain's care, of course; but so was the ship, and you can imagine which came first with him. Macpherson was also a passenger, and while most of the unattached men on board were in love with her before the long voyage was over, it was evident that none of the rest of us had a chance; he was the only one to whom she gave a second thought.

"The man was a complete mystery to us; he was a good mixer in the smoke room after the womenfolks had turned in, and he seemed to have had a broad experience of the world, to have been everywhere, and to have seen everything; but he never spoke of his home nor his family, and none of us was even sure of his nationality. His English was perfect, although there was at times a little burr to his pronunciation; and Desieux, the French consul at Kobe, told me that his French was Parisian. I am sure that he wasn't an American, though, in spite of the boy having acknowledged your jurisdiction."

"He didn't acknowledge anything; he simply raised no question; but never mind him now," said Sternberg. "Please go on, Uncle Charley."

"There isn't much to go on with in that part of it, for I don't know much more about him now than I did then," continued Winton. "It isn't easy to get to Lang Tun even now; fifteen years ago the journey was a terror, and the girl had to wait more than a month in Hongkong until opportunity offered for safe escort. Macpherson stayed there, too, living at the club, where some one

had put him up; but so far as I know no one ever learned any more about him than we had found out on the steamer. I happen to know that the missionary bunch in Hongkong was mightily relieved when the time came that she could be sent on, however, and her almost constant association with him gained their stern disapproval.

"It was apparent that her experience in the steamer and her month in the cosmopolitan life of Hongkong had opened her eyes and broadened her vision a bit, and she didn't seem quite so unworldly-wise nor so keen about devoting her young life to the conversion of our yellow brothers as she did when she left her native village. I think that they were afraid that she would fall from grace, and throw up her job for the fleshpots, and when I saw her saying good-by to Macpherson I knew that it had been a narrow squeak. That didn't make me entirely happy, although I had seen a good deal of him since we landed, and had grown to like the chap. And then, within a week after her departure, I didn't know whether to be glad that she had gone and left him, or sorry that she hadn't chucked the missionary pidgin and remained to keep him straight."

Winton stopped speaking, and Sternberg watched him impatiently, as, with great deliberation, he lighted a fresh cheroot and inhaled the strong, acrid smoke.

"Drink?" he suggested, as a prompter might give a forgotten clew.

"No, no more than the average new arrival puts away at the Hongkong club," answered Winton slowly. "You know that there are fifty-seven different varieties of roads which a man can follow to the demnition bowwows out here in the East. In my observation I've seen every one of them traveled more than once—with the same inevitable ending. To the best of my knowledge, Macpherson never more than tentatively set foot on any one of those well-trodden paths; but he seemed to be heading for the same destination fast enough. Even now—and I've thought over everything connected with

him time and again during these years—I can't put my finger on a single definite thing, for whatever he was up to was done away from us. He would most mysteriously disappear for days at a time, and when he turned up again he looked like a man who had been 'seeing things,' but I know that it wasn't drink.

"At first I suspected opium; but there were none of the symptoms which we so soon learn to look for out here in evidence. There was none of the inevitable gossiping and thinly veiled, contemptuous familiarity on the part of the Chinese club servants which inevitably betray that a foreigner is 'going native'—which is about the worst thing that can happen to a white man—although he had certainly accumulated the choicest and most variegated lot of Chinese acquaintances which I have ever known a newcomer to acquire in so short a time. He seemed to have at least a bowing acquaintance with every river pirate, fan-tan gambler, and hop smuggler in the native quarter, and at the same time he was persona grata with all the fat bonzes at the temples.

"I can't tell you what it was; the change was indefinable, but it was not for the better, and I could hardly recognize him as the same man I had seen riding with the girl six weeks before.

"When he returned to the club after his mysterious absences, he always seemed to be sort of dazed, and acted as if he were in strange and unaccustomed surroundings for a time; but that soon wore off, and he again became normal and European to his finger tips. We had simply been casual traveling companions, and his actions were none of my business; but it all made me feel mighty sorry for the girl at that lonely mission station—so sorry that I never hesitated when her appeal for help came."

Winton paused in his recital, and looked wistfully out over the river, and Sternberg tactfully remained silent. He knew that Winton would go on at his own good time—that he was debating with himself as to how much he had a right to tell.

"It was a pitiful little appeal," he continued, apparently satisfied in his mind that Sternberg was a safe confidant. "It had been ten days on the way, although the bearer had evidently traveled hard; and when he opened his wallet to get it for me I saw that he carried another chit, which was addressed to Macpherson. To me she wrote that her need was urgent, that she had tried to communicate with Macpherson, but had received no reply to the three messages which she had sent to him. There was nothing which hinted at distrust of him; she feared only that he might be dead, or too ill to come to her. She begged of me to find him, if he were living; to come to her myself, if he were dead.

"Well, only that day Macpherson had made one of his mysterious exits from the ken of European Hongkong, and no one knew where he was, or when he might return. I spent the night searching for him, but in vain. So, without confiding my real destination to any one, I left for Lang Tun at daylight. Remember, Sternberg, I was fifteen years younger then as the calendar counts time, and a good bit more as men's lives go."

"If you live to be a thousand, you'll not be too old to answer a distress signal, Uncle Charley. I've heard tales of you, of what you did for the Kenningtons, of your risking life and fortune for——"

Winton quickly interrupted him. "You mustn't believe all you hear, and only about ten per cent of what you see in China," he protested. "No decent man could have disregarded that one, anyway. I left her chit to Macpherson with my comprador, to be delivered as soon as he reappeared; but I felt that her fears were more than justified—that he was worse than dead to her.

"Let me tell you that was one awful trip. I knew the ropes, and spent money like a drunken sailor, and I made it in a week, clipping three days off the record of the native runners. You know what Lang Tun was before the tragedy—a walled native city of a

half million or so, a half dozen traders who carried on their business in defiance of treaties by standing for a liberal squeeze to the viceroy.

"There had never been a suspicion of antiforeign feeling among the natives, and the missionaries had neglected the most ordinary precautions in the arrangement of their buildings and the protection of the compound. Naturally I went first to the tiny settlement. The chaps there were equally unprepared for trouble if it should come, but there was one saving grace—there were no white women there; the fellows all lived in a little group of bungalows in one large compound, and messed at the tiny club.

"Well, when I visited the mission I found that the girl had not exaggerated things; her need was surely urgent. I had the whole pitiful story from the head of the mission before I saw her. He was entirely reasonable, and begged of me to try to influence her to meet their wishes—to return quietly to her own people. He told me that they were all heartbroken over the miserable business, more especially at the girl's practical defiance of them.

"She would make no admission of wrongdoing, and absolutely refused to be guided by their advice. She acknowledged their right to cast her out from the mission, but she resolutely defied them to make her leave China, and asserted that Macpherson would surely come, and then everything would be made right. It was evidently a bad business, Sternberg, and I couldn't see that my coming would make it much better. I can't tell you how I dreaded that interview, for I felt that if I told the truth—which was the only thing I could do—it would be small comfort to her; but I might have spared myself that anticipation of discomfort. Dynamite couldn't have shaken her faith in him, and my careful planning of a gentle way of conveying the truth was wasted. If he was alive he would come as soon as he received the chit which I had insured would reach his hands; the other messages must have miscarried; that was all there was to it.

"Well, the club was primitive, and without many comforts, but I was mighty glad to get back to it; the atmosphere of the mission had been depressing; their trouble was a deep one. The confidence of the girl had been almost contagious, but she had not seen the man as I had seen him, and I found myself wishing that she never might. There is no use in making bones about it; I had loved the girl, and as I thought over those last few weeks I realized that the earth was not large enough to hold Macpherson and myself. And then, just as I had formulated that thought in my mind, the man himself threw himself from the saddle of a half-dead horse at the very door of the club."

CHAPTER II.

"Naturally my first feeling was one of great relief, for his coming seemed in a measure to justify the girl's faith in him," continued Winton, after a pause which to Sternberg seemed interminable. "I believed he had received the message which I left for him at Hongkong, and it had caused him to follow close on my heels. But he was haggard and worn, and when he looked straight at me without showing the slightest sign of recognition I realized that he was in that same condition of semitrance which had always marked his reappearance at the Hongkong club; but he seemed even more stupefied than I had ever seen him there."

"Opium?" suggested Sternberg; but Winton shook his head emphatically.

"Not even a suggestion of it," he answered. "He seemed to have been transformed into an automaton, and I knew from the attitude of the club servants that he was an entire stranger to them, that he had not previously visited the club."

"From former experience, I judged that he would soon come out of it, and be himself; but I was mighty sure that he was in no condition to do anybody any good by going to the mission as he was. He offered no objection when I led him into the house, and into the bedroom which had been placed at

my disposal. Five minutes later he was stretched out on the bed, dead to the world, slumbering as peacefully as a child.

"Fortunately the club was deserted when he arrived; the fellows were all at their offices or godowns. When they returned they were naturally very curious, but I lied like a coolie before a mandarin, and saved Macpherson from being awakened even when dinner time came round. There was no sign of life from him, and after dinner we sat down for the inevitable whist. It must have been eleven o'clock before anything happened, and then Macpherson suddenly appeared, unannounced, in the doorway of the cardroom. He was apparently himself again—at least, there was none of the bewilderment and vacancy which had been in his face before; but when he spoke I believed that he had gone stark, staring mad.

"'Are you men fools, or crazy, that you sit playing cards when the country is up about you?' he exclaimed. 'For God's sake, help me if you won't help yourselves! I must get to Lang Tun, and I'm lost!'

"'Take it easy, old man, and likewise take a peg,' answered Creighton, the Englishman, who was practically the club father, soothingly as he clapped his hands to summon a boy. 'The sun was devilish hot to-day, and you must have had a tough ride. Bad thing—this Chinese sun until you get salted to it, and——'

"'But this place will be a shambles in an hour, you fool!' interrupted Macpherson furiously. 'Are you all deaf as well as mad? Can't you hear the brutes raging?'

"Creighton was a level-headed chap, and he didn't fly off the handle, but relieved his feelings by again clapping his hands for the dilatory boy. Macpherson seemed to be hearing something which was entirely inaudible to us, and I knew that they all believed he was mad, and suffering from hallucinations of hearing. It was very evidently real enough to him, for the man was in abject terror, but not the terror of personal cowardice, if you can understand

what I mean. He stared wildly about the room until his eyes met mine, and then a cry of relief came from his lips.

"Winton! You here!" he said. "Thank God for that! Tell these men that I am not crazy; I tell you, the country is rising! Listen, and you can hear the 'Burn and kill!' And you know what that means. I must get to the Lang Tun mission station, Winton—for God's sake, help me!"

"Steady, Mac," I answered, trying to humor him. "It's only a step; but we can't go there at this time of night. I'll go with you the first thing in the morning."

"Creighton, annoyed that there had been no answer to his summons, had stepped into the hallway to call a servant, and as I finished speaking he came back into the room. There was a curious expression on his face, and he looked sharply at Macpherson with troubled eyes.

"Fellows, there *is* something wrong," he said quietly. "There isn't a servant left about the club."

"For a moment there was absolute silence in the room, and then, with a round Teutonic oath, Kounz, the German tea buyer, jumped from his chair, and threw open the bamboo lattice which screened the window. It was a black night, but outside there was no disquieting sound; the stillness was so profound that in our keyed-up condition it seemed ominous. It was broken by Macpherson, whose voice was uncanny as he repeated over and over that 'Burn and kill! Burn and kill!' which was audible to him alone.

"You've never heard that cry, Sternberg, and pray Heaven you never will; it's the slogan of the mob when anti-foreign pidgin is toward. There could be no doubt of Macpherson's sincerity, and in spite of the evidence of our senses that he was suffering from a hallucination it made us all nervous, for the desertion of the club servants was disquieting. Bill Lennie, a raw-boned Scotchman, who had lived in China long enough to read the signs and know his way about, had slipped

from the room at the first announcement, and just as Kounz turned from the window with the assurance that there was not a sign of anything unusual in the native city, Lennie came back, in his hand a revolver, which he was stuffing with cartridges.

"Boys, the mon is *fey!*" he exclaimed. "Full well I ken the Macphersons, and they have the gift, or the curse, of it in the blood. I've been to my diggings, and they're stripped as clean as a hoand's tooth. I ha'e me doots that there'll be a saxpence left in the compound."

"There could be no further question of impending trouble; rats desert a sinking ship, and the Chinese servants had been forehanded. Not one of them remained in the compound, and the fact that they had dared to loot before deserting was sufficient indication that they believed their masters would never be in a position to exact retribution. But, most serious of all, a hasty search revealed that they had stolen all of the arms save, of course, the revolvers which we all carried.

"Creighton, by right of seniority, assumed the leadership. "Macpherson, what do you really know of this? Is there a general rising?" he demanded sharply. "Why in Heaven's name didn't you warn us when you first came, instead of waiting until——"

"When I first came! How long have I been here?" interrupted Macpherson. There was a curious expression of perplexity on his face, and he passed his hand over his forehead as if he were brushing something away.

"Creighton turned an inquiring glance to me, but I shook my head; I could make no more of it than he could. I could see that Macpherson was coming out of that strange condition which Lennie had described as '*fey*,' and the terror had left his eyes; but they were curiously bewildered and helpless as he fixed them on me.

"I can't see that we can make things better by talking," he said, ignoring the question of Creighton, to whom he seemed to have taken a violent dislike. "Winton, will you come with me to the

Lang Tun mission station—to my wife?”

“Well, perhaps it will strain your credulity, Sternberg, but for a moment I forgot our peril—that we were practically defenseless, and six hundred miles from help; his last word had lifted such a weight from my heart that nothing else seemed to matter. Had there been no threat of danger which made it imperative, I should still have taken him there even at that hour that he might proclaim what the girl for some reason which I could not guess had hidden from the world.

“It was not a time, however, to think of individuals, and of course there was no necessity for answering his question. Every man was on his feet, and anxious to be gone, for there was but one course open to us—to reach the mission station before the storm broke and cut us off. It was Creighton who gave the word, and even as we fled from the card-room the silence without was broken, and a curious buzzing and droning came in through the window at which Kounz had listened from the Chinese city.

“By the time we reached the open air that droning had increased to a confused murmuring, so quickly does passion fatten on itself with the Chinese mob, a murmuring which was punctuated now and then with a staccato cry—that peculiar falsetto which in the East always means mischief—while here and there patches of light betrayed the torches of assembling crowds. And then as we hurried through the darkness toward the mission we heard that cry of which Macpherson’s hallucination had given such strange premonition—the ‘Burn and kill!’ which told us that our worst fears were realized.

“As we had expected, we brought the first news of trouble to the mission—news which was as unexpected as a thunderbolt from a clear sky, and for which—God help them!—they were absolutely unprepared.

“The mission buildings were substantial—most of them with thick walls of brick—but they were scattered all over the great compound. Had there been

sufficient warning, the poor creatures might have concentrated in one building, and have held out for a time; but the storm burst almost at our heels as we gained entrance to the compound.

“Straight as an arrow from a bow, Macpherson had made for the mission hospital, where I had told him his wife was quartered. I had meant to stick to him, but I saw that the native converts had turned traitors, and were preparing to open the flimsy gates, which might have hindered the advance of the mob long enough to allow of a measure of concentration. Creighton and I tried to drive them back while the others ran to spread the alarm, but there were too many of them for two men to hold, and there was nothing for us to do but to seek the nearest shelter, which happened to be the very solidly built chapel. Perhaps a dozen of the mission people were already there—men, women, and children—and Kounz, the big German, staggered in just before we closed the heavy door, an unconscious white woman on his shoulder, a new-born baby under his arm.”

Winton abruptly stopped his recital, and clapped his hands.

“I’ll have a drink before I go on with this, Sternberg; I need it,” he said huskily.

The consul’s eyes were fixed on the doorway, and he gave a sigh of relief when an alert boy answered the summons.

“I’d have had a nervous chill if he had delayed a minute longer,” he said, after they had given their orders. “It’s a creepy business, Uncle Charley, when you think of that Chinese city yonder and our distance from the coast.”

“Yes; there’s not a night passes that I do not dream that I hear the terrible slogan, and see the mob pouring through its gates,” assented Winton. “But don’t worry, old man; I’m not going to give you food for nightmares by piling on the horrors. They were there, all right, and I missed none of them, for the chapel was the last building to fall. For six days we held out—or, rather, we watched and waited, because the mob realized that it was se-

cure from interruption, and had plenty of time, and they went at it methodically, taking the buildings one by one.

"The mission hospital was the first point of attack, and as it had been built with no thought of defense, but to afford all of the light and ventilation possible, the mob swept through it about as easily as it would have marched through an open field. I saw men and women dragged out, and although I thought I could distinguish both Macpherson and the girl whose plea had brought me to Lang Tun, I was never sure of their identity. It wasn't the sort of thing which one cared to watch too closely, although the brutes soon remembered that they could make us suffer in anticipation, and seemed to delight in exhibiting their methods to those who were not yet in their hands.

"The men who were with us in the chapel went fairly mad as they watched the devil's work going on. It was bad enough for us, but the poor wretches in the hands of those fiends incarnate were their coworkers, their friends, and in many cases their close relatives. Kounz, Creighton, and I fought them back from tearing away the barricades of the door and rushing out to certain destruction in vain attempts at rescue; but in their madness they wasted their small store of ammunition, so that when the final rush came there were only our three revolvers, and none of us had extra cartridges.

"Of course, I knew that there was no hope, but I had been treasuring those cartridges, and when our turn came every one of them told. I killed five men, and then——" Winton stopped, and took a long pull at the tall glass which the boy had silently brought.

"What was her name?" asked Sternberg softly, and there was a little catch in Winton's voice as he answered.

"Martha—that was the only one I ever knew; I have never tried to find out," he said. "All along I had planned to save that last cartridge for myself, but as the door went down she stretched out her hand, and there was no resisting the appeal in her eyes. She wasn't

more than nineteen or twenty years old. Thank God, she died with a smile on her lips, and the memory of that helped a little during the next few days.

"There is no use in going into the details of what happened to me after that. I suppose you know that a good many of the prisoners were dragged off to make sport in the neighboring villages; but for twenty-four hours those yellow devils exercised their ingenuity on me right there in the ruins of the mission station. I have never been able to figure out how I happened to last so long, nor why they stopped just short of finishing me. I have only a dim recollection of the last of it, and of the appearance on the scene of a fat old bonze accompanied by the boy who had waited upon me at the Lang Tun club. It was that boy who recognized me after they had spent a long time in examining what was left of some of the others; and the bonze, who spoke with authority, raised a bobbery, and interrupted the slicing process which they were just about to start with me.

"I couldn't understand the dialect of that part of the country very well, but the coolies who had been torturing me began quarreling among themselves, and I could just make out that some of them questioned his right to interfere, saying that I was the last one, and that it would be better to make a clean sweep of the foreign devils. Three words from the bonze settled it, however, and a couple of the largest coolies picked me up and carried me away; how far I don't know, for mercifully I became unconscious.

"When I came to myself, I found that my wounds had been carefully dressed, and I must have been liberally dosed with opium, for I did not suffer particularly. I was evidently a prisoner, though, confined in a sort of cage of bamboo. Strange faces were about me, but I was not treated unkindly, and slowly I began to take interest in life again. I had lost all track of time; but, figuring back afterward, I judged that my imprisonment must have lasted about ten weeks before that fat old bonze again visited me.

"It's a queer country, this China, and the longer I live in it the less I feel that I really know of it, of the things which go on beneath the surface which foreigners see. Certainly nothing in my previous experience had prepared me for what happened after that, and, to tell the truth, I have never been sure of just what did happen. They must have doped me in my food that day, and kept me doped for a long time. I have only a dim and confused memory of being carried in a hammock over range after range of hills, and through countless villages. Then a long, peaceful journey by water, and I slowly came back to myself in surroundings which seemed vaguely familiar. One by one, I identified objects which I had never expected to see again; but it was not until my own boy, the man who had been my personal servant for a dozen years, stood beside my bed, offering me a letter, that I could believe that I was really back in my old quarters in Hong-kong. I eagerly broke the seals of the silk strings which protected the contents, but inside was a single sheet of parchment, and inscribed on it was a quotation from Confucius:

"To accept gratefully and without questioning a gift, however humble, is to exercise the ever-to-be-honored and observed Courtesy through which we acquire merit.

"It was a plain hint, and one glance at the placid and imperturbable face of the boy convinced me that it would be wise to take it, for I should gain nothing by questioning any native.

"Well, when I got about, I found that the Lang Tun affair was three months old, and practically a closed incident. The mandarins had gone up with the troops, and virtually razed the city, exacting a heavy toll in heads, and imposing crushing taxes to supply the indemnities. No one knew that Charley Winton had ever been within a hundred miles of the place, for not one of the chaps from the club nor a soul from the mission survived to tell the story. Ask any of the old-timers at the Hong-kong club about me, and they'll tell you that 'Uncle Charley isn't the man he used to be; you should have known him

before he was pretty nearly bowled over by that fool hunting trip in the north country which he made fifteen years or so ago.'"

He rose from his chair as he finished his recital, and, walking to the rail, leaned against one of the pillars of cunningly joined bamboo which supported the roof, gazing thoughtfully up the river to where the landing stage of the Farley bungalow lay deserted in the bright moonlight.

Looking at the clear-cut profile and the outline of the slender, youthful figure, Sternberg could hardly believe that the man before him was nearing his sixtieth year, and that since he came out as a lad of eighteen, a cadet in the service of one of the old New England trading companies, he had lived almost continuously in China, where foreigners ordinarily die or degenerate before the end of the second decade unless by frequent and long visits to the West they keep in touch with Occidental civilization.

Winton was as alert and active as a youngster, as careful of his dress and personal appearance as a Beau Brummel.

Thinking of what the man had endured uncomplainingly, Sternberg became uncomfortably conscious of the habit of slovenliness into which he was allowing himself to drift, and, rising from his chair, he buttoned his tunic, mumbling an apology for the absence of his collar and tie as he joined the older man at the railing.

"You have always been a wonder to me, Uncle Charley, and now the wonder grows," he said, as he shook and smoothed his disordered clothing into the best shape he could. "I know that every other foreigner in the settlement—and I suspect a large proportion of those at the mission stations—remains here from strictly meal-ticket considerations, and looks forward eagerly to the day when he will have accumulated enough of a pile or earned a pension to live on at home. You made yours long ago, and I have often wondered why you don't get back while you are young enough to enjoy what the West

can offer. After what you have told me to-night, I wonder still more, for I should think you would loathe China and all things Chinese."

Winton smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

"You may be putting the cart before the horse, Sternberg," he answered slowly. "You are correct in one thing—I could have retired with more than a competence a score of years ago, and since then I have piled up a fortune which I do not need—a large one as those things are reckoned out here. Perhaps after forty years I have formed the habit of China, and can't shake it off; it's the deuce of a thing to get into your blood. I have often thought of going back home, but it would not mean much to me after all these years. I've lost touch, Sternberg, and then——"

He stopped abruptly, and pointed to the landing stage. A figure had emerged from the shadows of the thick shrubbery on the shore, and as it came into the bright moonlight they could distinguish that it was that of a man in native dress. He made no effort at concealment, but walked to the edge, and stood with his face toward them, gazing downstream.

"It's the Macpherson boy," said the consul, as the moonlight revealed the contour of his face.

Winton stared at him as one fascinated.

"Then Dick Macpherson survived Lang Tun," he exclaimed. "It's a pocket edition of the man I knew. There's the answer—or a part of it—to all of your conjectures about me, Sternberg. Fifteen years ago, as you have surmised, I was filled with hatred and loathing of China and all things Chinese. I was rich enough then to satisfy any reasonable man, and not too old to return home and renew old associations and friendships. I tried the experiment, Sternberg, and I stayed in America just three months. I can't tell you what it is, but the East is uncanny. It had gotten a hold on something inside me, and there was no fighting against it. That three months was

almost as bad as their predecessors which I had spent in a bamboo cage, and I gave it up, and returned to the old life.

"Until to-night I never realized what it was, but now I know. There was work for me to do here, Sternberg—something, I know not what, which had its inception at Lang Tun. Perhaps those fifteen years of idleness have been wasted, perhaps they have been only a needful preparation for what lay before me. In all that time, there has been nothing tangible in my mind, but as the steamer carried me up the river to-day I had a strange premonition that it was bringing me to something new, and yet something old; the explanation of many mysteries of the past, perhaps to action in the future. Hark!"

Winton had turned, and was gazing intently down the river, his head thrust forward, his lips parted, and his eyes glowing beneath the contracted brows. It seemed an eternity that he stood there inactive and tense, and then there came to his ears the faint, but unmistakable, rhythmic beat of a boat's engines.

"It's coming to me, Sternberg," said Winton gravely, as a graceful launch cut the broad pathway of moonlight on the river. She heeled over as she swung almost in a semicircle to clear the fleet of anchored sampans in front of the native city, and then, coming to an even keel, she headed straight for the bungalow landing stage.

"It's the same boat—the one which towed the sampans," exclaimed Sternberg. "The boy must have been expecting her, in spite of what he told me, for surely his father must be coming."

The launch was now so close that they could distinguish the figures of those on board, and especially clearly a tall, slender man, who stood on the tiny deck at the bow, steadying himself with a hand on an awning stanchion. Winton's eyes were fixed on him, and although Sternberg knew that standing as they did in the shadow of the porch they must be invisible from the launch, he had an uncanny feeling that

their presence was divined by at least one of its occupants, for as the boat passed the club landing the man in the bow turned squarely toward them, apparently returning Winton's fixed stare.

"Sternberg, the age of miracles has not passed; the dead still come to life, for that is Dick Macpherson, who died at Lang Tun!" said Winton, with a noticeable tremor in his voice, as the launch shot alongside the landing stage and made fast. "I am going to him; would you care to accompany me?"

"Won't morning do as well, Uncle Charley?" suggested the consul.

"No; he expects me to-night," answered Winton confidently.

Sternberg hesitated for a moment, and then drew his companion into the semicircle of illumination from the hallway lamps.

"See here, Uncle Charley, I half expected to find the light of madness in your eyes, but they are apparently all right," he said half seriously. "I reckon that it's just plain curiosity which makes you want to go to-night, and which will make me go with you."

Winton smiled as he pulled away from him and walked back to the railing.

"Very well; it's a thing which I prefer not to argue about—it is better to let time bring conviction," he said, as Sternberg rejoined him. "I believe, however, that you will find that I am right."

The consul shrugged his shoulders, but the scoffing answer which was on the tip of his tongue was never finished, for the comprador, Wong Tom, seemed to have popped up through the floor, or to have dropped from the ceiling, so suddenly and mysteriously did he appear before them.

"Mr. Winton, sir, my masta makee compliments, and say will he send boat, or you catch licksha to come bungalow side?" he asked; and Sternberg looked from one to the other suspiciously, wondering if Winton had not been trying to mystify him. He quickly realized that his suspicion was unjust.

"My compliments to Mr. Macpherson, and we should prefer a boat,"

Winton answered. "My friend, Mr. Sternberg, the American consul, will come with me to pay his respects."

Wong Tom bowed respectfully, and disappeared as quietly as he had come.

Sternberg watched him until he had vanished in the shadows. "It's high time that you came back to take these club boys in hand, Uncle Charley," he said. "They have grown careless without your watchful eye on them. They should not allow a native to get in here unannounced."

"Sternberg, there is one thing that I have learned in China—that it is a waste of time and energy to attempt the impossible," he answered, in a low voice. "I might rage at them until I was blue in the face, and I should have my trouble for my pains if I instructed them to deny that man admittance."

"What the deuce are you driving at, Winton?" demanded Sternberg impatiently. "It is a cast-iron rule of the club, and Wong Tom is only a comprador."

Winton drew nearer, and his voice lowered still more. "Perhaps he is; but I have warned you that you can't believe all you see in China," he said gravely. "We have made one identification to-night, Sternberg; your Richard Macpherson is my Dick Macpherson; now I'll tell you of another: Your model comprador, Wong Tom, is that same fat bonze who fifteen years ago had the power of life and death over the foreigners in the hands of his countrymen at Lang Tun."

CHAPTER III.

There was nothing in Macpherson's bearing or greeting which would have suggested to a casual observer that there was anything unusual in his meeting with Winton, from whom he had parted in such tragic surroundings; nor that he resented in the slightest degree the uninvited presence of Sternberg. He was a striking-looking man in his immaculate yacht uniform of white—tall and slender, with the broad shoulders, straight back, and slender waist which suggested military training. A

skin naturally swarthy had been tanned by sun and wind to the hue of saddle leather, and contrasted strangely with the closely cropped, snow-white hair and the carefully trimmed and pointed mustache. His eyes were of that peculiar dark hue which makes it difficult to distinguish the line between pupil and iris, the nose thin and aquiline, with the peculiar curve cut of nostril suggesting a latent cruelty.

Sternberg had known the bungalow well in the days when the Farleys owned and occupied it; but there was nothing familiar in the room where they found the new owner. Then it had been typical of the temporary homes of most foreigners in the East—a medley of comfortable things imported from home, and a collection of porcelains, weapons, and other curios which the foreigner invariably accumulates in a strange land. But during Macpherson's brief ownership it had been absolutely transformed, and there was nothing in its furnishing or decoration which suggested that it was in China.

Rich Persian rugs covered the polished floor in place of the cooler and more appropriate matting of the country; the furniture was obviously of European design and make, and hunting prints and engravings of sporting subjects hung on the walls above the rows of well-filled bookshelves. It might well have been the den or study of a man accustomed to luxury in an English country house, and the servant who had admitted them was as typical an English butler as one could find in Mayfair.

Winton, in spite of his mind being possessed with weightier things, looked about curiously, for none knew better than he what an expenditure such a transformation implied, and in the old days Macpherson had frankly admitted that his means were of the slenderest.

But more impressive to him than the change in the surroundings was the change in the man himself. On the steamer and in Hongkong—except during those strange periods which always followed his return from his expeditions of mystery—Macpherson had

been of a rollicking, devil-may-care temperament, full of fun, and always ready for mischief and larks. His hair and mustache had been of raven blackness, and his face had been free from lines and care. Now it was marked with two parallel perpendicular furrows between the white eyebrows, and the mouth was set in straight, stern lines, which gave one the impression that it could never again relax into a smile.

"It was good of you to come, Winton—and to bring Mr. Sternberg with you," he said quietly, and with just that hint of hesitation before the inclusive ending of his greeting to make the consul suspicious that Macpherson would have been better pleased had Winton come alone. "I take it for granted that your friend is not entirely unacquainted with ancient history?"

"I have told him pretty much all that I knew of it, which was little enough," answered Winton. "I have always believed that Lang Tun put a period to it, and that there was nothing to be gained by digging back into the past. I always supposed that you shared the fate of the others—that I was the only Caucasian who came alive out of that compound where we parted company in the darkness fifteen years ago. It is not more than two hours since I learned that I was mistaken."

Macpherson nodded, and the furrows between the eyebrows seemed to deepen.

"It was a tragedy of errors, Winton," he said. "I was deluded with the same belief; I supposed that I was the only survivor; I have only a few months the advantage of you in learning the truth—or a part of it."

"I have not been in hiding since," answered Winton, with just enough emphasis on the personal pronoun to give his comment a significance which Macpherson could not ignore.

The swarthy skin became of a darker hue, and for a moment there was a strange light in the somber eyes; but it died quickly, and his voice was even and free from anger when he spoke.

"See here, Winton, let's assume for the present that this whole thing has

been an honest and excusable error on the part of each of us," he said. "If you adopt that tone, it will be simple for us to be at each other's throats in no time—which would prove nothing at all. I plead guilty to a possible appearance of hiding, for unless you were a student of Burke's Peerage you would hardly have recognized Dick Macpherson under the string of aliases which he inherited. It took the keenest Chinese bloodhounds a dozen or more years to accomplish it. If you don't mind, we'll let it go at Macpherson for the present; the titles would not interest you."

"I never heard of your reaching the coast, Macpherson, although I had connections and acquaintances in every port," answered Winton; and Sternberg was conscious from his tone that his suspicions were by no means allayed.

"But I never saw the coast of China from the day I left Hongkong to go to Lang Tun until I sighted it from the deck of my yacht a month ago," answered Macpherson. "There is no use of our talking at cross-purposes, Winton; will you tell your story, or shall I lead off?"

"I should prefer to listen," said Winton. "Mine is of secondary importance—it involves only myself. Go ahead. Time is passing."

"I'll try not to waste it," answered Macpherson. "There is no use in going into all of the details, but when I made your acquaintance on the *China* I was under orders for Hongkong. All of the arrangements had been made by my family; I had a credit on the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank for three hundred pounds a year, twenty-five pounds to be paid to me personally on the first day of each month, no payments to be anticipated under any circumstances, and the credit to lapse automatically if I failed to appear in person for two successive months."

"A remittance man!" exclaimed Winton.

Macpherson nodded. "Exactly, with every precaution taken that I should not break away. That is one reason

why there was no particular hue and cry when I failed to appear after Lang Tun; the bankers are accustomed to that sort of thing. There had never been any public scandal at home; the family council had just decided that I was of no particular use, and better off out of Europe. I had started in the Guards—the Blues—but I couldn't stand the pace, and transferred to a Hussar regiment ordered to India.

"Out there I didn't do any particular good; I accumulated a rather heavy score of debts, and on top of that a touch of the sun and fever. I'm not trying to make out a case for myself, but there is a lot of my life out there which is hazy in my memory. There was no scandal that I know of, but the colonel invited me into the orderly room one day, and suggested that I affix my signature to certain documents which he had already made out; they were my papers, and my connection with the regiment ceased as soon as he could get official approval by telegraph—which enabled me to start for England that same night.

"There was no fatted calf sacrificed to celebrate my return; the younger son of a younger son who has practically been cashiered is not received with open arms, even when the head of the family happens to be several times a baron, a few earls, and a marquis, mostly in the Irish and Scotch peerage. An arrangement was made with my creditors—they were mostly money lenders—and the beauties of life in China were impressed upon me. I had no choice, and in any case I didn't much care, so I accepted the situation—and became your fellow passenger on the *China* from San Francisco to my appointed place of exile.

"The rest of the story you pretty well know, Winton. I fell in love with Josephine, and she consented to my plea for an immediate marriage after we landed in Hongkong. I can't tell you how many times I have cursed the decision to which we came to keep the marriage secret until I had communicated with my people. Remember, I was only twenty-three then, and I trust-

ed that they would accept the fact of my marriage as a proof that I had steadied, and, at the very least, materially increase my remittances. False pride made me hesitate to announce our marriage until I could give my wife such an establishment as she deserved; and so we decided that she should go to that accursed Lang Tun under her maiden name, and wait there until I received answers to the very effusive letters which I had sent home.

"I received those answers—two years later in London. The family solicitor handed them to me reluctantly; I imagine that he had dictated them, and feared to lose a very lucrative client. In the meantime, the tragedy of Lang Tun had become a matter of history. Winton, I hope that you can tell me what brought me there; I only know that I left Hongkong on a shooting trip with a little half-caste, who called himself Jenkinson there, although the Chinese had another name for him. Then I suddenly found myself in a room where a lot of strange men were playing cards. I remember the rest of it, of our racing through the night to the mission station, of my finding Josephine, and then the fighting."

"Go on!" said Winton curtly. "You found your wife in the hospital, did you not?"

"Yes, with a couple of missionary medicos and three or four other women," answered Macpherson. "None of them had any conception of the real danger which menaced them, and the men foolishly decided to close the flimsy doors and parley with the rioters, as they called them, from the windows. They would not listen to me; they knew that the people for whom they had done so much would not harm them. I insisted that Josephine should come with me; to remain was certain death; in immediate flight there was perhaps one chance in a million.

"We escaped from the rear of the building as the mob was forming to rush the front; but the odds against us were even greater than I had counted.

"I believe that I killed a man or two, but it was hopeless. The cries of the women who had been dragged from the hospital were in our ears, and I turned my revolver against my wife; but that shot was never fired. The last that I remember was a cry of rage and protest, and then a million stars danced before my eyes, and all became black. It was weeks before I regained consciousness, and then I found myself in a strange country, among people radically different from the Chinese of the southern provinces."

"Alone?" demanded Winton sternly.

"Yes, alone save for a few millions of Tartar Chinese," answered Macpherson. "I'll make a long story short, Winton, although Heaven knows it seemed long enough in the making. It was necessary for me to learn a new language before I could even beg for information; but that was the least of my troubles, for languages come easily to me; the blood of half the races of Europe is mixed in the Macphersons. Then I learned that I had been left for dead where I had been struck down.

"Of course, I have since learned that that bloody orgy continued for many days and nights, and it seems physically impossible that I should have survived without some attention; but a Scotch Irishman takes a lot of killing, and in any case I survived. Then, when the last building had been plundered, and death had ended the suffering of the last captive, the mob began to count the cost, to remember that a day of reckoning would surely come, and it melted away. The news had spread far, and people had come from the neighboring provinces to join in the sport and plundering, as vultures flock to carrion. Many of them had arrived too late, among them a troupe of strolling mountebanks and bear tamers from the north. There was nothing left of settlement or station but blackened walls, deserted even by the mob, for the fear of retribution lay heavy upon them, and they had slunk back to the slums of Lang Tun.

"The mountebanks, retreating in disgust at their hard luck, stumbled across

me, and while making an examination in the hope that some trinket of value might have been overlooked, they found that there was still a spark of life left in me. They added me to their caravan, and carried me off, giving me the rough but effective treatment which they had learned in a calling where broken heads were a part of the day's work.

"On the whole, I was not badly treated by my captors, for I was valuable to them; but they lived hard themselves, and didn't give me any the best of it. I was kept almost continuously in a stout cage such as they used for the animals. That was not to prevent my escape, for they had impressed upon me the hopelessness of such an attempt, but as a measure of protection from the malice of the crowds who flocked to see me; but the life had become so intolerable that I determined to take any chance which offered. The opportunity came after an exhibition in a village at the very tip of the empire, right on the borders of Tibet.

"Gentleman, there is no use in recounting the adventures and hardships of my flight across Tibet. I won through at last to the Indian frontier. And then, so small is this world of ours, I fell into the hands of a detachment from the very troop which I had served with in the Hussars, for the regiment was guarding the frontier against a threatened outbreak and incursion of the border tribes. Naturally I was unrecognizable, and I had no wish to disclose my identity, for it wasn't pleasant to think of returning in such guise to the company of men who two years before had virtually kicked me out of the mess. I believed that I could bluff it through, but I had not reckoned that I might be regarded with suspicion, owing to the disturbed state of the country.

"The regiment had suffered severely from sniping; it had lost many horses and several men each night for more than a week, and suspicious characters brought in by the patrols were given short shrift unless they could account for themselves. No one had the slight-

est suspicion that I was anything but a native, and silence on my part would have led to summary execution.

"Gentlemen, that declaration was not the least trying of all the hardships connected with my escape. Of course, I knew that I was in no further danger of punishment, but I expected to meet averted faces, and to be escorted out of camp. You can imagine my surprise when I was welcomed with open arms, and treated as if I had conferred honor on the regiment when I had served with it.

"Those two years had made a vast difference; death had been busy in my family at home. When I sent in my papers I was Richard Macpherson, an unimportant member of one of the oldest families in Great Britain. A series of accidents had changed all of that; the six lives which stood between me and any benefit I might receive from my birth had been snuffed out in quick succession, and I had come into a string of imposing titles and one of the largest fortunes in the peerage. That is why you never heard of Dick Macpherson again, Winton. He was lost in the greatness which he had inherited—too late to bring him happiness.

"It did bring him power, however—a power which he used to the utmost to prevent the history of those last two years becoming public property. There was nothing to be gained. Naturally every possible scrap of information which the government had in regard to the Lang Tun affair was placed at my disposition; but, after all, that was mostly secondhand, as I appreciate now.

"The principal document was the official report of one of your predecessors as consul, Mr. Sternberg. It stated that all of the people at the mission had been accounted for, their bodies identified, and given Christian burial. My wife's name was on that list—her maiden name, of course, for there had never been public announcement of our marriage. Remember, I saw only the opening of that horrible affair; but from what I have since learned I know that report must have been fiction; it

would have been impossible to make such identifications."

"It was the published report which you saw, Mr. Macpherson," said Sternberg. "There is no use in denying the fact that it did not contain all of the truth; *that* is contained in the confidential report to the secretary of state, of which I have a copy at the consulate. You can appreciate the reason for not giving it out."

"Man, man, what a lot of misery might have been prevented had the truth been told fifteen years ago!" exclaimed Macpherson bitterly. "I believed that lying report, and from the day I accepted it as verity I tried to forget that China existed. Had I suspected that it was a lie, I should have dragged the emperor from the walls of the Forbidden City itself to get at the truth, to have found my wife if she lived, or certain proof of her death. Of my own sufferings I do not speak, though God knows what they have been; but for fifteen years a helpless woman—your countrywoman and my wife—has been the prisoner of those devils who sacked Lang Tun!"

For a moment following the declaration there was absolute silence; and then, white of face and trembling, Winton rose from his chair.

"Macpherson, are you mad, or can this thing be true?" he exclaimed brokenly. "Josephine lived through that horrible time perhaps; I was prepared to believe that, for to-night I saw your son; but fifteen years—— It is impossible!"

"I am just beginning to learn that nothing is impossible," answered Macpherson grimly, as he touched a bell on the table beside him.

The English servant who had admitted them answered the summons. Macpherson made a sign with his hand which the servant mutely acknowledged with a respectful bow, and left the room. A moment later the door again opened, and the boy whom they had seen on the dock entered.

There was no mistaking the likeness between father and son; the boy was the living image of the man in feature

and coloring. His expression, too, was impassive, but curiously unlike that of his father. Macpherson's face was a mask which one instinctively felt hid suffering; the boy's expression was the mask of the Orient, a veil which no Western eyes have ever learned to penetrate. He stood before them in respectful silence, but there was just a hint of defiance, half sullen, half mocking, in his eyes as he looked from one to the other.

"There is living evidence of the truth of my assertion that nothing is impossible," said Macpherson bitterly. "Gentlemen, this is my son; through me he is kin to half the noble families of Europe; his mother was a sweet, clean-blooded American girl of old New England Puritan stock. Centuries of hereditary influence have operated to make him an Anglo-Saxon, and have succeeded only in stamping the Macpherson likeness on his face; for thirteen years of training in the Orient have made him heart and soul a Chinaman!"

CHAPTER IV.

The boy listened impassively to the tirade, which was practically a denunciation; that impassivity possibly the most convincing proof which could have been afforded of the justice of his father's estimate of him. He was a picture of curious contrasts as he stood there, his clear-cut profile, straight eyes, and gracefully poised head as strikingly out of harmony with the baggy, uncouth native costume as was the bit of transplanted England which he had entered in discord with the great East which environed it. Winton was still shaken and tremendously agitated from the effect of Macpherson's astonishing announcement, and had apparently forgotten the existence of the boy, but Sternberg, lacking the intense personal interest in the whole tragic history which possessed the others, found the boy the most interesting of the strange human documents which comprised it.

When the boy had been haled before him at the consulate, he had been puzzled by that stolid impassivity which

so irritated Macpherson, and even more puzzled by the attitude of the ruffianly Chinese soldiers who had made him a prisoner. They had treated him with that subtle deference which they might have accorded to a mandarin, while it was perfectly evident that they only refrained from manhandling young Astly because of the most unpleasant punishment meted out to the soldiery by their superiors for any open disrespect shown to the hated foreign devils.

Perhaps the boy instinctively felt that of the three adults the consul was at least the least antagonistic, for it was to him he turned, breaking the silence which had grown embarrassing with a courteous expression of regret for having been a possible bother to him as a result of his fight in the native city.

Sternberg was about to answer, making light of the whole matter, when he was forestalled by an eager demand for details from Macpherson.

The consul supplied them hesitantly, and when the recital was finished Macpherson looked at the boy approvingly.

"By Jove, perhaps there is some Anglo-Saxon in you, after all!" he exclaimed. "You say that he thrashed them both well, Sternberg? There was no kicking and scratching about it—just fair, straight punching?"

Greatly relieved, Sternberg amplified and perhaps embroidered his story with most satisfactory details. He was a sympathetic person, and underneath the bitter hardness of Macpherson's exterior he read the heart hunger of a disappointed and lonely man, the eager longing to find something which he could love, of which he could be proud, in this boy, who was stamped with his likeness and bore his name. And watching them closely, he thought that he could detect just a momentary flash of responsiveness beneath the mask of the boy's stolidity, a faint echo of that silent cry.

"I can't tell you a great deal more," Macpherson resumed his story. "Not because I have anything to conceal, but there is little that I know myself." He turned to Winton. "Winton, you, at any rate, can understand why I finally

accepted what I believed to be the inevitable in a way which must seem surprisingly casual to Sternberg; there was nothing to be gained by stirring up the past, and my only hope for even a measure of peace lay in forgetting it. You can also surmise about how successful I was in that, although I drove myself to find occupation for every waking moment."

"Yes, I know—there are always the dreams," assented Winton gravely, sympathy for a moment banishing distrust and suspicion from his eyes. "I found them even worse when I tried to live in America than after I came back here."

"I can believe that—from my own experience," continued Macpherson. "For a horrible ten years I seemed to be enveloped in a horrible mist as soon as my head touched the pillow. Awake I resolutely banished the thought of everything Chinese from my mind, scrupulously avoiding anything which might bring up painful memories or suggest this accursed country. But the visions came in the night; the faces of those men who were with you in the cardroom of the Lang Tun club, of the men and women who were with my wife in the mission hospital, and of the yellow devils who swarmed about us. I was always powerless, fighting away that horrible mist which smothered and strangled me. That continued until two years ago, and then suddenly the mist became a net, equally as baffling, but at least giving me the sensation of something solid to struggle against. The change followed the appearance of a Chinaman, the first one I had seen since I interviewed those plausible liars at the Chinese legation after my return to London."

"You knew him—it was one of your old acquaintances out here?" demanded Winton eagerly. Macpherson shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps; I may have seen him a thousand times, but I didn't recognize him," he replied. "I was on one of my estates in Scotland for the deer-stalking, and the gillies found him concealed in a clump of firs from which

he was watching the house. They had handled him pretty severely before they brought him to me, and I wasted no time with him. I shall not weary you with the details of it, but that was only the beginning, and for the next three months, do what I might to avoid them, I was conscious that I was rarely free from the scrutiny of oblique eyes. The espionage was never obtrusive, and I never succeeded in getting one of the slippery devils in my grip. It became a perfect obsession. We are conservative at home, you know, so being in difficulties I did as all well-regulated British peers do when they need some one to think for them—I consulted my solicitor.

"He was the one man in England who knew the story of my experiences in the East; he and his forefathers had kept the Macpherson consciences for generations, and I expect that a lot of family skeletons of which even I am ignorant are locked in the old strong boxes of the firm. I don't believe that anything could surprise him, and he listened to my tale of the latest developments as stolidly as he usually took my directions as to the renewal of a lease. They are a queer lot—those solicitors who dry nurse the British aristocracy—and my man, Guilfoyle, is the queerest of them all. He never talks more than he can help, and he had nothing to offer when I had finished except the assurance that he would give the matter his immediate and personal attention. He certainly did, and with the most surprising results, for two days later he appeared with this young gentleman, whom he introduced to me as my son, and the heir to the Macpherson titles and estates, as formally and casually as he would have presented some trivial legal document for my signature.

"I'll not waste time in analyzing my emotions for you, gentlemen. Guilfoyle was not the man to accept anything on faith, and even without his assurance I should have believed that this strange Chinese changeling was my offspring, for he was cast absolutely in the Macpherson mold. Guilfoyle

made no mystery about it; he had gone straight to the Chinese legation after hearing my story. After the manner of diplomats, white or yellow, they had asked more questions than they answered until they had assured themselves that the nobleman whom he represented was, in fact, that same Richard Macpherson who was in China fifteen years ago. Then, explaining that ever since Lang Tun the Chinese government had vainly tried to find trace of me, they produced this young man, and trusted that his lordship would now see his way clear to being equally magnanimous.

"'And that,' concluded Guilfoyle, 'I took it upon myself to promise, and I should most earnestly advise your lordship to overhaul your memory concerning things which happened during your stay in China, and which you have not confided to me. The boy is only an evidence of good faith, my lord—a retainer, as we might say in my profession—and I am convinced that other rewards will follow compliance with their wishes.'

"Step by step, and day by day, we went over together everything which I could remember from the day I landed in Hongkong until I reached the frontier of India. Human memory is fallible, but so far as I could recall we went over every detail, and there is but one blank—the few days immediately preceding the Lang Tun massacre. I remember leaving Hongkong with Jenkinson and traveling by steamer to Canton. From there we traveled inland for a day or two, and then there comes a blank until I found myself that awful night in the club at Lang Tun.

"Guilfoyle was convinced of my sincerity, and he carried that conviction back with him to the Chinese legation, instructed by me to accede to anything they might demand which it was in my power to do; but they evidently did not share his belief in my veracity. They would formulate no demand, insinuating that I knew exactly what was wanted. Neither would they furnish a single scrap of information which would throw light on the fate of my wife.

My boy was equally unable to enlighten us; he had no recollection of his mother—from infancy he had known no one but Chinese. He had been carefully reared, and given an education of sorts; among other things, he had a good foundation in English.

"And there for nearly two years the matter has rested, for we have wasted that time in absolutely futile endeavors to come to an understanding with the legation people. They could not be shaken in their absolutely firm conviction that I knew what they wanted and was lying and bluffing.

"I placed the boy in one of the great public schools of England. He was there for a year, and I think the head master was relieved when I recalled him to come out here with me. He told me frankly that he could not get hold of him as he did of English boys. He could make no specific complaint, but the boy simply baffled him. Guilfoyle and I had found the same difficulty; there was nothing which seemed to appeal particularly to his affection, his ambition, or his pride. He accepted everything as a matter of course, and the first real interest which he ever displayed was when I announced that I had decided to come to China—a decision which I reached when the legation announced to Guilfoyle that further parleying was useless, and suggested that perhaps a personal visit to the East might refresh a memory which was evidently at fault.

"Mind you, gentlemen, the Chinese legation people never made the slightest admission which we could definitely take hold of, but in analyzing the whole thing Guilfoyle and I reached exactly the same conclusion. The boy had been produced as an evidence that my wife had lived through the massacre of Lang Tun, for he was born about five months afterward. They dared not make the admission that she still lives, for that would have meant the usual naval demonstration, humiliating apologies, and a tremendous indemnity in land or treasure. But the fact that they had voluntarily produced the boy was sufficient indication that they believed they still

held a more valuable hostage. We have argued and negotiated at cross-purposes because of their distrust; they refuse to believe that I am sincere in disclaiming all knowledge of what they want.

"Winton, I am less suspicious than you are. I know that of all the men who came out with us on the *China* fifteen years ago, you were the only one whom my wife trusted and cared for. I know that it was her business which called you to Lang Tun. I know that after fifteen years of silence her first communication bids me to rely upon you, and be guided by your advice—and I am here to ask it." He stopped abruptly, and Sternberg leaned forward eagerly, his eyes fixed on Winton's face. Winton remained perfectly calm, and, with aggravating deliberation, selected a cheroot from his case, and lighted it.

"What has become of Guilfoyle?" he asked; and, while there was nothing offensive in the question itself, his voice and expression invested it with a meaning that verged on insult. A momentary flash in Macpherson's eyes was the only suggestion of resentment on his part; but while the boy's face remained absolutely passive, Sternberg noticed that the hand which was half concealed in the loose sleeve became a clenched fist. Macpherson hesitated for a moment, and then, his voice absolutely without emotion, gave a matter-of-fact answer to the matter-of-fact question.

"He left the yacht at Suez," he said quietly. "I can't tell you why, but he took a P. & O. ship for Bombay there. I am expecting his arrival any day. He would not tell me what he was after. See here, Winton, I know that you distrust me; but I give you my word that I have told you the absolute truth. What is it that you suspect? What do you wish to know that I can tell you?"

For a full minute they looked each other squarely in the eyes, and in the end it was Winton's which were averted, seeking the tip of his cigar.

"There is a great deal which you would have to tell me, Macpherson,"

he said quietly. "I am like your Chinese friends of the legation. It is difficult for me to believe in such a complete lapse of memory; but we will let the few days before Lang Tun go at that. There was a time before Lang Tun—those weeks which you spent in Hongkong after your wife had departed for the mission—which leaves a great deal to be explained if we are to see eye to eye."

A puzzled expression came to Macpherson's face.

"Yes, those weeks—what of them?" he asked. "Heaven knows they were sufficiently tedious to me; I was on tenterhooks awaiting the answers to the communications which I had sent home. I have told you the reason for my remaining there."

"Yes; but you have told us nothing of your mysterious absences—those excursions which you made so quietly away from the knowledge of every one in the foreign quarter," answered Winton; and Macpherson looked at him in blank amazement.

"What in the deuce are you driving at?" he demanded impatiently. "I bored myself to death at that infernal club; perhaps I drank more than was good for me at times, but that was nothing to be——"

"Nonsense!" interrupted Winton curtly. "I am not talking of that sort of thing, but of the periods in which you spent days at a time away from Hongkong, evidently in queer company from the acquaintances that you made. I remember that the disreputable little half-caste, Jenkinson, was one of them. I knew him; we all did. He was the go-between in recovering our property whenever the Chinese pulled off a successful robbery. The police were after him when he disappeared; they had concluded that he was more than a fence—that he planned every big job which they pulled off. He was only a sample, and hardly a fair one, for your acquaintances included worse characters than he—the pirates of the river, the desperadoes of the slums of the native quarter. All of that has got to be explained, Macpherson."

Macpherson sat as one dumfounded, and then slowly the mask of impassivity dropped from his face. Perplexity deepened to bewilderment in his eyes, and he rose unsteadily from his chair. A tremulous hand passed and repassed over his forehead as if it were vainly trying to brush some impalpable but troublesome thing away.

"Winton, tell me what you mean, of what you accuse me?" he said huskily. "You are speaking in riddles, for I know nothing of this. I have not the slightest recollection of any such thing happening in Hongkong. Back in India—yes, it did happen; but I believed it was the sun. My colonel thought so, too; he acknowledged that he had been unjust—that I had not been responsible."

"Macpherson, I don't care a copper cash for what happened back in India!" exclaimed Winton harshly. "I am speaking of Hongkong and fifteen years ago, and I can tell you of one item which was discovered later about your chosen companion, Jenkinson. It was conclusively proven that it was he who plotted the looting of the *Avondale*, the only entirely successful attack which has been made by the pirates on the Canton steamer. You may remember it; it was while you were waiting in Hongkong. All of the European officers and passengers were butchered. The booty was tremendous, but the pirates are supposed to have missed what they were really after—a mysterious treasure which was being transported to——"

"I was there!" interrupted Macpherson, and both Winton and Sternberg jumped to their feet, startled by an unearthly quality in the man's voice more than by his astonishing statement. His dark skin had suddenly turned sallow, and his staring eyes, with dilated pupils, looked past them unseeingly. "That is right; they did miss the treasure, although they tortured the captain and officers most fiendishly in their effort to uncover it," he went on. "It was of no use; some fool had fired the boat, and it burned like tinder, driving the captors off with a few paltry thou-

sands in gold for their reward. It was a pitiful failure after so much risk."

Macpherson had spoken like an automaton, a man detached from himself. Sternberg was intensely interested, but he had an uneasy, half-guilty feeling, as if he were eavesdropping. Winton, however, had no scruples. His face hardened as he listened, and when Macpherson's recital ended he was quick to prompt him to other disclosures.

"Yes, it was a pitiful failure, and one which led to another attempt a short time later," he said. "You may remember that, Macpherson, although it did not create such a sensation in Hongkong because no foreigners were among the victims. It was the attack on the Shen Fun caravan, which was rescued only by the opportune arrival of the viceroy's military escort. The prisoners taken admitted before they were executed that they were the same pirates who had looted the *Avondale*. There were queer rumors afloat about the entire affair; you may have heard them."

"Rumors! Why should I listen to rumors?" answered Macpherson, in that same peculiar voice. "They were the same——" With the lithe grace of a panther, the boy sprang forward, placing one hand on Macpherson's shoulder, the other lightly over his lips. The interruption was effectual in more ways than one; it cut short any avowal which his father might have made, and at the same time served to arouse him from that strange condition of trance into which he had drifted. He drew away from the boy, and looked about him curiously, but it was the boy who spoke.

"Gentlemen, my father is not well," he said quietly. "You can see that he is not himself, and it is unfair to——"

"What in the deuce are you talking about, Dick?" broke in Macpherson impatiently, his voice once more natural, but still a trace of perplexity in his eyes. "Winton, you were making some absurd charges against me, of my behavior in Hongkong; let's have done with it. Do you mind telling me plainly what it is that you suspect me of?"

Winton motioned the boy aside with an imperative gesture. "I have made no accusation," he said sternly. "I have demanded certain explanations, which I believe I had a right to do. I have distrusted everything but the evidence of my own senses since the first discovery that I made to-night—that your most trusted servant, your comprador, Wong Tom, is the same man who fifteen years ago was virtually in command of the looters at Lang Tun!"

Macpherson, entirely himself again, betrayed not the slightest surprise or emotion.

"Then, if what I have heard is true, you have small cause to quarrel with him," he answered quietly. "I understand that it was through his efforts that your life was spared."

"You knew of this when you employed him?" exclaimed Winton.

Macpherson nodded assent. "I should have employed him if he had worn horns, a spiked tail, and a cloven hoof. He has the best of recommendations, Winton; you will hardly question them. He met me when the yacht dropped anchor at Hongkong. It was he who brought the letter from Josephine. In it she tells me to trust implicitly in two men—yourself and the bearer of the letter, whom you know as my comprador, Wong Tom."

"You have that letter?" demanded Winton.

"I have."

"I should like to see it."

Macpherson took a step backward as Winton extended his hand and looked at him defiantly.

"You may not, Winton—you nor no other man so long as I live," he replied. For a moment Winton looked into the dark eyes which met his unfalteringly, and then, with a shrug of his shoulders, he turned to the consul.

"I think that we had better be getting back to the club, Sternberg," he said. "The fellows should have returned from the hills by this time."

Macpherson stepped forward before Sternberg could answer. "What's the meaning of this, Winton?" he asked

sharply. "I do not intend to have my story retailed for club gossip."

Sternberg attempted to intervene with the assurance that he would regard everything he had heard as confidential, but Winton brushed him aside.

"I can't tell you the meaning of it, Macpherson," he said. "I am no purveyor of club gossip, but I am not a reckless fool. Chee Nung is nearly two hundred miles from the coast. The settlement and the missions are important, but, after all, the whites are but a handful when compared to the swarming population of the native city and the sampan fleet."

"Well, what of that? There is no threat of a rising," protested Macpherson; and again Winton shrugged his shoulders.

"In my knowledge of China, the risings have rarely been preceded by threats," he answered. "I suppose that there have always been signs and premonitions if they could have been read. I make no pretense at prophecy, but the man is a fool who does not profit by experience. Fifteen years ago your appearance at Hongkong was followed by the looting of the *Avondale*, and you have acknowledged that you were there—and you are the sole European survivor of that slaughter. Then followed the attack on the Shen Fun caravan, which happened during one of your mysterious absences from Hongkong. There were strange rumors of a mysterious white renegade connected with the story of that attack. A few weeks later your appearance at Lang Tun is followed by the most appalling massacre of foreigners in the whole history of China.

"For fifteen years you disappear absolutely, and when you reappear you are hand in glove with Wong Tom, whose activities in the past justify our suspicions for the future. Perhaps you have told me the absolute truth, Macpherson, but it is so strange and grotesque a story that it demands a measure of corroboration. That will require time, and if a few quiet words of advice from me will prevent it there

will be no repetition of the opening of the Lang Tun tragedy."

Sternberg had quietly ranged himself beside Winton, alert for trouble. Winton had spoken quietly, but his words were a terrible arraignment, and Macpherson had listened with hardening face. Little of sympathy as had previously existed between father and son, Winton's implied accusations had evidently aroused blood loyalty, and almost imperceptibly Dick had moved to his father's side. Sternberg knew that no mere verbal denial could adequately meet that accusation. Winton had spoken without passion, carefully choosing his words, and driving home the points of his arraignment as might a public prosecutor before a court.

But Macpherson was no helpless prisoner, compelled by superior force to listen in silence. His dark face had become livid, and the blood lust shone from his eyes as he faced them. The whole atmosphere had suddenly become quick with passion, with violence, with murder; and then just as suddenly it cleared.

The heavy curtains covering the long window parted, and as noiselessly and as mysteriously as he had appeared at the club Wong Tom stood in the room. There was not the slightest change in his apparel, but the change in the man himself was remarkable. He was no longer the placid, deferential comprador, but a man accustomed to command, and to having his commands unhesitatingly obeyed, and from the moment of his entrance his personality dominated the situation. He raised his hand in an imperative gesture, and Macpherson fell back. Winton, whose muscles had become tense against an expected attack, felt them relax; and the consul's hand, which had instinctively started for the revolver in his hip pocket, just as instinctively fell, empty, to his side.

"I have heard everything, gentlemen," he said quietly, his English free from even a suggestion of accent. "Mr. Winton, I offer you a part of the corroboration which you require. Mr. Macpherson has told you the truth so

far as he knows it. Your suspicions are justifiable, but some of your deductions are wrong."

Winton stepped forward, evidently to make indignant protest. The interruption caused by Wong Tom's entrance had been a relief, but once the surprise of it had passed the ingrained sense of superiority which the humblest Caucasian feels for even the greatest man of black or yellow skin asserted itself, and with it came resentment at his assumption of command. The Chinaman apparently read what was passing in his mind, for he stepped forward and checked him with a gesture.

"I have told you that some of your deductions are wrong; others are correct, but they do not go far enough," he said, as he stretched out his hand, palm upward, from a voluminous sleeve. "Mr. Winton, the life of every foreigner in the settlement and missions of Chee Nung lies in the hollow of my hand. If I close my fingers your avenging countrymen will find what they found at Lang Tun—blackened ruins and unrecognizable corpses. For fifteen years I have waited for this night—and I shall not be denied."

CHAPTER V.

As a man hypnotized, Sternberg gazed at that extended hand, for Wong Tom's words had carried conviction. To Winton, wiser in the subtleties of the people with whom he had lived so long, it was merely a symbol; and, disregarding it, he looked searchingly at the eyes which so defiantly met his. In them he read little of comfort, for as well as any foreigner can he understood the Chinese, and he knew that Wong Tom had made no idle boast.

Dick, from the moment of Wong Tom's entrance, had practically effaced himself, withdrawing from the side of his father to an inconspicuous corner of the room; and Sternberg, taking his cue from Winton's attitude, stood absolutely passive, watching curiously. For the moment both he and Winton had forgotten Macpherson, and as for Wong Tom he had practically ignored

him from the start. And of the three Wong Tom was the only one who remained calm and unstartled when Macpherson, having edged toward the door, threw it open, and sounded a shrill blast on a silver yacht whistle.

Winton, already suspicious, was quick to read treachery in the signal, and, with a cry of warning to Sternberg, he whipped out his pistol, and backed against the wall. The consul followed suit; but Wong Tom stood stock-still, a smile of mingled amusement and mockery on his face as he looked at Macpherson.

"Suspicion must be contagious, Mr. Winton," he said quietly. "Mr. Macpherson's confidence in me was unshaken until you met. I should advise you to put your pistol away; his retainers are apt to be impetuous." Both of the Americans took the advice, for from without came a few words of warning and a sharp command, both in English, tintured with a broad Scotch accent. The crunching of the gravel beneath heavy-soled boots denied the advance of the silent-footed Chinese, and in a moment they caught sight through the open doorway of a dozen brawny sailors in white duck uniforms, each heavily armed, and all under the command of a gigantic man with flaming red hair, on whose sleeve was the insignia of a quartermaster's rating.

"I would suggest that they would be equally available if they remained in the hallway, and it may save you embarrassment if you close the door, Mr. Macpherson," said the Chinaman quietly. For a moment Macpherson hesitated, his hand on the knob; and then, with a curt "Stand by!" which the quartermaster acknowledged with a tug at his flaming forelock, he shut the door, and stood with his back against it.

"Go on, Wong Tom," he said defiantly. "The presence of these men is not a threat; it is a precaution." The Chinaman accepted the assurance with a smile.

"It was one which I anticipated you would take from the moment I boarded your yacht in Hongkong," he said blandly. "Fifty or sixty men would

have been a generous crew for a craft of that size, but I noted more than a hundred idling about her decks. Surely a half dozen of them would have sufficed to bring the launch up from the coast, so I suspected that the extra dozen crowded into the after cockpit and concealed by the drawn curtains were not on board to aid in the navigation."

An angry flush came to Macpherson's dark face. "Everything you say justifies the precautions I have taken," he asserted. "I have not forgotten the two years I spent in a cage, nor the treachery which led to that ignominious captivity. Come what may, there will be no repetition of that, Wong Tom. The men outside are a fair sample of the yacht's crew, and I can assure you that they are not peaceful missionaries nor helpless traders, who will accept butchery lying down."

The Chinaman shrugged his shoulders. "I believe that, for I recognized a number of them as the gamekeepers and gillies of your Scotch estates; I had occasion to dodge more than one of them on their native heath," he said; and both Winton and Sternberg appreciated that the tacit confession of espionage was not made artlessly.

Macpherson's face became as black as a thundercloud, and he advanced threateningly toward the Chinaman.

"You were one of those infernal spies who made my life miserable?" he exclaimed; and, unawed and unabashed, Wong Tom nodded assent.

"Yes; I directed the whole investigation," he admitted. "I would suggest that you take things more calmly, Mr. Macpherson. In your own country you were helpless with practically an army of retainers at your command. It is not probable that a mere handful of men would be of much service in the heart of the Chinese empire."

"He is right, Macpherson," exclaimed Winton quickly, fearful that a rash word or act might precipitate the trouble which he felt hovered about them. "Be careful, man; Wong Tom has arranged your entire establishment, and he has not thrown his cards on the

table without knowing that he held the winning hand."

The Chinaman nodded approvingly. "Your insight justifies my decision to have you invited into this affair, Mr. Winton," he said. "The wisdom of that step was doubted in certain quarters, but I am glad that my counsel prevailed. I have not planned and waited for fifteen years to have everything upset by a moment of passion. It was not difficult to bring Mr. Macpherson to China, and now that he is here I trust that it will not prove too difficult to persuade him to be reasonable."

"Wait!" said Macpherson sullenly; and, walking to the door, he opened it, and gave a curt order to the quartermaster. Again a tug at that flaming forelock acknowledged it, and even as Macpherson closed the door they heard the heavy tread of the sailors as they withdrew toward the launch. "Now I trust that you are satisfied, and that you will be good enough to tell me about what I am to expect," he continued. "I have wanted to be entirely reasonable all along. So far as I am concerned, it is a perfectly plain proposition. I have every reason to believe that my wife survived the Lang Tun massacre, and lives, a prisoner, in some part of this beastly country. I am prepared to make any sacrifice to ransom her, but I have never been able to get a definite demand. I have been met with the absolutely baseless assumption that I knew what was wanted of me; and now Winton caps that by making the most absurd charges against me."

Wong Tom, apparently gratified and relieved that a situation which had threatened disaster had ended quietly, smiled sympathetically, and his oblique eyes fairly radiated benevolence.

"Mr. Macpherson, I believe that you are perfectly sincere, and that you are stating what you believe to be absolute verity, or you would find yourself in a very different position," he said. "Paradoxical as it may seem, Mr. Winton has every foundation of fact for his charges. Do not interrupt me, please!" he exclaimed peremptorily, as Mac-

pherson's expression betrayed the imminence of angry protest. "You have demanded an explanation, and I shall give as much as is permitted. I speak of things within my own personal knowledge, of events which my eyes witnessed. Mr. Macpherson, fifteen years ago you were present at the looting of the *Avondale*. Of such part as you may have played in the capture of the steamer I do not speak, for of that I know nothing from my own observation. You were, I believe, a passenger, bound for Canton, ostensibly on a sight-seeing expedition. But I do know that after the steamer was in the possession of the pirates you acted as the leader of those who ransacked the holds and cabins, while Jenkinson supervised the torturing of the European officers on the deck. You were the last man to retreat from the flames."

Macpherson's face had become livid as he listened. "You lie!" he gasped.

Wong Tom ignored the insulting denial. "Furthermore," he continued evenly, "the rumors of the presence of a Caucasian at the attack on the Shen Fun caravan some ten days later had this much foundation of fact: You were there, leading the desperate charges of the brigands. You escaped capture only because that same Jenkinson had a half dozen of them seize you and hurry you away when the viceroy's guard came to the rescue, and made the carefully planned attack hopeless. Those brigands were the same river pirates who captured the *Avondale*."

Macpherson's eyes dropped for a moment, and when he again raised them they were filled with piteous appeal as he looked at the two Americans. Perhaps he had expected to find an expression of triumph on Winton's face; but even suspicion had departed from it, and he read only sympathy.

"Gentlemen, you cannot really believe that these atrocious charges are true!" he exclaimed piteously. "Winton, you know how this yellow devil has wronged me, and he has been quick to take a hint from what you said. You whisper of a white renegade, and he shouts my name."

Winton stepped forward, and placed his hand gently on his shoulder.

"Steady, old man! No one is disposed to judge harshly; let's hear him out. There is more to this, is there not, Wong Tom?"

The Chinaman gravely bowed assent. "Yes, or we should not be here together," he answered. "Mr. Winton, you at least know of Shen Fun?"

"Yes; I saw its towers and battlements in the distance when I journeyed to Lang Tun," replied Winton. "Naturally I was curious about it, for I knew that no foreigner was permitted within its gates. It is the Sacred City, as I understand it—the only one in the empire which is ruled absolutely by priests."

"In a general way, your information is correct," said the Chinaman. "Like Peking, there is a city within a city. Inside of the outer walls the imperial mandarins exercise a measure of authority, for the population is much like that of other great Chinese towns. But inside of the Sacred Precincts, which corresponds to the Forbidden City of Peking, the priests rule supreme. It is a sanctuary; the treasure house for all that the believers in the teachings of Confucius hold most sacred. The sanctuary was never violated until fifteen years ago. Gentlemen, Mr. Macpherson is the only Caucasian who ever passed out alive from the Sacred Precincts of Shen Fun!"

Macpherson for a moment seemed stunned. Sternberg looked at him with a new interest, for he was new enough to China to chafe under restrictions which older residents learn to accept as a matter of course. That Macpherson had penetrated and returned alive from the "Mysterious City" seemed more remarkable to him than any of the strange things he had heard that night, for ambassadors, and even visiting royalties, had been rigidly excluded from its walls. Winton, however, accepted the statement without the least evidence of surprise.

"I have been suspicious of that," he said quietly. "Shen Fun is less than fifty miles from Lang Tun, and I saw

Macpherson when he arrived there. You can tell us more, Wong Tom?"

Macpherson had recovered himself, and he broke in angrily before the Chinaman could answer. "You credit this infernal tissue of lies, Winton?" he demanded. "You, who know that my one thought was for——"

"Stop, Macpherson!" interrupted the Chinaman sternly. "Courtesy and patience have limits which you may not transgress with impunity. I am stating the exact truth, but I do not hold you responsible in the ordinary sense. If I did, your life would be forfeit, and all of your blood would make vicarious atonement. For fifteen years your son has been in our power, and my protection has saved him.

"Do not misunderstand me; I know that you are a brave man, and I am not seeking to terrify you by threats. But you are not your own master; you have come to China for a purpose; to accomplish that purpose you must live. To live you require my protection; to receive it you must be guided by me."

Macpherson shook his head hopelessly. "Shall I never be able to make you understand that my one wish has been to do anything and everything, to give anything and everything, that you may demand, and which it is in my power to do or give?" he exclaimed irritably. "There is the matter in a nutshell, and all of this melodramatic stuff which you have devised has been worse than useless."

"No; you are entirely mistaken in that, Mr. Macpherson," answered Wong Tom earnestly. "The proposition which I have to make would have sounded melodramatic and absurd in Scotland. You could not have granted our demands then; you cannot now unless you will place yourself absolutely in my hands. It is impossible, because the knowledge which you possess, and which you must transmit to us, lies only in your subconscious mind, lies dormant with the sleeping memory of those other things—the looting of the *Avondale*, the attack on the Shen Fun caravan, your visit to Shen Fun itself, and what happened there—events in your

life of which I believe you to be absolutely ignorant."

Macpherson's face was a study as he listened, and when the Chinaman stopped speaking he turned to Winton, a smile of derision on his lips.

"Winton, you are reputed to be wiser in the ways of the East than any other foreigner; can you explain to me what sort of a hocus-pocus he is trying to put up against me?" he asked.

Without answering, Winton looked inquiringly at Wong Tom.

The Chinaman nodded. "I expect that you understand enough of it to make it clear, Mr. Winton," he said. "You saw Mr. Macpherson in Hongkong after the loot of the *Avondale* and the caravan attack, and you were at Lang Tun when he sought refuge there after his flight from Shen Fun. You can testify that he was certainly not himself—that his mental condition was not normal."

"That is entirely correct, Macpherson," agreed Winton. "I can vouch for that; you were as a man bewitched, or in a trance. 'Fey' was what Bill Lennie called your condition——"

"Wait!" interrupted Macpherson sharply, his face going white beneath the tan. "Wong Tom, you believe that I did all of these things of which you accuse me when I was irresponsible—that I actually did them, but have no memory of them?"

"I believe that so firmly that I have stood between you and the vengeance which has sought you since you fled from Shen Fun," replied the Chinaman.

"And why should I have fled from there? What had I done?"

For the first time, Wong Tom betrayed a suspicion of weakness which suggested fear. He hesitated, and his oblique eyes shifted uneasily. "Mr. Macpherson, that is the one thing which I may not tell," he said, in a low voice. "If it were generally known, even I could not save you, and the consequences to others might be terrible. It is known only to a very few of the priests who guard the sanctuary of

Shen Fun, to your subconscious mind, and to Jenkinson."

"Jenkinson is alive?"

Wong Tom shrugged his shoulders. "He exists," he said significantly. "He knew only a part, but even of that he will never speak."

"Where is he?" demanded Macpherson.

"If you will do as I wish, you will see him," answered Wong Tom evasively. "Fifteen years ago you managed, by craft and the exercise of a devilish ingenuity, to get within the walls of Shen Fun. Now I wish you to return there with me."

"One moment, Wong Tom!" interrupted Winton. "I have not forgotten that you saved my life at Lang Tun, and I believe that it was through your influence that I was restored to liberty. May I ask if you were responsible for the attack on the foreigners there?"

"I was not," answered the Chinaman decisively. "For weeks I had known that trouble was brewing, and that an outburst might come at any moment."

"Wong Tom, Mr. Macpherson will accompany you," said Winton quietly.

"Who gave you the authority to answer for me?" demanded Macpherson irritably.

"Common humanity, for one thing," answered Winton. "If it is permitted, I shall accompany you."

Wong Tom nodded assent. "It increases my difficulties, but it may also contribute to the success of my plan," he said.

Sternberg came forward eagerly. "Will you accept another volunteer?" he asked. "Not in my official capacity," he added hastily, when he read denial in the Chinaman's expression. "I'll cable my resignation if it is necessary."

Wong Tom hesitated. "Y-e-s, you may come," he said, with evident reluctance. "Never mind your resignation, Mr. Sternberg. If things go wrong, and I am unable to protect you, the star-spangled banner would not impress the Shen Fun mob. Gentlemen, we start at moonrise to-morrow. There will be a houseboat at the landing, and the launch can tow it."

Macpherson looked ruefully from one to the other. "I seem to be without authority in my own house," he said. "Perhaps Dick has a few orders to give me." He turned toward where the boy had stood in the shadows, but the corner was empty; Dick had silently vanished from the room.

"Your son is already on the way to Shen Fun, Mr. Macpherson," said Wong Tom quietly. "In China a male child is often hostage for his sire."

CHAPTER VI.

The boat which Wong Tom had provided was the last word in the way of comfort and luxury. It was sufficiently large to permit of spacious quarters aft for Macpherson, Winton, and Sternberg. Amidships accommodations had been provided for the white sailors; and forward, separated from the passengers by a stout bulkhead, the native servants and crew pigged in together as no other people on the face of the earth could.

Once on board, the Chinaman dropped all pretense of the rôle of comprador, and, with a quiet dignity, became the most considerate and solicitous of hosts. With wonderful tact and unflinching courtesy, he managed a situation which was not without difficulties, for from the very start the men whom Macpherson had insisted upon bringing from the yacht threatened trouble.

Niel, the gigantic quartermaster, was the only real sailorman in the lot; the others, as Wong Tom had asserted, were recruited from the gillies of Macpherson's Scottish estates, and their sole fore-castle experience had been gained on the passage out. They were undisciplined, and without the ready adaptability of the sailor, and Niel, whose temper did not belie his flaming hair, had cursed their awkwardness and inefficiency so roundly and continuously that they had become morose and irritable, much given to venting their tempers in turn upon the native sailors.

Now, the Chinese sailors and stokers on deep-water ships, where they are commanded by European officers, are

one thing; the fresh-water sampan and houseboat men of the inland rivers and canals are another. At the best, they are little better than pirates, and human life in China is remarkably cheap. It spoke volumes for the power of Wong Tom that no man among that rascally crew of cutthroats ventured to raise a hand in protest; but, listening to their chatter among themselves, and the shrill, discordant chants with which they accompanied their work, Winton appreciated that once his protecting hand was removed they would exact a bloody vengeance for the kicks and curses which the Highlanders dealt out to them.

Wong Tom, however, made neither complaint nor comment to Macpherson on the behavior of his followers. From the first it had been tacitly accepted by the three foreigners that mention of what Macpherson had done in Shen Fun fifteen years before, or of what he was expected to do upon their arrival there, was taboo; but of everything else he spoke freely.

"Wong Tom, I have made myself clay in your hands, and I give you my word that I shall go through with it without a whimper," said Macpherson quietly one day. "I ask only one thing—the definite assurance that my wife lives."

The Chinaman hesitated for a moment. "There is no further reason for concealment," he answered finally. "It would have been unwise to have made the acknowledgment before, for we knew what the consequences might have been. Yes, Macpherson, she lives; she has been tenderly guarded and cared for, and I can safely say that this has been the happiest day of her life. Your son was not sent to Shen Fun as a hostage; but as soon as I received your pledge he was permitted to go on an errand of mercy, and today he knows for the first time a mother's embrace."

It was a long journey from Chee Nung to Shen Fun—long enough to impress upon Sternberg the immensity of the Chinese empire, of which he had previously known but the fringe. To

Winton, of course, it was an old story; but Macpherson found little in that journey to remind him of his previous experiences—a fact which puzzled him not a little.

He knew that he must have covered practically the same territory in his previous trip to Lang Tun, but not a landmark could he recognize. The weary months of his captivity had been spent in far-distant provinces, and the uplands of the north are as different from the river country of southern and central China as is Maine from the lower Mississippi Valley. In the north the men had been of large stature, their life pastoral, their cities separated by great wastes of untilled lands. Here he traveled for day after day through a country in which not a square inch of land was left unoccupied by growing crops. Drainage had reclaimed every swamp, and a skillfully devised scheme of irrigation had made the uplands fruitful. It was all as new to him as if he had never visited China before, and more than anything else he was impressed by the density of the population.

The mere mass of yellow humanity seemed overpowering. Man for man, they were insignificant foemen when contrasted with the giants of the north; but he knew that he must reckon with them in the mass, and not as individuals. Hourly he had ocular demonstration of the density of that mass, for the progress of the launch, with its heavy tow, was necessarily slow, and the news of their coming evidently preceded them. At every lock the sides of the canal were lined with thousands of curious natives, and more than once the eagerness of those in the rear ranks to obtain sight of the "foreign devils" caused scores of those in front to take involuntarily baths in the yellow water.

There was never a sign of open hostility displayed by the curious thousands who stared at them—a condition which Winton, from previous experience in inland travel, knew to be most unusual. Out of compliment to his guests, Wong Tom had caused both the American and British ensigns to be flown from staffs at the stern; but those

national symbols had no meaning for the coolies and peasants, who gazed indifferently at them. From the staff at the bow fluttered another flag, however, the ground of imperial yellow bearing three intertwined circles of green, red, and blue; and that the multitude greeted with every mark of awe and respect.

If it came to a question of flight, Macpherson's men would hamper him because their numbers would attract attention; and yet they were too few in number to make effective resistance against this human swarm. He wished heartily that they were back in Chee Nung, on the yacht—or, better still, in their native Highlands—for while they had inherited the loyalty which would make them follow him unquestioningly in danger, or to death, he had inherited the obligations which forbade him to traffic needlessly with that feudal devotion.

It was that sense of obligation which finally caused him to go to Wong Tom with the suggestion that the house boat should finish its journey by sail and hand power, leaving the launch free to carry his useless followers back to the coast.

"They will be in less danger if they stay with us, Mr. Macpherson," he said. "If they are reasonable, I can protect them; but they could never retrace this voyage in safety alone. Every one of them has done enough since we started to earn a knife between his ribs; but no Chinaman dares raise his hand against even a foreigner beneath the yellow flag with the intertwined circles. The meanest criminal in China would be safe from the vengeance of Tsi-Ann, the empress dowager, under its protection."

"There is a flagstaff on the launch," suggested Macpherson.

Wong Tom smiled as he shook his head. "That would be piracy, Mr. Macpherson," he said. "Sailing under false colors wouldn't be much of a protection. The flag in itself is valueless; it is what it represents."

"And that is?"

For a moment Wong Tom hesitated, and then proudly drew himself up to

his full height. "And that is the Custodian of the Inner Sanctuary of Shen Fun—by virtue of his great office, the real power behind the dragon throne," he answered. "That is my flag so long as I hold that office, and in the eyes of every follower of Confucius it would be sacrilege for another to use it. There is no reason for further concealment; so long as I live and retain my power, I am supreme in Shen Fun, and he who rules Shen Fun rules China.

"Macpherson, for nearly fifteen years this great empire has been virtually without a ruler, for in Peking Tsi-Ann has ridden unchecked, and China is headed for destruction. I have played for a great stake, and some time within the next few days I make the final throw of the dice. If I win, you and your friends are assured of protection, your wife and son will be restored to you, and you will be given safe escort to the coast. Tsi-Ann will tremble on the dragon throne which she has usurped, and under my guidance China will be saved from the dangers which threaten her."

"And if you lose?" asked Macpherson quietly.

Wong Tom shrugged his shoulders and made a gesture eloquent of helplessness. "Then may my gods and your God aid us!" he exclaimed. "We shall be alone in Shen Fun, for my power would be gone. To-day my word is law to millions; if I fail, I shall be of less account than the meanest beggar in China—powerless to save myself, and a menace rather than a protection to my friends. I am depending upon you, Macpherson, and I have faith that I shall not be disappointed. No—do not attempt to question me, for I can tell you nothing. I know that fifteen years ago you were not yourself, and in a few hours of madness you did that which had terrible consequences. Now for a few hours you shall again be mad that you may undo the harm which you have done. Until the time comes, I can tell you no more."

Macpherson had listened with increasing bewilderment in his eyes, and that peculiar, dazed expression had

come to his face. Again his hands were raised to his forehead as if he were trying to brush away some impalpable but mystifying veil.

"Yes—perhaps—it was madness in India, too," he muttered. "That horrible Temple of Juggernaut—the flight—the trail of silver—" His voice sank lower and lower, until it was merely a whisper, and the words which came from his lips were those of a strange language.

Wong Tom watched and listened in silence; then, leaning forward, he placed his hands on Macpherson's shoulders, and shook him roughly.

"No, no, not yet!" he exclaimed peremptorily.

Macpherson started, and quickly recovered himself; but in his eyes was a perplexed inquiry—the expression of a man suddenly aroused from a deep sleep and finding himself in strange surroundings. He glanced furtively about the deck before looking at Wong Tom—a respite which the Chinaman deemed fortunate, for he knew that his face had betrayed agitation. In those few seconds it had become as placid and inscrutable as ever, and a pleasant and reassuring smile played about his lips.

"So I think that you will agree with me that it is better they should go on with us," he said, as if he were continuing a conversation of which Macpherson had in a moment of inattention or drowsiness lost the thread. "Fortune is notoriously fickle, you know, Mr. Macpherson, and stranger things have happened than that I should welcome the presence and aid of your wild Highlanders."

Macpherson nodded assent. "Very well; I expect that it is the only chance," he agreed. "It is reassuring to find that we are all in the same boat, Wong Tom—that we must stand or fall together."

The house boat was floating lazily into one of the innumerable locks which, foot by foot, had raised them to the level, where paddy fields commenced to be interspersed with patches of millet, and here and there the bril-

liant hues of poppies broke the vast expanse of waving green. The clumsy, ponderous gates swung together behind them, and the water from the spillway rushed in to raise them to the upper level. Wong Tom made no answer until the shaded deck on which they sat was even with the stone coping of the lock. Then he rose from his chair, and, beckoning Macpherson to follow him, he walked to the rail.

Gathered at the edge was the usual crowd of chattering, gesticulating natives, pushing and crowding to get a closer view of the pale-faced foreigners; but at the sight of Wong Tom their shrill clamoring hushed to immediate and absolute silence, and a single gesture with his outstretched hand sufficed to start them backward even more eagerly than they had pushed and struggled to get in the front rank. In a surprisingly short time that great mob had so effectually dispersed itself that from the deck was offered a clear and unobstructed view of the surrounding country, and, raising his hand, the Chinaman pointed to a range of low hills which edged the eastern horizon.

"There lies Shen Fun, Mr. Macpherson," he said gravely. "To-morrow at daybreak we should be able to see plainly the outer walls. Until we reach them there will be little which differs from the country through which we have passed; but once within the gates of the outer city, you must be prepared to see much which will shock Western eyes."

"But still you intend to take us through; will it mean fighting?" interrupted Macpherson. "I'm not afraid for myself, Wong Tom, but I have come here for a purpose, and that will not be advanced if I am knocked on the head. Is your power great enough to give us safe conduct?"

"A very positive 'No' to your first question," replied the Chinaman. "It would not be fighting; it would be annihilation, a massacre, if such an entrance as you have pictured in your mind were attempted. You and those who accompany you will enter the outer gates as my prisoners, and none save myself will

have the slightest suspicion that it is planned for you to come out alive."

Macpherson had listened in blank amazement, and he greeted the conclusion with a derisive laugh. "Are you serious? Do you believe for a moment that we shall trust ourselves in there without weapons in our hands?" he demanded.

Wong Tom gravely inclined his head, but before he could make verbal answer Macpherson walked to the companionway which led to the cabin where Sternberg and Winton sat, absorbed, over a chessboard.

"Come up here, you fellows, and listen to this!" he called; and when they reached the deck he repeated the gist of the conversation for their benefit. "And even if we should be idiotic enough to consent, can you see Niel and his men submitting docilely to even a pretense of being herded as prisoners by Chinamen?" he concluded.

Wong Tom had listened patiently, and he spoke before the others could answer.

"There is no question of that," he said; and there was that in his voice which recalled to Sternberg Winton's prophecy of the iron hand. "Officially I am dealing with you alone, Mr. Macpherson, and I shall hardly need to remind you of your promise to me that you would submit your will to my judgment. You *must* go with me to the Sanctuary, and for your own safety it is necessary for you to go as my prisoner. That applies equally to any foreigner who accompanies you, and you have acknowledged that even your authority could not make your men submit to that. It is therefore a self-evident fact that they may not enter Shen Fun, and I may say that I have never intended to permit them to.

"This is my plan: To-morrow afternoon you three gentlemen will land with me at the point on the canal which is nearest to Shen Fun, which means a land journey of ten miles. Before that you must impress upon your Highlanders the fact that any further indiscretion on their part will lead to their destruction. It will be far better if they

remain under cover in their own quarters.

"The launch will keep on with this house boat, towing it through canals which I shall indicate, which will bring it in two days to a point midway between Shen Fun and Lang Tun, and there it will remain until you rejoin it. You three gentlemen will enter Shen Fun as my prisoners, if Mr. Winton and Mr. Sternberg still wish to continue." He paused, and looked inquiringly at them.

"Please go on; let us have the rest of it," said Winton. "We haven't come this far to back out without reason."

"Very well; but I warn you that it will be a trying experience," continued Wong Tom seriously. "Once inside of the walls which surround the Sacred Precincts, you will be safe, and free from annoyance. Until we reach there, I can guarantee only your personal safety, for the mob is fanatical, and in spite of my protection you will be subjected to jeers and insult. But when we have entered the sacred gate you gentlemen will be liberated; Mr. Macpherson alone will remain my prisoner—on parole, it is true, but absolutely subject to my orders. To you, Mr. Winton, and to Mr. Sternberg, will be intrusted the safety of Lady Lochineal. Her son will guide you, and you will escort her to this boat. There are the broad lines of the plan; the rest is only a matter of detail."

CHAPTER VII.

In the distance Shen Fun looked very like any one of the dozen walled cities which they had passed on the voyage, but as they neared its gates the three adventurers distinguished one striking difference. The massive medieval walls and flanking towers had been kept in scrupulous repair, and the glint of sunshine on steel at regular intervals on the walls suggested that the watch and ward was still vigilantly maintained.

In this last stage of the journey there had been nothing to arouse their apprehension; chairs had been in waiting for them when they landed from

the house boat, and, swung on the shoulders of powerful coolie bearers, they had been swiftly and comfortably transported across the level plain over which the battlemented hilltops of the city frowned.

A hundred yards from the main gate the bearers halted, and lowered their burdens; and, obeying a gesture from Wong Tom, the foreigners stepped out of their chairs and joined him.

"One last word of caution for your own safety, gentlemen," he said impressively. "I know that you are armed, but—no matter what happens—you must trust in me to protect you, and make no show of resistance."

There was no time for more, for no human voice would have been audible above the discordant blare of horns and trumpets which suddenly came from the vaulted gateway; and a moment later it seemed as if the entire population of Shen Fun must be emptying itself through that narrow passage. The column mushroomed and spread as it reached the open space before the gate, and then swept toward them—a shrieking, gesticulating billow of menacing fanatics. For a moment there was a shade of doubt and anxiety on Wong Tom's face, but it gave way quickly to stern determination, and, jumping up on the seat of his chair, he raised his hand, and made an imperious gesture. No shouted command would have carried, and nothing less than a barrier of stone could have stopped the oncoming rush; but the sight of that upraised hand apparently inspired a measure of awe, and within a yard of them the human billow split and divided, swirling about the chair and the three men who instinctively clung to it as the surf breaks and lashes about an isolated pinnacle of rock.

Even to Winton, who had perfect command of classical Chinese, and a working knowledge of most of the dialects, the shouts and cries were unintelligible; but there was no mistaking the hatred which the fierce intonations conveyed, nor the cruelty and blood lust stamped on the hideously distorted yellow faces which surrounded them.

Wong Tom was quick to take advantage of the respite, and his voice rang out sonorously above the shrill falsetto cries of the fanatics. His words, too, were those of a language unknown to his companions; but there could be no question of the speech coming from the tongue of one accustomed to speak it with authority and a master of invective, and those unlucky enough to be in the front rank shrank back as if they were menaced with a whip. The clear space about the chair grew gradually larger as the human tide receded under his fierce denunciation; but while the cries were stilled and the threatening gestures ceased, there was no lessening of the hatred expressed on the yellow faces.

For the moment they had apparently yielded from the habit of a long obedience imposed by fear, but it was a sullen yielding, and Wong Tom, wise from the experience of years of power, wasted no precious second of the brief minutes which his fierce tirade had gained. The coolies who had carried them from the house boat had been swallowed and lost in the mob, and the chairs in which the foreigners had ridden smashed and trampled into shapeless wreckage; but that on which the Chinaman stood was intact. Swiftly his eyes searched the ring of sullen, scowling faces which surrounded them, and unerringly singling out the four most prominent leaders, he beckoned them forward, and pointed to the long bamboo carrying poles.

In the instant of hesitation which followed, the silence of the mob was broken by a venomous, sibilant hiss which in the East is ever the forerunner of more violent protest, and no interpreter was needed to tell the three foreigners that their lives hung by the slenderest of threads. Winton, familiar with the distinctions of native dress which mark to a nicety the wearer's station in life, knew that Wong Tom had selected the four men of greatest wealth and position in the motley crowd—men who would consider the coolies' task to which his eyes invited them a degradation. Their clothing was fashioned

from the finest silk, and the hideously long finger nails protected from breaking by cunningly devised sheaths of gold proclaimed that their hands were never soiled by manual labor.

Wong Tom had shrewdly drawn a herring across the hot scent upon which they were urged by their ferocity and lust for torture, and until they dared again to follow flesh they would be content to harry fish. Perhaps it was more a desire to inflict humiliation and suffering than fear of Wong Tom which influenced them; but in any case they were quick to grasp the possibilities which the situation offered. It would be vastly amusing to see those soft-living merchants groaning and bending under the burdens which the backs of many of them knew only too well, and a single jeering suggestion from one of the chair coolies who had wriggled to the rear of the crowd was enough to change the mood from one of protest to a ribald but effective approval. To the accompaniment of mocking laughter, jeers, and coarse jests, the merchants were unceremoniously and relentlessly pressed forward, and forced to assume the unaccustomed burden.

There was just the suggestion of a grim smile about Wong Tom's lips as he settled himself comfortably in the chair, and, under cover of the noisy merriment of the mob, which forgot for the moment its more important business in enjoying the discomfort and humiliation of its recent leaders, he spoke in English to his companions.

"Stand fast, and, whatever happens, keep close to this chair," he said hurriedly. "I can't explain, for I do not know what has happened, but there has been treachery, or these dogs would never dare to snap at those under my protection. Make no resistance unless I give you the word, but if that word is spoken it will be a fight to the death, and it will be a mercy to you if you die fighting. I have won the first skirmish, but the real test will come within the walls. You can best aid me to protect you by remaining absolutely passive."

There was no time for questioning or suggestion, for the chair had reached the gateway, and on the shoulders of its unskillful bearers it rocked perilously above the heads of those who crowded and jostled about it in the narrow passage through the massive wall.

Once within the city, Wong Tom half raised himself in the swaying chair, and as he settled back into the seat he shot a warning glance at Winton, who had already guessed the cause of his uneasiness. Like all Chinese cities, Shen Fun was a network of narrow, twisting lanes between high buildings, and filthy beyond anything conceivable to Western imagination. But leading from the main gateway in the outer wall was one exceptionally wide thoroughfare of perhaps a quarter of a mile in length—the celebrated "Path of the Million Beatitudes," which had been planned to permit unobstructed passage to the Sacred Precincts for the great spring and autumn pilgrimages to the holy shrines.

But now that broad street, through which the Chinaman had planned to convey his companions quickly to the safety of the Sanctuary, was blocked from end to end and side to side by a solid mass of humanity. There was no hostile demonstration, but no barricade bristling with cannon could more effectually have barred passage than did that silent mass of immovable human beings. Wong Tom was quick to read the significance of the blockade, and sharply commanded his amateur bearers to turn to the right.

And then began a progress which, in reality, was worse than any of the nightmares which for years had made Macpherson and Winton look forward with dread to the coming of darkness, for clinging to the chair the three adventurers were crowded with it into the opening of one of the filthy, malodorous alleyways.

There was no thought of resistance in the minds of the trio who clung desperately to the bamboo carrying poles. They were so tightly packed in with the screaming, jabbering natives that they could not have struck a blow if

they would, and they dared not loosen their holds on the poles for fear of being trampled into the filthy mud.

In such madness there was no measuring of time, for every minute seemed an eternity; but while the advance was slow it was always an advance, for the pressure from behind permitted of no halting. And, bad as had been the progress, the ending of it promised no relief, for there could be no mistaking the peculiar uses to which the open space in which the narrow slum terminated was devoted. It was the execution ground of the city.

At the eastern boundary of the square the city wall rose sheer and unpierced by openings, and spread-eagled on its gray face were more than a score of human bodies, blackened and mummified by long exposure to the weather, but sufficiently preserved by skillful embalming to retain the unmistakable characteristics of Caucasian origin.

Macpherson's face grew white, and he would have attacked the yellow men had not Winton and Sternberg gripped his arms.

"Stand fast, you fool!" exclaimed Winton harshly. "This is no time to think of exacting vengeance for the past. Look, and you will see for yourself that we have troubles enough in the present." As he spoke, he wheeled him sharply around to face a far corner of the square, from which a chorus of mocking cries and derisive cheers announced the coming of fresh food for the merriment of the crowd.

It was a curious figure which was being impelled toward them by a noisy gang of urchins—a man bent double by the weight of a great *kang* fashioned from thick planks of teakwood. It was at least five feet square, and only the bearer's head, which protruded through the hole in the center of it, was visible, for its lower edge barely missed the filthy stone pavement of the square, and, like a curtain, concealed the motive power of the cumbersome frame. He managed the unwieldy ambulatory pillory with an ease and dexterity which told of long confinement

in its inexorable embrace, however, and dodging the blows and missiles aimed at his defenseless, shaven pate by the cruel escort of ragamuffins from the slums, he crossed the intervening space with incredible speed, and came to a halt with the edge of the heavy *kang* resting on the ground in front of the chair on which Wong Tom still sat enthroned.

There was abject terror in the eyes which were raised to Wong Tom's face, and almost instantly the cries of the mob hushed to silence as the ranks strained forward, listening greedily for a sentence to some new form of torture for the poor wretch. But the Chinaman remained silent, and furtively those eyes wandered to the faces of the men gathered about his chair. On Sternberg, who was gazing at him as a man hypnotized, they rested but an instant; on Winton little longer; but when they met those of Macpherson, and read in them the recognition which was struggling with horror, a hoarse, inarticulate cry came from his lips, and he started forward so violently that the heavy *kang* would have dragged him to the ground had not Macpherson jumped toward him and steadied it.

"Jenkinson, by all that's holy! And he has lived in that devil's collar for fifteen years!" exclaimed Winton, as he, too, started forward; but Sternberg grasped his arm with one hand, and with the other pointed at the two faces which were now close together, with the black surface of the *kang* as a background.

"Great Heaven, man, don't you see the likeness?" he gasped. "Jenkinson and a half-caste it may be, but so Macpherson's face would look had he endured a half as much."

Winton stared incredulously, but there was no denying the evidence of his eyes. Jenkinson, the "fence" of Hongkong, had been a gross, fat half-caste, the native blood far more in evidence than that of the unknown Caucasian who had fathered him. But years of suffering and privation had fined down the coarseness of the Oriental inheritance, and there was no mis-

taking the startling likeness of his face to that of the man who fifteen years before had been associated with him in such a mysterious way, and had come with him to this very city of Shen Fun.

CHAPTER VIII.

As a man possessed of devils of rage and violence, Macpherson hammered and wrenched with his bare hands at the clumsy locks which fastened the hinged halves of the *kang* about the captive's neck, the half-caste meanwhile uttering strange, uncouth cries, which for all the meaning they conveyed might have been either encouragement or protest. Wong Tom, who had given no sign that he had noticed the likeness between Macpherson and the face which, like a hideous caricature, gibbered and mouthed the unintelligible screams and howls, watched the futile contest of muscle against iron with a grim smile on his lips, and answered Winton's glance of mute inquiry with a shrug of his shoulders.

There was little time for explanation, for the natives, as if fearing that even against such odds Macpherson might succeed in robbing them of the victim who for years had furnished them amusement in their idle moments, pressed forward menacingly.

Perhaps it was as well that neither Winton nor Sternberg understood the few shouted words with which Wong Tom halted abruptly that threatening advance—words which the mob greeted with shrill cries of approval, and which were taken up by those in the front ranks and shouted back until like an echo they were repeated from the narrow lanes packed with those who were unable to force entrance to the crowded square.

Wong Tom, inactive, but alert, sat quietly in his chair, listening to the repetition of his words, which seemed to grow into a chanting supplication or summons to some unseen power, and, watching Macpherson, who soon became convinced that his mad efforts were hopeless, and stood gazing at his torn and bleeding hands, that same fa-

miliar look of bewilderment upon his face.

It seemed an impossibility that anything save a battering-ram could win a passageway through the tightly packed mob which surrounded them, but appearances are traditionally deceitful, and a swaying of the dense throng, accompanied by cries of welcome in spite of the added discomfort, announced the coming of those for whom there had been such insistent clamor.

Slowly a narrow gangway opened from one of the streets at a far corner of the execution ground, and through it advanced a half dozen men, the leader such a giant in stature that his shoulders rose above the bobbing heads which struggled about him. Fierce yelps of approval marked their progress, but a profound silence fell over the throng as the gigantic figure reached the freedom of the open space about the chair, and, with every mark of respect, kotowed before Wong Tom. Behind him, his followers gathered as they succeeded in wriggling free from the crowd, and a more villainous aggregation of human brutes it would be impossible for even the slums of a Chinese city to breed.

There could be no mistaking their vocation. The great two-handed sword which hung at the leader's back, its polished hilt rising above his left shoulder, was of a pattern never designed for honorable combat, and the use of the scourges, thongs, and peculiar implements carried by his men was obvious.

For the first time, doubt of Wong Tom came to Winton's mind, and his hand dropped from the arm of the chair to a side pocket of his tunic. Without taking his eyes from the huge executioner, who was rising to his feet after his obeisance, the Chinaman leaned over, and placed his fingers on the American's shoulder.

"Patience, Winton!" he said quietly. "I have not played falsely. I have seen what you have seen, and I know that it is necessary to save that dog from the *kang*. Get hold of Macpherson, and make him understand, if you can; I

am fighting for minutes, and a second's rashness may ruin our chances." It was the feel of the man's fingers on his shoulder which reassured Winton more than his words, for there was no suggestion of fear in that firm, steady touch, and it was that rather than treachery of which he had been apprehensive.

Even as the Chinaman gave his orders to the executioner, he stepped forward and took a firm grasp of Macpherson's arm, aided by Sternberg, who pinioned him from the other side.

It was well that the consul had come to his assistance, for, roused from his strange bewilderment by a piercing shriek of terror from the half-caste, Macpherson struggled fiercely to break away and go to his assistance. The executioner had passed Wong Tom's quietly given instructions to his crew, and with quick obedience they had grasped the heavy *kang*, giving small heed to the cries of its miserable prisoner as they jerked it about in their efforts to unfasten the locks rusted by years of disuse. One by one they gave way and fell clattering on the stone pavement, and just as the two Americans succeeded in forcing Macpherson back beside Wong Tom's chair the two halves parted, and Jenkinson, free for the first time in many years from that cruel yoke of wood and iron, pitched forward on his face, and lay writhing at their feet.

A couple of the executioner's men darted forward to lay hold of him, but at a sharp command from Wong Tom they drew back; and Jenkinson, made hopeful when a minute had passed and his head still remained upon his shoulders, struggled awkwardly to his feet.

Naked save for a ragged breechcloth, he was a sufficiently grotesque figure as he swayed and staggered in a vain attempt to gain his balance. His great muscles, which had been developed and hardened by the burden of the *kang*, had learned to accommodate themselves automatically to its ever-shifting weight and balance, but now could not serve and coördinate in the sudden freedom. The half-caste could neither stand erect

nor, without the accustomed weight on his calloused neck and shoulders, maintain the stooping position to which he had been so long condemned. As helpless as an infant essaying its first steps, he lurched and swayed, falling heavily when he would advance, and rolling helplessly when he strove to rise without the support of the pillory for which he instinctively stretched out his great, muscular arms.

In that spectacle of helplessness the crowd for a time found such amusement that its desire for a bloodier demonstration was forgotten; but Wong Tom was not lulled to any sense of false security.

Leaning forward in his chair, he gave a sharp command to the bearers whose services he had impressed. The natives gazed at him wonderingly as his chair was again swung shoulder-high, but the executioner, who had stood expectantly, with his sword of office resting in the hollow of his arm, stepped forward, and motioned to his men to draw about him.

Even then the mob had no suspicion of his real purpose, and evidently believed that he was simply withdrawing to the Sanctuary, and leaving the intruders to be dealt with after the manner prescribed by immemorial tradition. But when at his low-voiced command Winton leaned over and steadied the incoördinate movements of the half-caste with a supporting hand, and Macpherson and Sternberg moved forward with the chair, a fierce howl of protest rose from the human wall which circled them, and the executioner, his face black with anger, placed himself menacingly in their path. His attendants, trained by long and constant practice to anticipate his wishes, and to act without spoken orders, jumped forward, and grabbed for the stooping shoulders of the half-caste; for their master, his feet planted wide apart, and his eyes fixed on that calloused neck, was making the sword whistle as its keen edge described great circles about his head.

The bearers, with cries of fear, halted abruptly; and, disregarding Wong Tom's protest, Macpherson and Stern-

berg jumped forward to Winton's assistance as he stood his ground against the threatening attack, a defiance which was obviously hopeless even with their backing. But as if the touch of Winton's hand had roused a long-forgotten memory of his inheritance of Caucasian blood, the Oriental fatalism which had enabled him to endure so long his cruel burden was banished from the half-caste's mind, and with that aroused memory seemed to come a new-found mastery of the great strength developed by management of the *kang*. For just a moment he had drawn his crouching body back as if in fear, but it was in reality a preparation for a spring which sent him forward like a human missile from a catapult, the impact of his calloused shoulders toppling over the headsman's jackals without in the least diminishing his speed.

Before the astonished executioner could strike, the shaven pate had taken him fairly in the chest, and the sword clattered to the pavement as he went down with the clutch of the sinewy hands at his throat, his protruding eyes staring for the last time at the evidences of his bloody handiwork, which seemed to mock at him from the scaffolding above.

The very inability to stand erect which had made the half-caste an object for their ridicule when he had first been released from the *kang*, now operated to make him a dangerous antagonist from the very novelty of his method of attack; for, maddened by his first taste of vengeance for all these years of suffering and humiliation, his one desire was to maim and kill. Grasping in one hand the hilt of the headsman's sword, he steadied himself with the tips of the fingers of the other on the pavement, and as he plunged forward the great blade swung in threatening semicircles.

Probably never in the history of human combats had there been such an attack, and certainly nothing in the experience of the Shen Fun mob had taught an effective parry for it. Had he stood erect, there would have been opportunity to rush in and bear him

down after the first stroke; but more like an ape than a man, he came at them in great leaps.

With the death of the executioner, Wong Tom realized that any hope of the efficacy of moral suasion had vanished, and even before the half-caste had started his mad attack he had given the long-delayed command to his companions to fight. Without the slightest compunction, Winton had shot the only two of the executioner's men who had not been disabled in Jenkinson's charge, and Macpherson and Sternberg were discouraging attack from the rear by careful shooting, while the Chinaman, with an automatic pistol, which he had drawn from his voluminous sleeve, held his terrified bearers to the faithful performance of their unwelcome task.

Onward into the crowd the half-caste plunged with his apelike leaps, the heavy weapon in his powerful grasp shearing through flesh and bone and mowing a broad path to the very edge of the square.

Panting, and with his bronzed skin glistening with sweat, the half-caste paused after gaining the entrance of the street through which Wong Tom hoped to gain the Sanctuary, balancing himself with the point of the bloodstained sword resting on the pavement. The portion of the square through which he had literally mowed his way was deserted by all save the wounded and dead, and in front of him the narrow street was emptied of all human occupants.

"Bravely fought, Jenkinson! You have saved the day!" exclaimed Winton, as he placed his hand on the calloused shoulder which reached almost to his waist. "Never mind the others; our friends can hold them off when they get to this narrow lane. You must know every twist and turn in this hole of a city, and you can best serve us by showing us the shortest cut to the Sanctuary." The half-caste looked up at him, and with foam-flecked lips mumbled an inarticulate reply; but he made no move to obey.

"Oh, of course—you have forgotten

your English—and small wonder!” exclaimed Winton; and then, in the Cantonese dialect, he repeated his request. Still the half-caste remained immovable, but again he essayed to make verbal answer, and Winton, who had leaned forward to catch his words, drew back, his eyes distended with horror.

“The devils! The cruel devils!” he exclaimed pityingly, for in the distorted syllables which came from the half-caste’s mouth he had recognized an attempt at English; but they were almost unintelligible for lack of a tongue to form them. He remembered Wong Tom’s statement, which when it was made had puzzled him, that Jenkinson lived, but would never tell of what he knew; and had only his own safety been concerned he would have remained passive when he saw the half-caste’s hand tighten on the sword hilt as the chair drew near.

“Wait, Jenkinson! This is no time to think of private vengeance,” he warned. “There is serious business before us—the rescue of Macpherson’s wife, who is a prisoner in the Sacred Precincts. You must be patient, and aid us, for without Wong Tom we can never gain admittance.”

A curious gleam came to Jenkinson’s eyes as he listened. No possible combination of letters could give adequate idea of the sounds which came from that mutilated mouth; but, with wits and ears sharpened by danger, Winton managed to get an inkling of his meaning—that even with Wong Tom’s help entrance to the Sanctuary would be impossible, for every gate had been seized by newly arrived imperial troops. And then, as clearly and distinctly as if his tongue had not been torn out, he ended with a single terse statement, his voice so loud that it carried even above the clamor of the crowd to Wong Tom’s ears:

“Tsi-Ann knows all!”

Little as that shrill announcement conveyed to the foreigners, the visible effect upon Wong Tom was greater than had been produced by the inexplicable and threatening revolt of the

Shen Funesse. He started violently, and barely waiting until the clumsy chairmen had obeyed his quick command to lower, he jumped from his seat, and hurried to the crouching half-caste.

“Is that true?” he demanded sternly. For just a moment Jenkinson cringed, but the fear bred by years of habit quickly vanished, perhaps because he read a greater terror behind the Chinaman’s eyes, and, more erect than he had stood since his neck had known the crushing burden of the *kang*, he faced him defiantly. The harsh sound which came from his throat needed no interpretation, for the hatred and exultation in his eyes confirmed Wong Tom’s worst fears, and the Chinaman’s sallow face went ghastly white.

“Gentlemen, we have but one chance,” he gasped. “We must reach the Sanctuary if we have to tear our way through Shen Fun with our bare hands to get there! If the dowager’s troops arrive ahead of us——”

“They are already there, Wong Tom,” interrupted Winton, alarmed by an increase of the hostile cries from the square which told of a gathering of fresh courage by the mob. “Jenkinson has told me that they hold the gates; but still we had better try to reach them. I’d rather take chances with the soldiers than with the mob, and we can’t stay here.”

“Right you are, Uncle Charley!” agreed Sternberg, who had remained by the deserted chair, using its back to steady his aim as he fired at the threatening semicircle. “The brutes are getting their second wind, and preparing for a rush.”

The Chinaman stood hopelessly irresolute, but after one glance up the narrow street Winton grasped him by the arm, and shouted for the others to follow as he dragged him along.

At length, recovering from their stupefaction, the mob raced swiftly through the narrow thoroughfare, and searched eagerly every kennel and malodorous lane which led from it; but they could find no trace of the man who for fifteen years had been their butt for their cruel jests, the hated

foreign devils whom they had planned to kill with many lingering tortures, and the bonze who had so treacherously planned to destroy their means of livelihood by a foul desecration of the sacred shrines.

Dusk was already gathering, but great torches of resinous wood were hastily procured, and until far into the night the search continued; but as completely as if the earth had opened and swallowed them their victims had disappeared, and only a score of dead men on the filthy pavement of the execution square were left as evidence of their visit.

CHAPTER IX.

In the precipitate flight the leadership which had tacitly been accorded to Wong Tom since they left the house boat was lost, for, less active than the foreigners, he became almost a dead weight in Winton's grasp—a handicap which, as the event proved, was fortunate, as it disturbed the American's ordinarily accurate aim. Shooting as he ran, Winton had emptied the chamber of one revolver at a single figure which apparently threatened to block their escape before he recognized that the excited gestures were meant as an incentive to their own speed, and that the supposed foeman was in reality the boy who had so mysteriously disappeared from the bungalow in Chee Nung on the night of that last fateful conference.

For just a moment Dick looked suspiciously at the grotesque figure of the half-caste, but the howls of the Chinese forbade dallying for investigation, and, calling to them to follow, he darted around the turn, the fugitives close on his heels. Fortunately the lane on which they had entered was devoted to godowns, those solid warehouses which the Chinese merchants use to protect their most valuable goods from fire and theft, and not a window pierced the massive walls of masonry which bordered it.

Here and there a small postern closed by iron-bound and bolt-studded doors

of heavy teak gave access to the magazines within, and it was one of these which opened to the pressure of the boy's shoulder, revealing a narrow, stone-vaulted passage leading to a small interior courtyard. Dick closed the door as the half-caste leaped through the passageway behind the others, and noiselessly shot the great bolts which secured it as the leaders of the pursuing pack swept past with shrill cries of rage and hatred.

A moment later he joined the panting fugitives, who stood together in the courtyard, a small space littered with bales of merchandise which was gratefully quiet and peaceful after the riot from which they had emerged. But there was gruesome evidence that violence had penetrated even here on that mad day, for the walls were flecked with blood, and stretched on the stone pavement lay the body of a Chinaman clothed more richly than the coolies of the mob.

"Dick, has he told the truth? Your mother lives—you have seen her?" panted Macpherson eagerly, as the boy joined them. Dick nodded gravely, and even in his anxiety Sternberg noted that there was a subtle change in his face—a softening of that Oriental cynicism which had given to it such a look of premature age.

"Yes, dad, I have been with her for nearly a week in the Sacred Precincts," he answered. "She is well, and she was perfectly safe when I left her at day-break this morning." A hundred questions struggled for precedence on Macpherson's tongue, but Winton checked them with a hand laid gently on his shoulder.

"Wait, Macpherson!" he said quietly. "That we know that Jose—Lady Lochineal is safe must satisfy you for the present." Wong Tom, who had regained enough of his breath to gasp a question, came forward also, but Winton unceremoniously silenced him with a gesture.

"Where are we, Dick?" he asked. "Time is precious; tell us what it is important for us to know."

"You—we—all of us are in the deuce

of a mess, Mr. Winton," answered Dick. "After I left you in Chee Nung everything went smoothly and exactly as Wong Tom had planned until this morning. I traveled much faster than you did, and reached Shen Fun six days ago, finding the city as quiet and orderly as I had ever known it to be during the years that I lived here. I had never before been admitted to the Sacred Precincts, and even now I have seen no more of it than the walled garden which surrounds my mother's house, but absolute peace and quiet reigned there until last night, when the bonzes suddenly commenced to buzz about like swarming bees. Wong Tom, at day-break this morning Cen Yung, the bonze whom you have always warned me to mistrust, came to my mother's house, and demanded to see me. He told me to reach you and warn you that Tsi-Ann had defied your authority, and sent her favorite eunuch, Lat Kee, with orders to take your head to Peking. Several banners of the Imperial Guard escorted him, and they have seized all of the gates of the Sacred Precincts."

"And this place—it is secure?" demanded Winton. "We are safe here until we can plan some means of rescuing your mother and escaping from the city?" The boy shrugged his shoulders as he looked about the court.

"You know as much about that as I do," he replied. "I never saw it until an hour ago, but from the placard on the door I imagine that it belongs to the silk merchants' tong. When the mob crowded you away from the Path of the Million Beatitudes I guessed your destination, and I knew that if you escaped from the execution ground Wong Tom would endeavor to reach the Sacred Precincts through this lane, so I waited here for you.

"I can only guess what happened before I stumbled in here, but I imagine that thieves took advantage of the excitement in the city to attempt robbery when Sing Fen"—he pointed at the body—"came to select goods from his warehouse. I noticed the door swinging open, and entered, for I knew that you would escape from the mob only

to fall into the hands of the soldiers unless you could find a hiding place. The hatchet men had already killed Sing Fen when I entered, and they were busy finishing their work with his porters in his warehouse. They are in there yet; they had foolishly left no one on guard, and I slammed and locked the door before they discovered me."

"But we must be out of here before midnight," exclaimed Wong Tom. "My only chance lies in getting inside the Sacred Precincts before daylight. In an hour I can have the mob with me instead of against me if——"

"Wong Tom, you just restrain your enthusiasm, and remember that you've been reduced to the ranks," interrupted Sternberg impatiently. "I reckon we've had about all of the demonstration of your ability to handle that mob that we are liable to get. Uncle Charley, you know more about this business than you have ever let on, and I guess it's up to you to boss the job from now on."

"It's certainly up to me to get information," agreed Winton, as he turned, grim of face, on the Chinaman. "See here, Wong Tom, we have played the game according to Hoyle, but you haven't been able to make good. I'll admit that it wasn't your fault, but that does not make your failure any less disastrous for us. Now I'm going to ask you a few questions, and I want straight, plain answers. We have only had so much of your story as you chose to tell us. Now you will be good enough to fill in the gaps, and tell us the parts you omitted; just what Macpherson did fifteen years ago, and just what you expected him to do if we reached the Sacred Precincts."

Wong Tom looked at him defiantly. "And if I refuse?" he demanded.

"Then it will be a toss-up as to whether we turn Jenkinson loose on you or shut you up in that vault with the choice assortment of your fellow citizens that Dick trapped," answered Winton grimly. "See here, Wong Tom—I am not blaming you for what has happened, and I'm pretty sure that you

can give a reasonable explanation. I should advise you to try."

"I can—to a reasonable man who knows as much of China as you do," answered Wong Tom, after a short deliberation, during which his eyes had searched furtively the faces of his companions. "Mr. Winton, you know that this great, loose-jointed country is held together as an empire solely by a common religion—that, in fact, religion and government are synonymous. Tsi-Ann rules, nominally as the emperor's regent, only so long as the priests give her writ authority outside of the pink walls of the Forbidden City. The man who rules the priesthood rules China, for without him Tsi-Ann's authority would extend only so far as her wretched army could enforce it, and at a word from the bonzes that army would melt away like snow before the monsoon.

"The chief bonze of all China has for many hundreds of years been the Custodian of the Seal of Confucius. That piece of jade, engraved with the three intertwined circles, is of less intrinsic value than the golden signet which you wear on your finger; but it is venerated by every Chinaman, from the meanest to the highest, as the holiest relic of the great teacher. For centuries the Chinese rulers have acknowledged the power of its custodian, who is the spiritual head of the empire, and more than once in our history he has used that power to change the temporal rulers, and even dynasties. Fifteen years ago the arrogance of Tsi-Ann threatened China with destruction. The reason for it all is a matter of palace history, of intrigues and plotting within the Forbidden City which would not interest you; but even the foreigners resident in the country were aware of the wide unrest and disorder throughout the empire."

"Yes, I remember that there was grave trouble then, that all of the southern provinces were threatening revolt," assented Winton.

"And you could have read only the surface signs; the hidden part was even greater; until such a crisis existed

that I, the Custodian of the Seal, removed the sacred relic from its shrine in the Sacred Precincts, and journeyed with it to Peking to demand the abdication of the dowager from the Dragon Throne," continued Wong Tom bitterly. "And then I was weak enough to listen to Tsi-Ann's protestations and promises, and to defer action, only to learn what I had come there believing—that the woman is a devil, and served by devils. Her expressions of gratitude knew no bounds, and when we departed she heaped honors and riches upon us; but we were not more than three hours' march from the walls of Peking when our party was set upon and practically annihilated by her mercenaries. I alone escaped, for even those butchers venerated the sacred relic which they had come to steal for her, that, possessing it, she might defy the authority of the bonzes.

"I knew that Tsi-Ann would use every artifice to intercept my return to Shen Fun, for she must realize that once safe within its walls I would issue the proclamations bearing the Seal of Confucius which would consign her to the oblivion which she had so richly deserved. I knew that my only chance was in secret flight, but Tsi-Ann shrewdly guessed the route I would follow, practically the only one which was open to me.

"Mr. Winton, you knew the Hongkong of fifteen years ago, and you will remember the position which Jenkinson occupied. He was a half-caste, despised by both of the races which had contributed to his being, an outcast from the whites, and tolerated by the vilest of the Chinese only because he was a ready tool in their rascality.

"But in just such a creature Tsi-Ann found the weapon she needed to do her devil's work—a mongrel who would have none of the reverence which would make the vilest Chinaman shrink back at the last minute from a sacrilege which would invoke the curses of the gods on his ancestors. An outcast held in such contempt by the foreigners that he could gain neither attention nor credence if he tried to turn his theft to his

own greater advantage by betraying his employers. Gold meant everything to him, but little to the woman with the revenues of China in her grasp, and he was liberally supplied with it to enable him to recruit the gang of river pirates whom he would need to seize the steamer on which I traveled, for Tsi-Ann had ordered that no innocent witness to the theft and my murder should be left alive to tell tales.

"And now, gentlemen, comes the part which puzzled me for many years, and for which I have only guessed the real reason since Jenkinson and Mr. Macpherson faced each other in the execution place to-day. I knew that it was impossible for the vile little half-caste to employ men suitable for his purpose who would follow his leadership even among the desperadoes and pirates of the Yangtze Kiang. They would recognize his captaincy only so long as they pleased; it takes a man to rule them—a man whom they fear even if they do not respect him. Such a man Jenkinson discovered in Richard Macpherson, then a young fellow of slender means and an adventurous disposition at loose ends in Hongkong, although I do not know how the half-caste managed to meet him and gain such a sinister influence over him.

"Do not misunderstand me, gentlemen; I am positive that Mr. Macpherson is morally as innocent of what he did under that malign control as either one of you Americans. He was outside of his normal self—bewitched, entranced, hypnotized—call it what you will; but assuredly he was not Richard Macpherson, Marquis of Lochineal, whom we all know. But, Mr. Winton, you guessed at Chee Nung, and from my own knowledge I can bear witness that your guess was correct, that it was Richard Macpherson who led the pirates who looted the *Avondale*. You know how it happened; the pirates whom Jenkinson had enlisted engaged passage at Hongkong, in the steerage, of course; but Macpherson and his alleged servant, Jenkinson, were first-cabin passengers. Fortunately for me, I had assumed a humble disguise, and

was herded in with the steerage passengers. Jenkinson had marked down a bonze who happened to be traveling on his own affairs in the first cabin as the Custodian of the Seal, and while he was searching his body I escaped in the confusion, dropping overboard, and swimming ashore with the sacred relic hanging from a chain about my neck.

"And so the second attempt ended in failure; but, while Jenkinson had missed the great prize at which he aimed, his followers had garnered a rich loot, and when, a few days later, he again called upon them they responded eagerly. There had been no arrests, for I was the only one of the innocent passengers or crew who escaped, and for obvious reasons I remained in hiding. It took many days for me to reach Canton, and in the meantime Jenkinson had returned to Hongkong and received fresh instructions. Then, under Macpherson's mad leadership, followed that furious attack upon the Shen Fun caravan with which I was traveling—an attack which, despite the disparity of numbers, would have been successful except for the accidental arrival of the viceroy's guard.

"There was, however, no further interference with my journey, and three weeks later I entered Shen Fun, and at last felt secure from molestation, for even Tsi-Ann would never dare to attempt to seize the sacred talisman from its shrine—a sacrilege which would inevitably raise every hand in China against her. But, gentlemen, what even the all-powerful dowager would not dare to think of this miserable half-caste and his dupe, Richard Macpherson, planned and accomplished.

"Accompanied by a half dozen of their most desperate followers, they entered Shen Fun disguised as pilgrims to the holy shrines. They arrived a day earlier than I did, and spied out the lay of the land. And then, when, lulled to a sense of false security, I slept the sleep of exhaustion after my terrible experiences, they entered the Sacred Precincts during the watches of the night, and stole from its shrine the most sacred relic in this great empire!"

CHAPTER X.

Macpherson had so far listened in silence to the story, which was such a terrible arraignment of his past; but with that last dramatic impeachment the limit of his patience was reached, and he advanced threateningly. Both Winton and Sternberg had been watchful for such a move, and they were quick to intercept him.

"This is no time for protest nor exculpation, Macpherson," said Winton sternly. "It is an unpleasant business, but we must sift it thoroughly. If this man tells a single lie, you will have my full permission to do what you please with him, but it is absolutely essential that we know what we shall have to face. Go on, Wong Tom." For just an instant Macpherson's resentment threatened revolt against Winton's assumption of authority, but Dick, too, came forward, and laid a protesting hand upon his arm. Scowling and flushed of face, he stepped back, and Wong Tom picked up the broken thread of his narrative.

"There can be little more that you have not already guessed," he continued. "There was no concealing the fact that vandals had entered the Sacred Precincts, for the seal was not the only thing missing. I do not believe that the two leaders had given a thought to anything else, but their followers were greedy for plunder, and they forced the most valuable of the treasure chests, and loaded themselves with its contents. That robbery, when we raised the alarm, was the only announcement which we made public, for the far greater loss was known only to myself and a dozen of the bonzes whom I knew that I could trust implicitly.

"The alarm was given within six hours after the robbery was committed, and from my previous experience I was able to make a shrewd guess at the identity of the robbers, and to furnish a description of the leaders. Within the week every one of the vandals but Macpherson had been run down and brought back to Shen Fun. The rising at Lang Tun was one of those

peculiar coincidences which could not have been anticipated, and the results for a time threw us off the track of the only fugitive who remained at liberty.

"Gentlemen, you have seen enough of Shen Fun and its people to-day to be able to judge how the native vandals were dealt with. I have no apologies to offer for my own part in delivering them to the tender mercies of the citizens of the secular city; they had entered into the game with their eyes open, fully realizing the penalties which they would incur if they lost—and they paid them in full. In cold blood they had murdered the two bonzes who watched the holy shrine, and that crime alone merited the most severe punishments decreed by the Chinese law. Jenkinson's life was spared, not from pity, nor because he was less deserving of the death which the others suffered, but because I firmly believed that in some way, sooner or later, he would be of use to us in recovering the holy relic.

"After he was brought to Shen Fun he told us all he knew—there was no resisting the measures which were adopted to make him speak, the details of which I will leave to your imagination. The plan of escape had been carefully mapped out in advance; they had separated after leaving the city, and it was agreed that Macpherson should go to Lang Tun to claim his wife, and meet Jenkinson later at a point about halfway between Shen Fun and the coast. It was Jenkinson who had taken the sacred relic and carried it from the city; but, perhaps because of the Chinese blood which he had inherited from his mother, its possession terrified him, and although an infant might have held it in its palm it seemed a weight which he could not carry. Just before they separated, he delivered it to Macpherson, and with Macpherson it went to Lang Tun.

"Mr. Winton, it was Macpherson's wife, Lady Lochineal, who was brought—a prisoner—to Shen Fun after the attack on the mission. When I demanded her from the hands of her captors I was ignorant of her identity, but I knew that such outbreaks were futile,

and bound to be followed by terrible reprisals. I shall be perfectly frank with you; I rescued her because I feared that if she were left in the hands of the mob Tsi-Ann might use that as a pretext, and permit the foreign soldiers to sack the Sanctuary. Fanaticism had run mad in the city, and after I had rescued her I knew that there was but one safe refuge for her; so she was taken to the Sacred Precincts. There I questioned her, and when I learned that she was Macpherson's wife and soon to bear him a child, I realized that I had secured a valuable hostage if by any chance he had escaped death in the attack on the mission. I left her in safe hands when I hurried to Lang Tun, promising that I would do everything in my power to find her husband and the friend who had come to Lang Tun to serve her." He paused, and looked inquiringly from Macpherson to Winton.

"Go on," said the American curtly. "I have reason to remember your coming to Lang Tun. What then?"

"Then, after my gruesome task was finished, I returned disconsolate to Shen Fun," continued the Chinaman. "The ruins of the settlement and mission had been minutely searched for the missing treasure. Unsuccessfully, of course. When the rumors of Macpherson's curious escape reached us, every one of his footsteps from Lang Tun to the great Tibetan desert, where he disappeared, was traced and followed. The individual was lost, but so long as we had no positive proof of his death we continued the tireless search for him, and you already know how we succeeded in the end.

"A son had been born to him in Shen Fun, and you have been told of the manner in which he was sent to his father. In negotiating with the Marquis of Lochineal we necessarily observed the greatest caution. We dared not admit that a foreign woman was held a prisoner in China, and I could not let the legation staff know the truth of our loss. I believed that Macpherson would quickly guess the whole truth and offer to return the relic, which was

absolutely valueless to him, as the price of his wife's freedom, and that proposition I should have received in person:

"After months of study, the truth slowly dawned upon me, for a streak of mystery strange to find in the Occident was in his heredity. I was convinced that he was honest in his denials; he was absolutely ignorant of what he had done. He had acted as an automaton, controlled by the will of another. I found means to watch and study him, sleeping and waking. I even attempted to exercise certain powers which I have acquired. I learned this much—that the sacred relic was no longer in his immediate possession. He had carried it from Shen Fun to the settlement of Lang Tun, all the way unconscious of his movements; but from the moment of his awakening in the club all memory of it was gone. When he returned to his normal self it meant nothing to him, and he may have tossed it aside as a valueless thing.

"When I became convinced of that, I realized that the only hope of regaining the holy relic through his assistance lay in bringing him back to the scene of his subconscious crimes, if we may call them so. Briefly, my plan was this—to bring Macpherson to the Sanctuary which he and his companions had desecrated, to the place where the surroundings would fairly cry out for recognition from that long-dormant subconsciousness. I trusted that in the original environment I could induce just such a trance as had controlled him fifteen years ago, and that, step by step, he would repeat the progress of his flight under our watchful eyes, and lead us to the spot where he had parted from the sacred relic.

"For fifteen years I have lived under a cloud of apprehension. The secret of our loss has been carefully guarded; the sacred shrine is as reverently attended as it has been every day for centuries, and only to its actual guardians is it known that the reverence is a hollow mockery. I know that Tsi-Ann has been suspicious that all was not right, for on no other supposition

could she account for my forbearance in delaying the exaction of vengeance. She may even have guessed the truth, but for fifteen years I have prevented her from making that guess a certainty. And now, on the very eve of my success, some one within our ranks has betrayed us; in no other way could she have gained such positive assurance that she would dare to send her troops here with the demand for my head. I suspect Cen Yung, a bonze who has long plotted against me; but it is not yet too late to checkmate——”

A harsh, mirthless chuckle, indescribably horrible, interrupted him, and when they turned to where the half-caste crouched on the pavement they saw his great shoulders shaking, and the scarred face distorted in a hideous grin. Inarticulate sounds came from the dry, cracked lips; but Winton, quickly suspicious of the truth, bent over him, and listened attentively to his mumbling. In the gathering dusk, the others watched curiously, and when Winton straightened up they pressed eagerly about him; but, disregarding the questioning of Macpherson and Sternberg, he placed himself between Wong Tom and the half-caste, drawing a revolver from beneath his tunic before he spoke.

“Wong Tom, there need be no further mystery concerning the source of Tsi-Ann’s information,” he said gravely. “We have a saying which you would have done well to remember fifteen years ago—that ‘Dead men tell no tales!’ Tearing out this poor wretch’s tongue was ineffectual in insuring his silence, for in a few years he learned to express himself without it. He concealed that faculty, biding patiently his time until a chance should come to employ it to his own advantage. Three months since his opportunity came, for the agent of the dowager who had enlisted his services in Hongkong visited Shen Fun as a pilgrim, and beside the Path of the Million Beatitudes the beggar in the *kang* told him your secret. Within a month it was repeated to Tsi-Ann in the Forbidden City, and—— Stand back!”

Winton’s pistol was pointed steadily in his face, and even in his rage and desperation Wong Tom read certain death in the eyes which looked over it, and halted, mumbling curses with trembling lips as the pistol slipped from his relaxed fingers and fell to the pavement.

“We may as well understand each other right now, Wong Tom,” said Winton. “You and Jenkinson can settle your private differences later. We have scrupulously performed our part of the contract, but it is evident that you are unable to carry out yours. Your struggle with Tsi-Ann is of no interest to us, and you can no longer use us as your tools in your intrigue. Our sole object is to rescue Lady Lochineal from her long captivity, and escape with her to one of the foreign settlements, and we can no longer recognize as a leader a man who has an entirely different ax to grind. I think that you fellows will agree with me in that?” He turned as he finished speaking; but, instead of the ready assent which he expected, Sternberg laid a warning hand upon his arm.

“By Heaven, Uncle Charley, look there!” he whispered. Winton wheeled about, to find Macpherson leaning over the crouching half-caste, whose eyes were fixed steadily on his; but it was not the Macpherson he had ever known. There was none of that curious bewilderment which he had seen so often, and the grim mask of imperturbability acquired by fifteen years of stern effort to conceal suffering was gone. But every evil passion which man can inherit or acquire stood revealed in that curiously transformed face, and Winton involuntarily recoiled from him as he would have shrunk away from contact with a leper. It was only for a moment, however, for in spite of the instinctive repulsion he knew that he was unjust—that Macpherson was as helpless as an infant, and that even as he had done fifteen years before this outcast of the Hongkong slums was exercising some diabolical power which they could not understand to make the other for the time his abject slave.

With a cry of protest, he sprang forward, determined to break that horrible spell, even if he had to kill the loathsome creature who was casting it; but Dick's strong young arms suddenly clasped him, and held him back.

"Wait, Mr. Winton!" he gasped, his face ghastly white, and his eyes dilated with horror. "It is terrible—worse for me than for you—but we must not interfere. Hosts of devils are loose in China to-night, and one more or less can't matter. No sanity can save us; our only chance is to lead the madness of this mad city. Even now the Chinese soldiers may be entering the Sacred Precincts, and it is only by a desperate effort that we can hope to rescue my mother."

Winton raised his hands, and gently unloosed the arms which clasped him. "You are right, Dick," he admitted. "That's an old head on your young shoulders." Macpherson had apparently been oblivious to the argument which had been carried on within a yard of him, and at a sign from Jenkinson he straightened up, and, disregarding his companions, circled about the courtyard as if seeking a means of escape from it, examining carefully each of the closed doors, and then stopping to listen intently at the one through which they had entered from the lane. Winton, in response to a gesture from the half-caste, again bent his head to listen to his mumbling, exercising no small measure of self-restraint in conquering his loathing and disgust.

"He bears you out, Dick," he said, as he straightened up. "He claims that he is now using for good the strange power which he once employed for evil—that only through the leadership of the madness which he has induced in your father can we hope to succeed. Sternberg, are you willing to follow?"

The consul nodded. "You couldn't hold me back—even if there were any choice," he answered, as he carefully reloaded the chamber of his revolver. "I can't see that the situation is bristling with opportunities to get out of this mess, and that looks like the one best bet to me."

Winton smiled grimly as he turned to the Chinaman. "And now, Wong Tom, what in the deuce are we to do with you?" he asked. "Will you pledge neutrality if we turn you loose?" Wong Tom smiled as he pointed to Macpherson, whose fingers were already clutching the great bolts which fastened the door; and Winton made no protest when he reached down and recovered the pistol which had fallen from his hand a few minutes before.

"I will give you a more solemn pledge than that, Mr. Winton," he answered. "Dick is right when he says that devils are loose in Shen Fun to-night; but here in this courtyard the gods have been fighting for me. Out of evil has come good, and Jenkinson has already accomplished as much as I could have hoped to do with Macpherson. I hope to profit by it, but if you will permit me to come with you I pledge you my word that I will not attempt to use his madness for my own purposes until you have no further need of it."

"Which may be interpreted as meaning until we are either safe or dead," said Winton; and Wong Tom nodded assent. For a moment they looked steadily in each other's eyes, and then the American held out his hand.

"I'll trust you, Wong Tom," he said quietly. "I owe you fifteen years of life."

CHAPTER XI.

Shen Fun was as medieval in its architecture as in its manners and customs, and save for the broad Path of the Million Beatitudes there was not one of its tortuous, twisting streets which was wide enough to permit of the passage of a cart. Even at midday those narrow cañons between the high buildings admitted sunlight only in occasional patches; and at night they were shrouded in Cimmerian darkness.

Those of its inhabitants whose business or pleasure called them out of doors after nightfall provided their own illumination with lanterns of gaudily painted silk or oiled paper, carried at the ends of long poles that the path

might be lighted while the bearer remained in the shadow—a precaution which was obviously wise in a place which afforded so many convenient lurking spots from which the predatory might spring.

In the lane of the godowns there was little traffic and less of human guardianship at night, for the Chinese depend upon the massive solidity of their windowless buildings and the strength of bolts and bars for the protection of their goods and chattels. Before darkness fell every foot of its surface had been gone over in the search for trace of the fugitives; but, concluding that they had escaped through one of the intersecting alleyways, and found refuge in another part of the city, the pursuit had passed on, and left it deserted.

Therefore the exit of that strangely assorted and more strangely led group from the godown which had afforded temporary security was made without discovery. Of plan, beyond the purpose to win their way to the Sacred Precincts, there was none; but, mad and desperate as such a confidence might have seemed if considered in cold blood and amid sane surroundings, they trusted implicitly and confidingly in the trance-controlled leadership of Macpherson to guide them there. And as for Macpherson's part, he seemed to assume as a matter of course that they would follow without question or instructions, and he never so much as glanced back after carefully withdrawing the massive bolts and opening the heavy door.

Then through that complicated maze which would have puzzled an Indian pathfinder in broad daylight he led them unerringly in such impenetrable darkness that his followers were forced to rely upon the sense of touch to keep together, never for an instant in all of the thousand and one twists and turns losing the sense of direction upon which alone he could depend.

Macpherson had more than justified their confidence in him as a leader, and it was not until he halted and they all crouched together in an angle of lane

from which they could distinguish against the sky the top of the ancient wall which surrounded the Sacred Precincts that there was even a suggestion of a conference.

Greatly to their relief, there was no hint of disorder beyond that barrier; the silence of night brooded over the great inclosure, but the glimmer of bivouac fires before the two gates which were within range of their vision told them that the Imperial Guard had established an effective blockade at the entrances.

Macpherson, however, had halted only to reconnoiter, and he gave no heed to the whispered consultation at his back as he peered cautiously from their hiding place, watching and counting the figures which crouched about the bivouac fires in a shrewd effort to estimate the relative strength of the two guard posts. A few minutes of watching convinced him that his estimate was correct, and for the first time since Jenkinson had exercised his strange power over him he spoke, addressing Wong Tom in the Cantonese dialect, in which he betrayed an unexpected fluency.

"If we clear the way to the gate, can you gain immediate entrance?" he demanded, in a whisper so clear that the question was audible to all of them. For a moment Wong Tom hesitated, and Macpherson raised a threatening hand as he repeated the question, fortified with such an oath as only a Yangtze Kiang pirate could have taught him, suggesting that he had ruled the rascally crew which followed him on his previous venture to the Sacred Precincts with a rough tongue and heavy hand. The Chinaman involuntarily shrank back, but he quickly mumbled an assurance that every door of the Sacred Precincts would open immediately to his summons.

"You can count upon being a subject for ancestral worship in short order if you are mistaken about this one," commented Macpherson grimly. "There is no use in wasting time in trying to sneak in; we could never make it without raising the alarm.

When I give the word, we will rush that picket to the east. The odds will be with us for a few minutes—long enough to dispose of the soldiers and gain entrance if we do not have to force the door. It will take a little time for the alarm to reach headquarters, and more for them to force entrance, so that we shall probably have a clear hour inside to attend to our affairs."

It was the counsel of desperation, but no one among them made protest, for certain death lay behind them, and their only chance, slender as it seemed, was to advance. Obviously Macpherson's judgment was right; the Chinese soldiers would be keenly on the alert to detect any furtive attempt at entrance, for the eunuch, Lat Kee, would realize the difficulty which would attend carrying out his imperial mistress' orders if Wong Tom once gained the shelter of the Sacred Precincts.

In the darkness the hands of Winton and Sternberg met and clasped for an instant, but both remained silent as they followed the crouching figure of the half-caste, who kept always close on the heels of Macpherson. Behind them came Dick, with the Chinaman clinging to him, for age had told on Wong Tom in those terrible hours; and while his crafty mind remained as clear and vigorous as ever his legs ached from the unaccustomed exercise, and he was faint from lack of nourishment.

Stealthily and silently they crept back to the shelter of the streets, for they could not hope to escape the observation of the sentries in the open space about the walls; but as unerringly as he had piloted them before, Macpherson led them through the maze until once again they were within sight of the Sacred Precincts; and this time exactly opposite one of the smaller gates, a mere postern in the ancient wall, before which the picket was stationed. About a dozen soldiers gathered about the fire, and of these a half dozen soon slouched off under the command of a corporal to relieve their fellows on post. Still using the Cantonese dialect, although he called them each by name, Macpherson whispered his

final instructions while he waited to allow the relief to reach the farthest post.

"Wong Tom, your part is to get that gate open, and to see that it is kept open until the last man of us is through," he said. "Dick, you will keep with him, and see that he carries out that order. As for the rest of us, I expect that we all know what to do. Kill any man who blocks the way or attempts to follow. Stick as close to me as you can, and remember that the man who goes down stays; there will be no time to tend to the wounded or bury the dead. Now, forward!"

So eagerly was that command obeyed that it was a straight line which emerged from the shadows and charged across the space of perhaps three hundred feet which separated them from the bivouac fire. Save for the noise of their feet on the pavement that charge was made in grim silence, for in their desperate venture there was none of the elan and enthusiasm which through the centuries has contributed so often to victory when only disaster seemed possible.

With an alacrity which testified to the painstaking instruction of their foreign teachers, the soldiers who were lounging about the fire sprang to arms as that slender charging line emerged from the shadows which had concealed it.

In the uncertain light of the bivouac fire, the number of the attackers seemed multiplied, and Jenkinson, who had been sufficiently terrifying in daylight, assumed grotesquely horrible proportions as he advanced with great, ape-like springs, which had carried him ahead of his companions. He had refused to accept the revolver which Sternberg had offered him, and still clung to the great sword which he had taken from the executioner.

One ragged and ineffective volley the guard fired before the cowardice inherited from countless generations overwhelmed the discipline acquired in a few months, and had Wong Tom's promise to gain immediate entrance been fulfilled the winning of the goal would have been a bloodless victory,

for after that volley the soldiers broke and ran, leaving an unobstructed passage to the postern.

But that gate, built with true Tartar solidity and massiveness, remained closed in spite of the summons which he gave softly, and then, as it passed unanswered, repeated in strident tones, accompanied by a furious tattoo with his fists. Against its strength they possessed no adequate means of attack, and the soldiers, who recovered from their panic when they realized how few in number were the men from whom they had fled, halted in their flight, and then, reënforced by the sentries and the relief, returned to attack them.

The crowded minutes which succeeded afforded ample demonstration of why the pirates of the Yangtze had so faithfully followed Macpherson's mad leadership, for he apparently possessed that charmed life with which the Chinese so readily credit any man who courts danger in combat—a charm which they believe he extends to his followers. Without so much as turning his head to see if his companions were supporting him, he threw himself at the advancing soldiers, and, single-handed, checked those coming from the east.

Jenkinson, snarling and screaming like a maddened beast, with even greater ferocity attacked those marching from the other side, and for the moment changed the advance to a retreat. Winton and Sternberg took a less active but perhaps as effective a part in the fighting to hold off the advance; for while the range of their revolvers was shorter than that of the soldiers' rifles, they fired with an accuracy of aim to which the Chinese are strangers, and with their bullets utterly demoralized the Celestial marksmanship. But fight they never so desperately, the struggle was manifestly a hopeless one, for the alarm had become general, and reënforcements were hurrying from the adjoining pickets; while, attracted by the firing and the bugle calls, the searching parties were rapidly approaching from the neighboring quarters of the secular city.

Fortune had so far favored them that as yet no one of them had received a wound, although about the gate in a wide semicircle many dead or disabled Chinamen lay huddled; but Winton knew that it could be only a matter of minutes before they were overwhelmed. Believing that Dick, because of his native costume and his thorough knowledge of the city, might stand a chance of escaping, he turned to urge him to make the attempt while there was yet time, trusting that in the confusion he might aid in the escape of the woman they had come to rescue.

But Wong Tom stood alone before the door, for with the agility of a cat the boy was clambering up the blank surface of the wall, and was already within a yard of the top. It was a feat which any but a boy reared in a Chinese city would have found impossible, but with Dick and his childish companions such climbing had been a daily sport, and fingers and prehensile toes seemed instinctively to find crevices and tiny projections which afforded sufficient support for their lithe bodies.

It was no childish game that the boy was playing now, however, for bullets were flattening on the wall about him, and once well started on his climb there was no returning, while every foot he gained added to the danger of a fall. And in spite of the great necessity for haste, he could advance only by inches, for every movement implied a nice readjustment of balance and gradual shifting of weight. But, slow as the progress was, he went steadily up, and at the very moment when the semicircle of soldiers seemed on the point of closing in his right hand shot up, and a couple of finger tips hooked over the edge of the cornice. For a period which seemed interminable his body swung, supported only by that precarious hold as the left hand crept slowly up the surface of the wall, and then, so quickly that the eye could not follow it, made a desperate clutch which gave it a firm purchase beside its fellow.

With one swing, the boy raised himself to the top of the wall, and a cry of relief came from Wong Tom's lips,

for he knew that on the inner side were climbing vines and bamboo trellises which would make the descent easy. But, as if in bravado, Dick jumped to his feet, and ran nimbly along the top of the wall until he was directly above the postern. And then, just as the infuriated soldiers fired a crashing volley, he threw up his hands, and plunged headlong from the high wall into the Sacred Precincts.

With that fall Winton's last hope vanished, for the soldiers had been largely reënforced, and, stimulated by the cries of the mob which had gathered behind them, they rushed forward. With the grim determination that never again would he fall alive into the hands of the Chinese, he turned to face them, jealously reserving for himself the pistol in his left hand as he emptied the chamber of the revolver in his right into the closely packed ranks of the advancing soldiers.

Again the three foreigners were shoulder to shoulder, backed to within a couple of yards of the postern, against which Wong Tom crouched, mumbling half-inarticulate supplications to the gods he had so long served, and who seemed to have forgotten him in his extremity.

Death—or worse—was imminent, and as if to let them taste to the full of its bitterness in anticipation the soldiers had halted about the victims whom they considered securely theirs. And then, just as Sternberg, with a parting curse, hurled his useless weapons at those hideous, grinning faces, and Winton was about to secure for himself the certainty of a quick and painless death, a cry of unutterable relief came from Wong Tom, and, hardly knowing how it happened, they found themselves in the Sacred Precincts, while a huge bonze slammed and bolted the heavy door which had so long defied them as the soldiers hurled themselves against it. When he was assured that it was securely fastened, he turned to the men who felt that they had been literally snatched from the very jaws of death, and made low obeisance to Wong Tom.

Immediately about the doorway a lantern cast a semicircle of light which revealed that even the Sacred Precincts had not escaped that violence which seemed to be universal within the walls of Shen Fun. Almost before the gate the body of a man clad in priestly vestments lay stretched face downward on the path, his outspread arms and legs twitching convulsively. A few feet farther on was another body—also that of a priest, with the burned spots which testified to recent sanctification upon his shaven head. At the very edge of the illumination was Dick, struggling with curiously bewildered movements to free himself from a tangle of broken shrubbery; and Sternberg ran to his assistance as Wong Tom rapidly questioned the bonze who had so providentially admitted them in a dialect which even Winton could not understand.

Macpherson and the half-caste were both so breathless and wearied by their recent exertions that the former half staggered to a lichen-covered bench of stone, while Jenkinson, still grasping his bloodstained and badly nicked weapon, stretched himself on the path at his feet, his great, calloused shoulders working curiously as he panted.

"It is what I feared," answered Wong Tom, when Winton impatiently interrupted the seemingly endless interrogation of the bonze with a sharp demand for information. "There has been an attempt at treachery among my own people. A guardian stood at every entrance, ready to open immediately at my summons; but this unfortunate neophyte paid for his attempt to be faithful with his life. He was about to withdraw the bolts when Cen Yung interfered, and, when he persisted, killed him with that sword. Cen Yung stood with his back against the door, threatening this other bonze with his weapon, when Dick reached the top of the wall. The bonze was unarmed and helpless to aid us against such opposition, but Dick dived from the top, and landed with such force on Cen Yung that I believe he broke his neck, and he himself rebounded, and landed in that clump of shrubbery."

Supported by Sternberg, Dick staggered forward to join them, and although his legs were still shaky he had sufficiently recovered his senses to confirm the Chinaman's statement, and to disclaim greater injury than a shaking up. On the other side of the wall there was still a great clamor of voices, and the sound of many marching feet; but the pounding on the door which had followed their entrance ceased abruptly as the high-pitched voices of officers rose above the shouting of the excited and demoralized soldiers.

"That door won't stand five minutes against a battering-ram," exclaimed Macpherson hoarsely, as he rose to his feet and stepped over the prostrate body of the half-caste. He still spoke in Cantonese, but a little of that old, familiar expression of bewilderment had softened the evil ferocity of his face. "We had better be about whatever there is for us to do." He paused, and looked curiously from one face to another as they stood revealed in the dim light from the lantern, and a hand blackened with powder smoke swept over his hardly less grimy forehead. "What is it, Winton? What in the deuce are we all here for? What's all this row about?" he continued brokenly, in English; but before the American could find words to answer, Wong Tom ran between them, and, grasping the shoulders of the prostrate half-caste, hissed in his ear a few words which had startling effect in restoring him to activity. The outstretched limbs gathered beneath the bent, muscular torso, and with one leap he was in front of Macpherson, as nearly erect as the effects of the long-borne burden of the *kang* would permit him to stand.

A peculiar, droning sound came from the cracked lips as he looked up at the bewildered face above him, his beady eyes fixed intently on those which turned to his with startling suddenness. And then, as if by black magic, the bewilderment and confusion vanished from Macpherson's mind, and his face was again eloquent of the evil passions which the half-caste's strange power had aroused within him.

"Of course, to the Sanctuary before those devils can break in on us!" he exclaimed, in Cantonese; and as if taking it for granted that his command would be unquestioningly obeyed, he darted away from the semicircle of light, the half-caste leaping after him like a great frog as they disappeared in the darkness. Wong Tom, too, would have followed; but Winton stretched out a hand, and grasping the neck of his blouse, hauled him roughly back.

"None of that!" he said sternly. "Our business first, Wong Tom. Never mind the Sanctuary now; you must guide us to Lady Lochineal."

"Certainly; I depended upon Dick to guide you there, and thought that you would join us at the Shrine of the Seal," protested the Chinaman. "This bonze, Wong An-ton, knows all of our secrets, and is faithful. He, too, will go with you."

His fingers had fumbled nervously with the gold buttons which secured the loose blouse as he spoke, and suddenly, with an agility which seemed marvelous in one of his age and build, he wriggled loose, and ran in the darkness in the direction which Macpherson had taken, leaving Winton standing with the empty blouse still clutched in his hand.

"The slippery devil!" exclaimed Winton savagely, as he dropped the blouse and reached for his pistol; but Dick, who had apparently fully recovered from his bewilderment, stepped forward, and caught his arm.

"You could never overtake him, and minutes are precious," he said earnestly. "This place is a maze of paths and courtyards. Wong An-ton is a safe guide, and every minute must seem an eternity to the poor woman who is waiting for us."

"The youngster is right, Uncle Charley, and we should be on our way," agreed Sternberg, as a particularly vicious yelling burst out on the city side of the wall; and Winton, whose desires so perfectly coincided with their counsel, turned to the bonze, and sharply ordered him to lead the way to the house of the captive woman.

CHAPTER XII.

Even with the guidance of Wong An-ton, the progress through the intricacies of the Sacred Precincts in the darkness was irritatingly slow. The great wall which divided the sacred from the secular city was nearly five miles in circumference, and inclosed a curious jumble of temples, pagodas, shrines, and buildings devoted to the domestic purposes of the bonzes.

It was to a low, rambling building in an isolated quarter of the Precincts that the bonze finally brought them after a journey which to their impatience had seemed interminable. Like all Chinese dwellings, the outer walls of the house were windowless, and access to the interior was gained through a large, arched gateway, which opened into a square courtyard from which the rooms derived light and air.

In that quiet and secluded quarter there was no hint of the riot and turbulence which raged without the Sacred Precincts, for long since they had left behind the shrieking of the mob and the shrill bugle calls which sent the alarm circling about the walls. It was Wong An-ton who gave the peculiar signal which caused the wicket in the arched entrance to fly open with a suddenness which told that the summons had been anxiously awaited; but it was Dick who entered first, springing forward to seize in his arms the dimly outlined, slender figure of a woman.

Half laughing, half crying, she led the way into one of the inner rooms when Dick released her, and as she turned to greet them Winton could hardly credit the evidence of his senses, for, realizing how his own terrible experience at Lang Tun and the subsequent years of worry and anxiety had aged him, he had expected to find only a pitiful wreck of the girl he had known in the woman who had been fifteen years a captive among aliens, robbed of the companionship of her child, and inexorably separated from everything which had been dear to her in the world.

But only the snowy whiteness of her

luxuriant hair suggested that she had ever known care or anxiety, for the face which it framed was as youthful and unlined as the one he had carried so vividly in his memory since that fateful parting at Lang Tun, and it was far more beautiful in its maturity than the one he had learned to love during the long voyage on the old *China*.

Flushed with excitement, her smooth skin was as delicately pink and white as that of a baby, and there was not even the suggestion of a crow's-foot about the eyes which sparkled so joyously; but the happy smile which disclosed beautifully white and even teeth quickly vanished, the flush faded from her face, and the sparkle of joy died in her eyes as she looked expectantly at the doorway, and realized that with the entrance of the bonze, who followed Sternberg and Winton into the room, the party was complete.

Dick's native costume was stained and torn, and his face scratched from his tumble into the shrubbery; and the clothing of the two Americans, immaculately white when they had left the house boat in the morning, was filthy with the mud of Shen Fun's streets, and stained with great splotches of ominously suggestive red. Their faces were begrimed with sweat and dust, their hands blackened with powder smoke, and in the absence of the man for whose coming she had so ardently waited she could read only that he had met with disaster in the strenuous fighting in which their bloodstained and disordered apparel testified they had been engaged. For a moment she stood speechless, looking imploringly from one to the other, her face blanched, her lips quivering.

"Dick, where is your father? Winton, where is my husband?" she demanded brokenly, after waiting vainly for them to speak; and while the boy hastily explained that he was waiting at the Sanctuary for them Winton's eyes dropped before her steady gaze of bewildered inquiry, for he knew that every word which Dick so artlessly uttered was a lash to her pride and confidence.

"He—he left it to you to fetch me—after all these years?" she faltered, when Dick finished his explanation with what he meant for the comforting assurance that his father had escaped unscathed from the fighting. "He is well—uninjured—and almost within call of my voice—after this cruel separation—sends others when he might have come himself? Winton, I can't believe it! You are concealing something from me—in mistaken kindness, my son is deceiving me, or for fifteen years I have deceived myself, and lived in a fool's paradise. Tell me the truth, Winton; you know that I am not a coward. He is dead? He is a prisoner? He is so grievously wounded that you have left him while you came to take me to him?"

"Macpherson would have come, but this is a grave business, and we must make haste slowly," answered Winton. "He could not be entirely his own master; there was the general safety to be considered, and each of us had his part assigned. He has gone with Jenkinson and Wong Tom to——" She cut him short with an impatient gesture, and turned to Sternberg.

"Will you tell me the truth?" she demanded passionately. "Dick has told me of you—you must be the American consul at Chee Nung?"

"Yes; name of Sternberg," he answered, with a glance of urgent appeal at Winton, in whose expression he found little comfort. "Uncle Charley has given it to you straight, Lady Lochineal. I can bear witness that your husband has been one of the busiest men in China to-day, and his day's work isn't cleaned up—not by a long shot. We never should have reached here if it hadn't been for his leadership, and I reckon we'll never get out unless he continues to boss the job."

Lady Lochineal smiled in spite of her anxiety. "I am selfish and inconsiderate," she said contritely. "I have not even thanked you gentlemen for your kindness in coming to Shen Fun to aid in rescuing me, and in my selfishness I have kept you starving while I pestered you with foolish questions. I am ready to go with you, but if my

husband could wait while he sent others to fetch me, he can surely wait long enough for you to eat the supper which has been ready against your coming for many hours."

They were famished; but, consumed with anxiety lest Wong Tom might yield to temptation, and employ the madness of Macpherson for his own purposes, Winton quickly negated the proposition for delay. But Dick, whose boyish appetite clamored even above fear and anxiety, quietly slipped into the adjoining room, and returned with a generous supply of food, which he had looted from the laden table.

"We'll not waste time if we eat as we go, and I couldn't go much farther without eating," he said, grinning as he displayed his plunder; and, so quickly does hunger reduce a man to the intellectual level of his primitive ancestors, the two Americans fairly tore to pieces the plump capon which was part of his loot, when Lady Lochineal left them to gather up the few necessities which she would need. The bones were stripped bare when she returned with a small bag made from antique brocade hanging by a heavy cord of silk from her arm.

"I am ready, gentlemen," she said quietly; and then, guided by Wong Anton, and accompanied by her son and the two Americans who had risked so much to serve her, she stepped out into the night, leaving forever that house which for fifteen years had been her prison. All was quiet now, and without challenge or molestation they reached the Sanctuary, that great pagoda of which the lofty dome, heavily covered with gold leaf, was visible for many miles across the plain which lay before Shen Fun. Beneath it was the shrine which for centuries had contained the most sacred and venerated relic of China—the symbol of the great secret power which the priesthood exercises in the Celestial empire.

Since the theft of the sacred relic a dozen bonzes upon whose fidelity and devotion Wong Tom knew he could rely spent the night in the Sanctuary, two of them always on watch before

the shrine, while the others slept in an adjoining anteroom within call. The personification of all that was conservative and medieval in China, Wong Tom was nevertheless fully awake to every development of modern progress, and without knowledge of those bonzes of whose jealousy and enmity he was suspicious, he had smuggled into the Sanctuary a well-equipped arsenal of the most modern weapons, and during the long, silent watches of the nights his followers had been instructed and drilled in their use.

It was, therefore, a curiously incongruous medley of the East and West, of reverence and sacrilege, upon which Lady Lochineal and her companions entered after Wong An-ton had guided them through the puzzling maze of outer courtyards and up the broad marble steps worn smooth by the feet of the millions of pilgrims who during the centuries had climbed them to prostrate themselves before the shrine of the sacred relic. The inner sanctuary was a vast, arched hall; but so perfectly proportioned that its size was the least impressive thing about it. Great as are the treasures of the Forbidden City in Peking, their value and historical and artistic interest would have been dwarfed by the contents of this single room, where for centuries the pick of all the vast tribute of the devout of the great empire had accumulated.

Every inch of the vast walls was covered with such decorations as only the infinite patience of artists with the true Oriental indifference to the value of time could have conceived.

But, lavish of human effort and wealth of materials as were the decorations of the walls, they paled to insignificance before the jewel of which they were the mere setting—the Shrine of the Seal of Confucius, which stood at the end. In size, it was as large as many of the buildings which covered the shrines scattered throughout the grounds, and even in the dim, weird light of the flickering candles which burned about it, it was a dazzling blaze of glory. None could guess the material which gave it strength and sub-

stance, for not a space the size of a pin's point was left uncovered with precious stones—diamonds whose facets threw back the light of the candles in dazzling reflections, pigeon-blood rubies which caught that fire and held it prisoner in their hearts, clusters of great emeralds which reflected it like sunlit patches of a summer sea amid white-capped billows of huge pearls.

Standing before that gem-incrusted shrine when they entered was Macpherson, the half-caste squatting on his haunches at his back, and Wong Tom, as tense and rigid as a dog at point, standing watching intently his every movement. Ranged at either side were a half dozen bonzes, their priestly robes in strange contrast to the cartridge belts slung over their shoulders, the deadly modern rifles in their hands curiously out of harmony with the ancient, barbaric splendor which surrounded them. All were so intent upon the movements of Macpherson that the arrival of the newcomers seemed unnoticed; and, bewildered by the unexpected brilliancy of the place they had entered, they, too, stood silent and spellbound.

Cursing in Cantonese, Macpherson was tugging and prying at the small doors in the shrine which concealed the resting place of the relic—doors which in all of history had never been opened but once without the prescribed and impressive ritual. Formerly they had been secured with the simplest of catches, but following the robbery Wong Tom had secured them so that they could not be opened without destroying them, fearing that curiosity might lead to discovery of the loss. Now, in attempting to repeat the actions of his previous robbery, Macpherson was meeting with an unexpected resistance; but Wong Tom dared offer no assistance, fearing that the slightest interference might lead to the violence of which he knew he was capable in his trance. And so those men stood rigid and watched until a cry from the one woman rang through the Sanctuary—a cry which made them all start violently, and caused Macpherson to wheel about until his back was to the altar.

She had started forward with outstretched arms, but one glance at that threatening, evil face, distorted with rage and black with passion, and she halted, cowering back, and covering her own face with her hands, while piteous little moans came from her blanched lips. Macpherson betrayed not the slightest sign of recognition; in the uncertain light, he had seen only that aureole of white hair with a dimly outlined face beneath it, and in this woman—dressed in native costume—there was nothing to arouse the dormant memory of the girl from whom he had parted at Lang Tun.

Macpherson now advanced on the man who had been his confederate in crime, and for the first time since the half-caste had found his courage and attacked the executioner he showed fear, cowering until his great shoulders almost touched the pavement, and, like a great crab, edging back under the lash of that vitriolic tirade.

But although it was in a measure revolt against the mysterious power of the half-caste, it was in greater degree a confession of how great that power had been, for Macpherson gloried in recalling what he had done, of the capture and loot of the *Avondale*, of the attack upon the Shen Fun caravan, of the desperate venture to Shen Fun itself he boasted; but those boasts were followed by bitter recriminations and abuse.

"I have faithfully served the blood brotherhood which exists between us," he went on. "My hand has never held back; I have never shown fear nor compunction. I have led those yellow fiends when they would follow; I have driven them when they would have held back. I have stained my arms to the shoulders in blood; I have blackened my soul with murder; I have made my ears deaf to appeals for mercy."

He raised his hand threateningly over the half-caste, who groveled at his feet, mumbling inarticulately. The bonzes would have interfered, but Wong Tom, hoping against hope, waved them back, and, slipping beneath that upraised arm, bent over Jenkinson, and again endeavored to stimulate him to a renewed ef-

fort to regain the control which had slipped from him.

Lady Lochineal had uncovered her eyes, and, white of face and tremulous of limb, clung desperately to Winton's arm. But after the effect of the first shock had partly worn away she began to get a conception of something akin to the truth. Fortunately the Cantonese speech was as unintelligible to her as Greek would have been; but in Macpherson's ferocity and passion, and the attitude of the others toward him, she could construe only madness; and, womanlike, she let her heart prompt and control her judgment, and convince her that it was anxiety for her safety and the strain of his effort to save her which had driven reason from its seat.

Pity drove from her mind the last shred of aversion and horror which the terrible change in the man she loved had inspired. And with that pity came the intense longing to save and protect which has so often transformed the meekest of women into veritable Amazons when those dear to them have become helpless or threatened with danger.

Motioning imperatively to her companions to remain quiet, she advanced fearlessly toward the trio so dramatically grouped before the glittering shrine. Macpherson, his face black with passion, still held his hand aloft as if waiting for the opportunity to make his blow surely effective; the half-caste still groveled at his feet, his inarticulate protest changing to a piteous whine. Over him Wong Tom bent lower and lower, striking puny and ineffective blows with his fists on the calloused shoulders as he fairly shrieked supplications, imprecations, and commands into the unheeding ears. On either side of them stood the bonzes, as stolid and rigid as if they had been carved from wood, their faces as impassive as masks, although every man of them realized that the chief to whose cause they were devoted was playing his last trump card in the great game which would decide their fortunes.

At the very edge of that group she paused, separated from the man whom

she had come to save by the prostrate form of the creature who had done so much to damn him, and the one who was willing to insure that damnation if through it he could find the relic on which his own safety and power depended. Slowly her small hands stretched out above that hideous, prostrate form and the half-maddened Chinaman whose fists were beating a devil's tattoo upon it. Startled, Macpherson stepped back, his eyes, in which shone the light of madness, looking into hers, which were filled with infinite longing, compassion, and love.

"Dick, my Dick! You have come for me at last!" she said tenderly, and even after that day of strong emotions and sudden surprises the magical effect of her words and voice struck the two Americans dumb with amazement. As the sun banishes the clouds after an April shower her appearance seemed to clear all ferocity and evil from Macpherson's face. For just a moment there was a suspicion of that bewilderment which had always characterized his recovery from his strange mental wanderings; but that, too, quickly disappeared, and despite the white hair and grime of combat there shone from it such a radiance as had greeted them from the face of the woman he loved when they entered the house which so long had been her prison.

At the cry which came from his lips, Wong Tom drew back with a gesture of defeat and despair, for it was the joyous cry of a man freed from shackles and reprieved from cruel torment. As he stood there, transfigured, he seemed to Winton the joyous, reckless, carefree Macpherson of the old days; and so he must have seemed to the woman whose love and understanding had cast out the black devils which possessed him, for from her lips came the echo of his cry, and her arms opened to receive him.

CHAPTER XIII.

Suddenly aged almost to decrepitude, Wong Tom tottered back, and would have fallen if one of the bonzes had not caught and supported him.

Winton, with old wounds reopened, and half-forgotten scars aching horribly, was fighting for mastery of himself, and in no condition to master others; while Macpherson and the woman they had come to save, still clasped in each other's arms, were oblivious to everything but their new-found happiness, which had obliterated for the time being the memory of the cruel years of separation.

But the bonzes, hatred in their hearts for these foreign devils, whose presence profaned the Sanctuary, were whispering among themselves, and ominously fingering their rifles as they watched the intruders with scowling faces and resentful eyes.

A man of stone could not have remained unaffected by emotion in what they had passed through; but Sternberg had a more impersonal interest in the whole situation than any of the others, and, hard-headed and practical, he was the first to appreciate the dangers which it presented. Macpherson had been rescued from his baser self; Wong Tom was evidently past plotting either for good or evil; and the groveling, whining half-caste was for the moment at least a negligible quantity; but they were immediately confronted by a dozen armed men whose attitude was becoming more and more threatening.

Wong An-ton, whose name denoted that he was of the blood of the Custodian, and who had very evidently been a trusted lieutenant, and the sharer of his secrets, had remained a silent and impassive spectator, and it was to him that Sternberg—for the first time assuming a leadership which the others had held in turn—addressed his questioning in halting and labored Chinese.

"There is no time to lose, Mr. Sternberg," answered the bonze quietly, and, greatly to the consul's relief, in perfect English. "We have had little communication with the officers from Peking; it was Wong Tom whom they were after, and they hoped to arrest him before he could gain the shelter of the Sacred Precincts. But now they know that foreigners are within, and that will offer an excuse for forcing the

gates, which they will probably do at daybreak. You can imagine what the result will be, for there is a strong party among the bonzes who are inimical to Wong Tom, and to rid the Sacred Precincts of the invaders they will not hesitate to deliver him to the soldiers and sacrifice you and your friends to appease the fury of the city mob. The only possible safety lies in immediate flight. Wong Tom had expected that you would all leave the Sacred Precincts to-night in any case, and I had perfected arrangements for you to reach the house boat. Horses are waiting at a small village a half mile from the city walls, and from there it will not require more than three hours to reach the house boat."

Sternberg listened, his face like stone.

"There are difficulties," went on Wong An-ton, "and there will be plenty of opposition, but it will not start until we leave the Sacred Precincts. Wong Tom cannot stay here, nor can these priests; they would all be beheaded as soon as they fell into the hands of the soldiers. We have plenty of arms and ammunition, and, desperate as the chance seems, it is the only one. We must try to fight our way through. I will guide you, Mr. Sternberg; I ask only that you aid in preventing the capture of Wong Tom by placing him with Lady Lochineal. He is crushed by his bitter disappointment, and for a time he will be as helpless as a child."

In a few words Sternberg acquainted Winton with Wong An-ton's proposal, and Winton gave immediate assent. The Chinaman gave a curt order to the bonzes, and although the language was unintelligible to the foreigners they were satisfied with the effect, for as Winton stepped forward and gently recalled Macpherson and his wife from their blissful dream to a realization of the difficulties which confronted them one of them beckoned Sternberg to follow him to the adjoining room, where he displayed a bewildering collection of weapons from which he might choose.

Less than two hours of darkness remained to them, and within five minutes they had filed from the Sanctuary,

and, under the guidance of Wong An-ton, commenced another pilgrimage through the intricacies of the Sacred Precincts.

As stealthy as marauding cats they approached the exit which their guide had selected for their sortie, and the time was that which all experienced campaigners recognize as "the dangerous hour," for while a night attack depends upon the cloak of darkness for creeping to close quarters and delivering the initial blow, there must soon be light, or in the confusion friend cannot be distinguished from foe.

The sudden appearance of armed men from the exit which Wong An-ton had selected was enough to send the soldiers on guard squealing and shrieking in flight, and had the bonzes been as cool-headed as the foreigners the passage to the city wall might have been made without striking a blow; but in their nervousness they loosed their rifles at the harmless fugitives, the bullets flying wide and doing no damage; but the report of the volley echoed through the narrow streets as a tocsin to the sleeping inhabitants.

The first hint of dawn was reddening the east as they reached the entrance to the nearest street of the secular city, a street already filled with a threatening assemblage of the riffraff of Shen Fun; but that mob quickly realized that the men who confronted them would not meekly submit to butchery to afford a Shen Fun holiday.

A fairly creditable volley from the bonzes opened the attack, and while of marksmanship they knew nothing the range was so short and the mob so tightly wedged between the buildings that its effect was terrible. The steel-jacketed bullets drilled through rank after rank. Terror spread in a great, irresistible wave, and with falsetto shrieks the crowd broke and sought the shelter of the warrens from which they had come, leaving the filthy pavement unobstructed save by the dead.

But before they had advanced a hundred yards their triumphant progress

degenerated into ignominious flight. Not an enemy was visible, but from housetops and balconies unseen hands showered down on them a perfect cascade of missiles which there was no dodging.

Before they reached the city gate which was their goal three bonzes had fallen, and Lady Lochineal was the only one in the party who was not bruised and bleeding.

In the desperate attack on the gate one of the bonzes was killed, and Wong An-ton received a bullet wound in the arm; but the gate was won, and as the advance guard of the Imperial Guard came at the double into the open space before the portal Sternberg, the last of the fugitives, stepped through the postern, and forever left behind him the mysteries and horrors of Shen Fun.

Once without the city walls, the pursuit was taken up by the guardsmen; but such tales of the prowess of the foreign devils had circulated through their ranks that they were not eager to come to close quarters, and contented themselves with a long-range rifle fire which inflicted no damage. It was not until they had almost reached the shelter of the village where Wong An-ton assured them that the horses would be in waiting that the main body of the guard issued from the city gates with Lat Kee borne in their midst in a chair on the shoulders of sturdy coolies.

Driven by their officers, and frightened by the eunuch's shrill reminders of the consequences if Wong Tom should escape, the guard approached the squalid village with a show of resolution, encouraged by the quiet which brooded over it into the belief that their victory would be an easy one. And then, when less than a hundred yards separated them from the low, mud-walled houses, they were met with a crashing volley which placed a round dozen of them beyond all fear of Tsi-Ann's vengeance. The shots were followed by such a cheer as never came from Oriental throats, and a moment later a score of white-uniformed men under the leadership of a giant with red hair sallied from the village.

The advance had halted at the first shot, and, without waiting to count the number of their adversaries, the Chinese fled in such confusion that not until they were halfway back to Shen Fun could the commands of the mandarins and the shrill protests of Lat Kee restore even a semblance of discipline.

CHAPTER XIV.

It was a sadly battered and bedraggled crew which crept into the narrow streets of the squalid Chinese village, and even Lady Lochineal's dainty native costume was much the worse from that hurried flight through the filth of the secular city.

Thanks to the canopy of steel weapons which her companions had held above her head, she had escaped injury from the shower of missiles; but all of the men were bruised and sore, and their clothing was in tatters. His face drawn with pain, Wong An-ton, supported by Sternberg, guided them to the inn where they were to find the horses for the last stage of their journey; and, rude as had been the shocks which the consul had received during the past twenty-four hours, nothing had surprised him more than the appearance of the man whom they found standing in the arched entrance to the walled inn compound.

He was unmistakably British, and to any one with even a casual acquaintance with the Inns of Court, he was just as unmistakably of the legal profession. Through a monocle which was so firmly fixed that it seemed to have taken root, he watched the approach of the two tatterdemalions, and, with a carefully modulated "Bless my soul!" he started forward when he recognized that Sternberg was a foreigner.

"My dear sir, I am looking for the Marquis of Lochineal; can you tell me anything of him?" he asked. For a moment Sternberg stared, open-mouthed and incredulous, at the thin, freshly shaven face.

"Your name must be Guilfoyle," he said finally; and when the Englishman nodded he pointed a grimy thumb over

his shoulder. "He's all right—or as nearly all right as any of us—and he's coming along with the rest of the bunch," he said, and would have volunteered further information had he not been interrupted by a strange and strident outburst of sound from the compound. Forgetting Wong An-ton, he jumped forward, and attempted to peer over Guilfoyle's shoulder.

"By thunder! I never expected to enjoy the sound of bagpipes, but if that means that the Highlanders are with you it's the sweetest music I ever heard!" he exclaimed; and before the Englishman could answer he was in the compound and surrounded by a score of brawny Scots, who fairly deafened him with questions until the giant Niel enforced a measure of order with his peculiar heavy-handed methods.

Sternberg wasted no time in making explanations, and a half dozen words were enough to send them streaming from the compound with their rifles in their hands, while the fugitives, feeling secure that the unexpected succor would afford them at least a respite, dragged themselves in to gain such shelter as the primitive inn afforded.

With true British stolidity, Macpherson and his solicitor greeted each other as casually as if they had met in Piccadilly, and Guilfoyle briefly related the reason for his being there, and the manner of his coming, which he seemed to consider a perfectly ordinary business matter. He had come from the coast to Chee Nung in the second of the yacht's launches, and, finding that the party had left for the interior three days before, he had proceeded to follow on their trail.

He had brought the Highlanders with him more for their own protection than for his, for they had gotten out of hand, and were in trouble with the peasantry of the surrounding country.

"And as they were all retainers of the Marquis of Lochineal, and in the immediate service of the present incumbent of the title, I feared that the estate might be held liable for damages for their behavior, which in my judg-

ment was distinctly actionable," he concluded. "As to their present action, I believe that any competent tribunal would hold that it was justifiable self-defense, and that therefore no damages would be imposed, the appearance of the defendants clearly demonstrating that they had suffered sufficient tort at the hands of the plaintiffs to excuse even homicide."

"Of which there has been quite some," remarked Sternberg, who had entered while he was speaking. "Enough to make it safe to make a quick dash for liberty if there are horses enough." It took but a short consultation to decide that immediate departure was impossible, however, for Wong An-ton had provided only a half dozen Chinese ponies, and their speed would have to be regulated by the pace of the footmen. Those who had come from Shen Fun were too exhausted from their exertions and lame from their bruises to make the long march in the sun until they had rested and had their hurts attended to, and, dangerous as delay might prove, they were forced to accept the risk.

Lady Lochineal, accompanied by Dick, accordingly proceeded to ransack the larder of the inn and the haversacks of the Highlanders for food, and Macpherson, despite his fatigue, eagerly questioned Guilfoyle as to his mysterious mission to India. The solicitor answered evasively, and looked significantly at his companions.

"Never mind them; they already know the worst of me, and nothing that you can tell will shock them," persisted Macpherson bitterly. "Let us have it, Guilfoyle; I am still the head of the house of Macpherson, and I give you full leave to bare the family skeletons for their inspection."

"Very good—although this is entirely irregular and contrary to precedent," said Guilfoyle, with apparent reluctance, after an irritating hesitation. "You will understand that this admission is made confidentially, and entirely without prejudice, but the most important result of the investigation which I carried on was the discovery

that there is a very serious doubt as to your right to the titles which you have borne for the past fifteen years."

Macpherson nodded indifferently.

"Unless there is more behind it, that worries me very little," he said. "God knows that they have brought me little happiness."

"But there is much more behind it, my lord," continued Guilfoyle gravely. "Much that is without the province of anything I have ever learned in the study of law, although some portions recall vaguely stories of your ancestors which are suggested in the dusty files of our office."

"Go on!" said Macpherson curtly. "I have no illusions about my family history which you can destroy."

Guilfoyle cleared his throat. "My lord, it may sound heretical coming from me, but I will admit that aside from the titles which they did nothing to win, and the estate which is so closely entailed that it could not be squandered, there is little for which you owe gratitude to your immediate ancestors," he said. "Your father never bore the title; he was still a younger son when he died, for his elder brother, the late marquis, survived him. Like yourself, he entered the army, receiving a commission in one of the native Indian regiments. My lord, there was never any public scandal, but your father was summarily cashiered from the service for a piece of madness which endangered the lives of a whole European community in India.

"Disguised as a native, he gained entrance to the Temple of Juggernaut, being the first and last European who has ever seen the interior of that place of mystery. He was discovered as he came out, and that discovery caused an immediate fanatical outbreak which threatened the lives of men, women, and children in the neighboring English settlement. In the night they fled through the jungle to the nearest cantonments, and they succeeded in eluding their pursuers only by scattering what silver and other valuables they possessed along the trail. Avarice for the moment proved stronger than fanati-

cism, and as the natives delayed to search for and wrangle over the treasure, they succeeded in reaching safety by the narrowest of margins. That much of the story was familiar to me before I visited India; the sequel I have known but a few weeks.

"My lord, the Brahmans were not appeased by the summary dismissal of your father from the service. They followed him from the moment he doffed his uniform, and, working in the mysterious ways of the East, they gained a weird control over him—such a subtle influence as we scoff at in practical, matter-of-fact England because we cannot reduce it to pounds, shillings, and pence, or square it with such standards as we know; but nevertheless it was a fact. In punishment for his sacrilege they laid a solemn curse upon him—a curse which was to be transmitted to his first-born child, who in turn was to possess unlimited power for evil over children subsequently born to him.

"Now, my lord, comes a part which can never be explained, for your father took no one into his confidence, and he is past answering. There can be no question of his own belief in the efficacy of the curse which had been laid upon him, and it is my belief that what he did was done to nullify its evil effects in so far as they might affect the future. In any case, he took a most unusual step for an Englishman; for, coming to Hongkong after he was virtually expelled from India, he married in due and legal form a Canton slave girl whom he purchased for a trifle.

"Less than a year afterward she died in giving birth to a male child, which your father provided for under another name, and left in Hongkong when he returned to England. It is my belief that he did this thing with premeditation; that he planned that never should the curse which had been transmitted to his half-caste child influence children which he might have by a subsequent marriage. At that time he could not have had the slightest idea that he or his heirs might come in for the titles and estates. So far as I know, he never mentioned his marriage to the Chinese

girl to a living soul; and shortly after his return to Europe he married again—a Frenchwoman of noble family and considerable fortune, your mother.

“His death fifteen years ago was the first of that series of tragedies which made his eldest son the heir to the titles and great, entailed estates which went with them. Your elder brother was killed by a fall from his horse, and when you reappeared after your long disappearance there was no one to dispute your right to the titles and inheritance.

“It is needless to say that I have checked up every point of the evidence, my lord. The story was volunteered by a Brahman priest in India. Never for a moment have they lost track of your father and his descendants. They were waiting for you when you arrived in India, and he gloried in telling me that they were responsible for the charges which were brought against you there—charges of which you were absolutely innocent, but which you could not disprove because they had drugged you into insensibility, and concocted careful proof that you were guilty of the theft from the temple—a theft which was never committed.

“They told me of your father’s marriage in Hongkong, and on my way here I stopped and verified the statement. The entries of the marriage and the birth are in the records, and can’t be disputed. There is only one hope, my lord, and that is that your half-caste half brother may be dead. That is a fair assumption, for all trace of him has been lost for fifteen years. He was well, but not favorably, known in Hongkong under the name of Jenkinson, and one of the older police officers told me that——”

Macpherson checked him with a gesture, and walked over to where the half-caste lay stretched out on the dirt floor, and shook him roughly.

With a shriek of fear, he awakened, and instinctively his hands reached out for the *kang*; but Macpherson grasped them, and drew him as nearly upright as his bowed back would permit him to stand. Indescribably filthy, reduced al-

most to idiocy by long years of persecution, and distorted by the crushing burden from which he had so recently been freed, he was a horrible and repulsive object; but Macpherson betrayed no aversion, and supported him tenderly as he turned to Guilfoyle with a curious smile on his lips.

“We can testify that the sins of the father are visited on the children,” he said quietly. “It is only fair that he who has suffered most should receive also the lion’s share of such benefits as may come with them. There will be no contest, Guilfoyle, and I have the honor to present to you the real Marquis of Lochineal.”

Shocked and horrified, the solicitor would have made protest; but at that moment Dick entered, carrying a steaming bowl; and his mother was close on his heels with its fellow. Macpherson gave him a glance of warning, and he remained silent, but he carefully avoided contact with the horrible creature whom a trick of fate had made the head of the great house which his forefathers had served for centuries.

It was a curiously silent and listless meal which followed, for, strange to say, there was something more depressing to all of them in the developments of the last half hour than in all the grim tragedy in which they had played a part.

Macpherson, whom the strange discovery had robbed of titles and wealth, seemed less concerned than any of them, and made occasional efforts to liven things up; but it was a hopeless task, and it was a welcome relief when one of the Highlanders entered with the announcement that a single Chinaman had advanced, waving a white flag, and requested speech of the leader of the foreigners.

“I reckon that I was ‘it’ last,” said Sternberg, after Macpherson, to whom the Highlander had instinctively addressed himself, had disclaimed leadership with a gesture. “We haven’t anything to conceal; bring him in here; let him do the walking.”

It was Lat Kee who was led in a few minutes later—a eunuch of great

stature and tremendous weight. As became a palace favorite whose whispered advice often decided the fate of the greatest men in the empire, he was arrogant of bearing and insolent of mien when he entered; but there was something in the grim faces of these foreigners, who looked at him with a mixture of contempt and defiance, which curbed the impudent demand which he was about to make, and changed it to a courteously worded proposition of compromise.

At that, it was sufficiently cold-blooded, for he offered the foreigners safe conduct to Chee Nung if they would deliver Wong Tom and the surviving bonzes over to him for execution. Otherwise, he pointed out, they could never hope to escape, for the Imperial Guardsmen would attack them as soon as they left the village, or if they attempted to make a stand the village would be demolished by the artillery brought from the capital of the province, thirty miles away.

They listened in silence; but there was no need of consultation before answering. Wong Tom, who sat shriveled up in the corner, gazed at the man who was demanding his head with lackluster eyes which betrayed nothing of interest, and beside him Lady Lochineal was washing the bullet wound in Wong An-ton's arm. The half-caste crouched on the dirt floor between the eunuch and the foreigners, who still remained seated about the rude table where they had eaten.

"Uncle Charley, you tell that fat, splay-footed toad that we'll see him in—a hotter place than Chee Nung during the monsoon first!" said Sternberg savagely, after Winton had translated the demand, which had been made in "mandarin" Chinese.

Couched in more diplomatic language, Winton translated the substance, but in their tone and expression the eunuch had already read the answer, and his fat, sallow face became black with rage.

As a matter of fact, his proposition had been made in desperation, for the guardsmen were in open mutiny. It

was probably fear of the foreign devils' rifles which had inspired it, but a superstitious terror had swept over them, and the bannermen had plainly told him that he could expect no further support from their men in action against the bonzes or their foreign allies.

Tsi-Ann's orders had been positive, and he knew that she would never even listen to an excuse for failure. There was just one desperate chance; if Wong Tom were dead, the foreigners might barter his head for a promise of security, and, quick as a flash, Lat Kee drew a pistol from his sleeve, and fired at the man who sat mumbling in his corner, his hands toying idly with the brocade bag from which Lady Lochineal had taken the simple dressing for Wong An-ton's wound.

The treachery was so quick and unexpected that the foreigners had no chance to interfere before the shot was fired, and but for Jenkinson the bullet would have found its mark. But from the moment they had left the Sanctuary the half-caste had transferred his dog-like devotion from Macpherson to his wife, and, understanding nothing of what had passed, he read in the eunuch's treachery a threat of danger to her.

Even as the pistol was whipped from the broad sleeve, the great muscles of his legs contracted, and with terrific impetus propelled him forward an instant before the trigger was pulled. The eunuch went down before the human thunderbolt, and lay stunned and helpless on the dirt floor. The half-caste fell with him, but so quickly had it all happened that no one realized the truth until the great muscles of his bowed back relaxed as he rolled over, for the bullet meant for Wong Tom had crashed through his brain.

Before the eunuch recovered consciousness he was securely bound, and every man in the room save Wong Tom had gathered about to help while Lady Lochineal, perhaps dimly conscious that the half-caste had believed he was dying for her, leaned over him, and tenderly closed the staring eyes. The man who had really been responsible for the trag-

edy was for the moment forgotten, but the deliberations of the men as to what should be done with the treacherous eunuch were interrupted by a sharp exclamation from the corner, which reminded them of him—an exclamation which was quickly followed by such a shrill shriek of triumph as no Western ears had ever heard.

Still shriveled and tremulous, but with a face suddenly rejuvenated, Wong Tom had risen to his feet, and stood with one hand extended far above his head.

For a moment the foreigners were suspicious of further treachery. The bonzes suddenly drew apart, uttering shrill screams; but almost instantly they threw themselves flat at Wong Tom's feet, kotowing until their foreheads rested on the dirt floor. Still suspicious and puzzled, the foreigners watched uncomprehendingly until Lady Lochineal innocently and unwittingly supplied the clew.

"Oh, Dick, the poor old man is childish!" she exclaimed. "He has been rummaging in my bag, which contains all of my little treasures. You must get

that one back for me, Dick; it is the most precious of all—my lucky stone—that little jade charm which you gave to me on that last horrible night at Lang Tun!"

Startled and incredulous, they followed the direction of her eyes, which were directed at Wong Tom's upraised hand. Between the thumb and forefinger he held a piece of jade no larger than an old-fashioned fob seal, but a certain awe and reverence crept into their minds, for they realized that they were looking at the most sacred relic of the great teacher whose precepts have been for centuries the accepted law of uncounted millions of human beings.

It was Winton who broke the silence.

"Josephine, I fear that you will have to humor him, and sacrifice your talisman," he said gently. "Call it your ransom, for Wong Tom will be our friend, and we have nothing more to fear. Again he is the most powerful man in China, for again he is in fact what he has been only in name for fifteen years—the Custodian of the Sacred Seal of Confucius."

COMING! A novel by the author of "North of Fifty-three." Bertrand W. Sinclair has written another big story of the West, called "The Laying of the Ghost." You will get it complete in the month-end issue, on sale June 23rd.



GEORGE BROWN'S OFFICE BOY

GEORGE BROWN writes the editorials and attends to the "exchange" work of a big metropolitan daily newspaper, all of which compels him to read oceans of other papers. It was his habit to send his office boy to the post office every day to drag back a tremendous bundle of papers.

One day the boy, who was red-headed and high-tempered, received his bundle in the corridor of the post office, cut the strings, and scattered the newspapers in wild confusion all over the floor. After that he ran wild among them, kicking them and slapping them about.

An official of the post office called up Brown's office with the purpose of informing him that he had sent a crazy boy to the office, and that the boy had scattered the papers all over the building. Brown was not in when the call was made, but later the official of the post office informed him that, when remonstrance was made to the boy, he exclaimed wildly:

"That fool gets too many papers, anyway! I'm onto him. I'm the only person on the newspaper that knows he don't read half of 'em!"

Mr. Cutten's Revolt

By Peter B. Kyne

Author of "The Connemara Blood," "Short-Bred," Etc.

Which describes how a kindly, cheerful, optimistic, and altogether lovable gentleman was turned into a very thunderbolt of wrath, a relentless instrument of vengeance, a mighty engine of denunciation and punishment. And all through a poor little joke conceived in the poor little brain of a ne'er-do-well relative.

EXCEPTING, of course, the average run of ills and minor trials to which every human being must inevitably fall heir, it would appear to those who knew him intimately that Mr. James R. Cutten's life had been singularly free from worry and annoyance. I suppose one might comb the ten largest cities of the world and fail to discover a more contented man, or a more efficient book-keeper and cashier, than James R. Cutten. In fact, so gentle, so kindly, so cheerful, so optimistic, so altogether lovable was Mr. Cutten that the little tragedies of life which make of many people neurasthenic wrecks passed Mr. Cutten by without even lighting to say: "How d'ye do?" His remarkable disposition, coupled with his sterling integrity, had for him metamorphosed the rocky road of life into an improved, up-to-date automobile highway bordered with pansies.

Having, early in life, discovered the recipe for happiness, Mr. Cutten held rigorously to his course. He ate sparingly, avoiding alcoholic beverages and starchy foods. He retired early, after say two hours' communion with a favorite author, and immediately fell into the dreamless, untroubled slumber of a babe. At seven o'clock he would arise and hop into a cold bath. Emerging from his bath glowing and tingling, he

would devote fifteen minutes to calisthenics, cook himself a light but excellent breakfast, and make a dash for the eight-three, arriving at his place of employment in the city at eight-forty-seven.

Blessed with health, a good job, and a huge capacity of simple enjoyments, there is no need to marvel at Mr. Cutten's happiness. He had a wife, too. Still, he was happy. Life, for Mr. Cutten, flowed along as gently, as unruffled as a purling brook through an alfalfa meadow. He was fifty years old, he made two hundred and fifty dollars a month, and he had saved his money. He had Mrs. Cutten amply provided for in the matter of life insurance, and he had a five-thousand-dollar endowment policy about to mature. The premiums on his "twenty-pay-life" policies were all paid forever. He was a paid-up risk, and nothing now remained for him to do except live to a ripe old age and die. Can you beat that for happiness?

And as if that was not sufficient for any man, it was a matter of common knowledge that Mr. Cutten had a little nest egg in the bank, and owned his own home—a pretty little bungalow, with a garage and an acre of land around it in a beautiful suburban subdivision. How about that, eh? But wait!

Mr. Cutten had three peach trees and three cherry trees, and berry vines around his boundary fence, and in addition he raised white Orpington chickens and vegetables. His Saturday afternoons, his Sunday mornings, his long summer evenings, his holidays, and his two weeks' vacation yearly Mr. Cutten spent in his yard and among his white Orpingtons. His hens laid sufficient eggs to pay for his groceries, and he had for dinner every Sunday a chicken with whose age he was familiar. He had fresh vegetables all the year round, and enough left over to give his immediate neighbors something more than a sample. Well, I wonder if Mr. Cutten wasn't happy!

No, sir. Mr. Cutten never worried unless he was out seven cents in his trial balance. Compared with Mr. Cutten a spring lamb was a tough customer, and no cloud had ever darkened the horizon of his placid existence until Mrs. Cutten's big bum of a brother—I hate to use that word, too, but then Mr. Cutten used it, so I presume I am justified; at any rate, it accurately describes Mr. Marshall Hackford, so even at the risk of appearing vulgar we will let it stand—came to visit the Cuttens for two weeks, and stayed a year.

It was not so much the advent of Mr. Hackford into his relatives' home, or the alarming inroads he made into Mr. Cutten's groceries that made of Mr. Cutten a raging demon, terrible to behold, but rather Hackford's low, vulgar sense of humor—— But that's the story, and it would be unprofessional and unprofitable to tip it off now. Let us, therefore, to the prologue.

We have already vaguely surmised one small fly in Mr. Cutten's amber—his wife. In the beginning, Mr. Cutten, at thirty, had married Mrs. Cutten, who was twenty, and the eldest of a family of six girls and a boy. Those were the good old days when a man who earned a hundred dollars a month was presumed, metaphorically speaking, to have the world by the tail and in a position to swing it wheresoever he listed. Mr. Cutten was such a man

then—a prize not to be passed lightly by.

Having entered upon a commercial career at the age of sixteen, at the time of his marriage Mr. Cutten had three thousand dollars in bank. He was supposed by the Hackford family to have more. After furnishing a cottage with plush-upholstered, spindle-shanked chairs and sofas, a curlicued, four-decker whatnot, a marble-topped center table for the parlor, et cetera, he still had two thousand dollars left to do with as he pleased. Following the trend of his generous nature, he gave his wife a little checking account of five hundred dollars. Within sixty days she had spent it on her unmarried sister and her baby brother, Marshall, and was hinting for more.

A great many people make the mistake of assuming that an "easy mark" is devoid of common sense. That is a mistake. Mr. Cutten, while realizing that he had married the Hackford family, in a certain sense, saw no reason why he should stand and deliver. Moreover, he hoped for a family of his own, so, pending the arrival of his heirs, he decided to get the remainder of his savings down safe. He quietly purchased twenty acres of despised suburban property with it, filed the deed away in a safe-deposit box, and, with the exception of the first Monday in March of each year, when the assessor came around, he forgot that he owned the land. Having purchased his twenty acres, Mr. Cutten very truthfully informed his wife that he had no more money, but would make her an allowance from his salary, and pay all bills himself.

It was a long time before Mrs. Cutten forgave him. She felt she had been swindled, and for quite a while she suspected Mr. Cutten of living a double life.

Mr. Cutten's family had never materialized. True, he had fathered a son who had died at the age of six hours, and there had never been any more babies. This fact saddened Mr. Cutten—but sorrow, sprinkled on certain natures, merely serves to make them

more mellow and kindly, and he could never forget that his wife was the one who suffered most. It was well for him that he did, for Mrs. Cutten was a little inclined to nag. Indeed, had she been married to an ordinary man it is difficult to say just what limitations might be placed on her nagging. But Mr. Cutten always knew just the right thing to say to divert an impending storm, and the right thing to do to keep her in fairly good humor, and as this knack of saying and doing the right thing apparently entailed no strain on his seemingly inexhaustible fund of gentleness and good humor, he managed to get along very well, and could, in all sincerity, brag that with him marriage had not been a failure.

In the meantime Mr. Cutten's twenty acres had increased tremendously in value. It was no longer a suburban tract. He had figured on this, and now, at fifty years of age, the future held no terrors for him. He had worked for the same firm all his life—it was the only job he had ever held—and now that the old partners were dead and their sons in command, the sight of an expansive gentleman with an air of large emprise, who was drifting into the office very frequently of late, and indulging in long consultations with Mr. Cutten's youthful employers, actually caused him to snicker furtively into his ledgers. He knew the trust was after the firm, and he didn't care.

Mr. Cutten made up his mind to keep right on posting debits and credits and handling the cash until some young fellow should take his job at half the salary. And the day this happened—the day the new trust manager should lead the new bookkeeper to his desk and inform Mr. Cutten kindly that while they hated to part with such an old and valued employee, still his services were no longer required—at his present salary—Mr. Cutten had fully made up his mind what he was going to do.

He was going to laugh out loud! He had chuckled his way through life, but on that day he would laugh like a laughing hyena, for he could afford it! In all his life he had never been angry,

and he would not even grow angry on that fatal day. Instead, he would on the instant divest himself of his alpaca office coat, slam it into the wastebasket, and go home with joy in his heart, to devote the remainder of his days to scientific gardening and chicken culture. He would set traps for gophers and concoct deadly poisons for predatory bugs. And he would study astronomy. All his life he had longed for a huge telescope, such as one will frequently see in the possession of a patriarchal old gentleman in a city street on a clear, moonlight night, the telescope bearing a sign which says:

See the Man in the Moon for Five Cents.

Mr. Cutten desired such an instrument. He planned to build a revolving turret on the roof of his house, mount the telescope in it, and on balmy midsummer nights study the heavenly bodies.

The fact is, Mr. Cutten was really of a scientific turn of mind, which probably resulted in his phenomenal success as a bookkeeper. It was an inherited tendency. His uncle, Jared Cutten, was a well-known amateur astronomer and student of animal life, in addition to being a bachelor and the possessor of a vast fortune. He it was who for many years had a standing offer of a reward of fifty thousand dollars for the discovery of a cure for cancer or tuberculosis. Jared Cutten was a patron of scientific research, although he could be induced to back any proposition which had for its object the attainment of exact and definite knowledge of some obscure problem of no particular importance to the human race. He was as crochety and belligerent as his nephew, James R. Cutten, was genial and peace-loving.

It was an open question among Jared Cutten's nephews and nieces—with the exception of Mr. Cutten—as to who should inherit the old gentleman's money. Mr. Cutten was firmly of the opinion that his uncle's fortune would be left to charity and the furthering of scientific research. In fact, he didn't care what became of it, for he did not require any of it for his personal use.

Of all the nephews and nieces Mr. Cutten was the only one who took no vital interest in the state of Uncle Jared's health. He had not seen the old man in years.

This was not unfriendliness on Mr. Cutten's part, for Jared had a mighty brain, and for this Mr. Cutten admired and respected him; but his own decency and self-respect would not permit the veteran bookkeeper to join the horde of relatives who thronged around the old man, hoping his health was good, and disappointed because it was never bad. However, he had carefully perused his uncle's celebrated book on serpent worship, and an account of the expedition which the old man had financed to Desolation Island to observe the transit of Venus.

Old Jared was too busy studying reptiles and animals—this was his principal hobby, with astronomy a close second—to call on his relatives, and Mr. Cutten's nature was too fine to permit of his appearing fond of the old man for the sake of his money.

Things were at this pass when Marshall Hackford appeared upon the scene. Mr. Hackford was twenty-eight years old, weighed a hundred and eighty pounds, and was the baby of the family. Seven sisters and a mother had effectually spoiled him. He was too proud to work, preferring to let his family do that for him, and he had been raised under the impression that he was delicate. Up to the day his mother died he had never peeled his own potatoes at dinner. He was a handsome, miserable, spoiled, selfish, peevish, overgrown baby, and for a man without any particular vices he was about the most worthless scrub one could meet in a year's travel. This was the incubus which was foisted upon Mr. Cutten when he married into the Hackford family.

It began with hobbyhorses and ten-cent pieces for candy, and ran the gamut of footballs, baseballs, and bats, a Shetland pony, a gold watch, and a college education. At the persistent and never-wearying—well, solicitation of Mrs. Cutten, who worshiped her brat

of a brother, Mr. Cutten had put up fifty dollars a month for three years to send Marshall to college, for the Hackfords were as poor as the proverbial church mouse.

Mr. Cutten remarked, upon the occasion of his surrender, that to him it appeared a good deal like putting a gold ring in a pig's nose, and let it go at that. He found it easier to put up the fifty than arouse the ire of Mrs. Cutten and the Hackford family. He was visibly and financially relieved when Marshall's health and the patience of the faculty failed coincidentally.

One by one the Hackford sisters had married—sterner men than Mr. Cutten, by the way—and one and all they declined to harbor poor, dear Marshall, who, with the death of his doting parents, found himself without a home, and not only obliged to peel his own potatoes at dinner, but to earn them, also.

A most unlucky dog was Marshall. As fast as Mr. Cutten found him a job Marshall would discover that the boss was prejudiced against him, or the other clerks were shunting their work on him, or the light was awful on his eyes, or, in fact, any number of things. Marshall had a list of grievances and reasons why his manhood compelled him to tender his resignation, compared to which a recall petition loomed up in the dimensions of a cigarette paper. He was a nuisance, and finally Mr. Cutten, having gotten himself disliked by many of his business friends on Marshall's account, gave up the battle, and Marshall came to live with him while waiting for something decent to turn up.

Every day for three months he had gone up to the city with Mr. Cutten, ostensibly looking for work, but in reality praying he wouldn't find it. Finally he gave up in despair, and remained at home, doing little chores about the place, such as going to the butcher shop for his sister, sweeping down the front steps and the sidewalk, exercising the dog, and bringing in wood and kindling. A large part of each day, however, was spent in the Dutchman's pool parlor uptown, where Marshall demonstrated to his admiring friends

the ease with which fifteen balls could be put down without a miss.

About this time Mr. Cutten discovered that whenever he hung his overcoat up in the hall and left the change from a half dollar in the little side pocket, somebody always "nipped" the change. However, even then, Mr. Cutten made no complaint, finding it cheaper to harbor Marshall at home than foot his expenses abroad. Once or twice he did make a feeble protest, which was incontinently overruled, for Marshall was still the baby of the Hackford family, and on her deathbed Mrs. Hackford had commended Marshall to her eldest daughter's care.

I have forgotten to state that at the time Mr. Cutten made his purchase of the suburban twenty acres, he had considered it the part of a shrewd husband to keep this information to himself. For twenty years he had kept it and blessed the forethought that had prompted the idea.

About the time Marshall had become as common around the house as an old rug, the trust took over the concern whose books Mr. Cutten had kept for thirty years, and Mr. Cutten, while somewhat nearsighted by this time, could nevertheless see the handwriting on the wall. He nerved himself for the verdict, and speculated upon the advisability of practicing a horse laugh against the day of his retirement. He felt that his cachination must do full justice to his sense of contentment, for of late he had been the recipient of numerous offers from real-estate dealers for his twenty acres. He had steadfastly declined them all, holding out for a hundred thousand net, for he realized that with bungalows and alleged Swiss chalets springing up like mushrooms all around his twenty acres it would not be long before somebody paid him his price. And he was not disappointed, for eventually he received such an offer.

The offer, however, came through the most unexpected channel imaginable. A real-estate dealer saw the land, realized its possibilities as a subdivision, and at once sought out the owner. Instead of visiting Mr. Cutten at his place of em-

ployment in the city, however, he elected to call at Mr. Cutten's home during the latter's absence. He met Mrs. Cutten and unfolded his proposition. Need we say more?

No, except to remark in passing that it was a terrible blow to Mrs. Cutten. It would be a terrible blow to any married lady to discover, after twenty years of married life, that her husband has been concealing a hundred thousand dollars' worth of assets!

"Such a *sneaky* thing to do!" cried Mrs. Cutten. "The miser! Working away, year in and year out, when we might be traveling in Europe!"

Forthwith she flew into a rage, and called up Mr. Cutten. Then she called him down. Marshall, coming in for his luncheon about that time, and finding his sister in tears, was soon in possession of the tale of Mr. Cutten's duplicity. He said nothing, but thought a good deal. Later in the afternoon he strolled uptown, and casually inquired of the Dutchman how much he would take for his pool parlor.

Poor Mr. Cutten hated to come home that night. When he did, in the language of the classic, he got his, and against the torrent of the Hackford wrath his good nature could not prevail.

For a week Mr. Cutten continued to get his at home; then, on Saturday afternoon, at the office, he got his some more. However, he had been expecting that, so to his credit be it said that he remembered to laugh. He did more. He flashed a certified check for a hundred thousand dollars on the amazed trust manager, and informed that individual that he might, for aught Mr. Cutten cared to the contrary, invade the realm of his satanic majesty in a hand basket; after which Mr. Cutten removed his alpaca office coat, rolled it into a compact little ball, dashed it into the wastebasket, and left that office forever, stepping high, like a ten-time winner. It was the first dash of spirit he had ever showed, and possibly a great measure of it was totally unnecessary, but then he had been heckled like a caged bear for a week past, and his nerves were gone for the time being.

Mr. Cutten went uptown and banked his check. Then he strolled over on automobile row and bought an electric for Mrs. Cutten. It was about the only thing he could think of as a peace offering. Next he purchased for himself that type of motor car described as a racy roadster, and engaged a greasy mechanic to drive him home in style, while another mechanic—not quite so greasy, followed in the electric. On the way Mr. Cutten paused long enough to purchase his telescope.

Thus did Mr. Cutten return to nature, his white Orpingtons, and the scientific life which had been calling to him for thirty years.

His purchase of the electric was a knock-out stroke of diplomacy. Mrs. Cutten kissed him a dozen times, and cried with joy. Also she called him Jimmy all the evening, and this was something which hitherto had always presaged a raid on his bank account. So closely did Mr. Cutten's own joy approximate delirium that he could not find it in his gentle heart to reprove Marshall when that wart on the face of society took the racy roadster out for a spin around the block, skidded into the curb, and demolished a wheel. On the contrary, Mr. Cutten instructed the parasite to hold himself in readiness for a journey to the city next day for the purpose of laying in a stock of summer raiment.

For a week all went merry as a marriage bell in the Cutten establishment. It almost appeared to Mr. Cutten that the money wasn't going to be a bone of contention, after all, and he felt a little ashamed of himself for his twenty-year suspicion that a Hackford should never be trusted with more than thirty-five cents at a time.

During that week Mr. Cutten made his first discovery of benefit to science. In the lower end of his garden he unearthed a colony of Argentine ants, the first seen in that section of the State. They were a long way from home, and Mr. Cutten recognized them as strangers; hence he investigated, and discovered that the Argentine ant is a distinct menace to society.

Now, as those familiar with the alarming spread and pestiferous activities of the Argentine ant must realize, Mr. Cutten's discovery of the invaders into that peaceful suburban community was really an important one. Ants in the sugar bowl, ants in the cake box, and in the molasses jug, ants everywhere was the curse that threatened the community. Mr. Cutten immediately published and distributed at his own expense a pamphlet descriptive of the Argentine ant and his depredations, and advised housewives to place jars of sugar, diluted with water and arsenic, in their cellars. The poisoned sugar would then be carried by the ants to their young and the queen ants, and thus, by slow poisoning, the coming generation would become enfeebled and the pest eventually eradicated.

For this public work Mr. Cutten received a half column in the local paper. This, in turn, was "swiped" as a good story by one of the city papers. Jared Cutten read it, and scratched his head in a vain endeavor to recall what his nephew looked like. At any rate, he wrote Mr. Cutten a nice letter, commending his public spirit and the scientific zeal with which he had handled the Argentine ants.

However, the ant campaign had scarcely been started before Mr. Cutten received further evidence that the Hackford spirit was ramping abroad, with designs on his bank account. Mrs. Cutten came to him one day with the suggestion that really they ought to do something for poor, dear Marshall. Mr. Cutten gulped, and inquired mildly what she had to suggest.

"I've just given the fellow a new overcoat and a new suit to keep him from wearing mine, and I've just had a bill for a set of new tires he's worn out already, scooting around in my racy roadster," he said, with just a hint of complaint in his voice. "We're feeding him and boarding him free gratis, and have been for a year. Isn't that enough?"

"I think we might set Marshall up in business for himself," began Mrs. Cutten, playfully pinching Mr. Cutten's

ear, à la Napoleon Bonaparte. It was a way she had when she wanted anything, and for twenty years it had never failed to work.

"Wha-what kind of a business?" quavered Mr. Cutten, feeling himself about to slide from his high private resolve to cut off Mr. Hackford at the pockets.

"That pool parlor up on Main Street. Schultz, the man who owns it, wants to go back to Germany, and he'll sell at a sacrifice."

"How much?" demanded Mr. Cutten weakly.

"Three thousand dollars, Jimmy."

"Well, it's a sacrifice, I'll admit," retorted her husband; "only I'm elected instead of Schultz. There's a lot of things I'd rather do with three thousand dollars, my love, than let poor, dear Marshall play horse with it."

"But, Jimmy, dear, we won't miss such a trifle. Why, we're rich."

"My love," said Mr. Cutten, "when you've handled money as long as I've handled it, you'll realize that riches have wings. I've been creeping along close to the earth for fifty years, and, by George, if there's going to be any flying, you and I will do it. I haven't a very high opinion of Marshall's business ability, although it would seem that a pool parlor would be about his limit. I'll have to think it over, my love. I was never accused of throwing three thousand dollars to the birds in a hurry."

"Do look into the matter, Jimmy, dear," purred the companion of Mr. Cutten's joys, and left him to think it over; for in all their married life Mr. Cutten had never before temporized while being raided, and, with the keen intuition of her sex, Mrs. Cutten decided that haste might ruin Marshall's chances. She was content, for the nonce, with a half victory.

Mr. Cutten, really perturbed for the first time in his life, went down into the cellar to think it over. Parting with money in dribbles never hurts a generous nature, but it is the three-thousand-dollar gobs that break one's heart, and Mr. Cutten had a keen suspicion

that he was being worked. He was still thinking it over when it occurred to him that it was time to gather the eggs, feed his hens, and lock them in for the night.

Now, for some days past Mr. Cutten had been vaguely troubled. One of his white Orpingtons had suddenly ceased laying, although apparently trying hard enough to make good, and as there was no obvious reason why she should not succeed, the scientific side of Mr. Cutten's nature was all on edge to ferret out the mystery. Now, as he entered the yard of his hennery, he thought he had solved the problem, and paused by the gate to prove his conclusions.

An unusually large gopher snake was crawling through the wire-netting fence. Mr. Cutten, trembling for the fate of his prize chicks, saw the intruder wind his sinuous way across the yard, and slip noiselessly up the runway into the hen house; then Mr. Cutten followed, and watched his snakeship through a knot hole. He saw the reptile creep up to a low box in which a white Orpington was even then in the act of endeavoring to deposit her daily treasure—the same hen, in fact, which had so mysteriously ceased laying. The hen saw the gopher snake approaching, squawked in terror, and flew for her life. The snake, nothing daunted, climbed into the box and disappeared. Mr. Cutten, approaching cautiously, peered into the box, and to his amazement discovered that the vandal had wrapped his maxillaries around the small end of the egg, and was actually engaged in the task of swallowing it whole!

"Well, I'll be blowed!" gasped Mr. Cutten. "An egg-eating sucker of a gopher snake! Why, I never heard of such a thing," and forbearing to disturb the reptile at its meal, he ran to the house to call Mrs. Cutten and Marshall to observe the remarkable performance. On the way out he carefully closed the chicken-house door to prevent the escape of the snake.

But Mrs. Cutten and Marshall were out in the racy roadster, so, pinning a note on the dining-room table, instructing them to report at the hennery to

view a strange sight, Mr. Cutten returned to enjoy to the fullest the scientific delight of watching a gopher snake dispose of a hen's egg without even cracking the shell. By the time Mrs. Cutten and Marshall had arrived, the egg had almost passed the snake's lips, and the creature's head resembled the thumb of a boxing glove.

Mrs. Cutten fled in affright, refusing to look at the horrid creature, but Marshall, possessed of all the curiosity of lazy and worthless people, took keen enjoyment in sharing with Mr. Cutten his study of the egg-swallowing snake. Together they watched for an hour, while the egg slowly worked along the snake's alimentary canal. Its progress could be readily traced by the conspicuous lump which it produced in the snake's midriff, thus proving the egg to be still intact.

"How long, Jimmy"—since Mr. Cutten's retirement on the proceeds of his early sagacity, Marshall had adopted his sister's patronizing habit of calling Mr. Cutten "Jimmy"—"do you suppose it will take the gastric juices of that snake's interior to so work upon the shell of the egg that it will soften and permit the egg to digest?"

It was a big question. It opened up a line of scientific research, and like a falling star it dropped on James R. Cutten's inherited appetite for exact and definite knowledge bearing on subjects of no importance to the human race.

How long *would* it take the snake to digest the egg!

Mr. Cutten scratched his head, and tipped his hat over on his left ear in a manner suggestive of profound meditation. Marshall's query had opened up an interesting line of conjecture, so, not desiring to appear ignorant in the presence of his despised brother-in-law, Mr. Cutten spat nonchalantly, and declared with conviction that within four hours the lump in the snake's belly would subside, thus demonstrating the powerful action of the gastric juice as an aid to digestion.

Marshall Hackford shook his head. "It can't be done," he said, with equal conviction.

"Why can't it?" Mr. Cutten demanded. "Nature always provides a way. If nature had intended that a snake should not swallow an egg without the ability to assimilate it, the snake would leave the egg alone. It stands to reason. But that dog-gone snake has been guzzling an egg a day for ten days, and I know it——"

"It will take at least twenty-four hours, if not longer," said Mr. Hackford.

"Nonsense! Marshall, you talk like a child. If it takes a gopher snake twenty-four hours to digest a white Orpington egg, it stands to reason he wouldn't be hungry every day—and this fellow gets an egg a day, I tell you. And he sucks 'em down whole, for I haven't found any eggshells lying around——"

"Bet you the cigars he don't get away with that egg in less than forty-eight hours, if you think you know so much about a snake." Mr. Hackford was fond of games of chance on a small scale.

Mr. Cutten reflected that if he won he would be winning his own cigars, and if he lost he would be no worse off than he was before, so he was not interested in making a small bet.

"That old Uncle Jared of yours could settle this question in jig time," pursued Marshall. "Take a man who's studied snakes all his life, and written a book on snake worship, and there's darned little *he* don't know about a snake."

"I'll wire him," said Mr. Cutten impulsively, slapping his leg. "I'll wire him and find out. Marshall, you watch the snake while I run down to the telegraph office," and, quite aglow with interest, Mr. Cutten sprang into the racy roadster and scorched downtown, where he sent the following telegram to his Uncle Jared:

Have snake just finished swallowing egg from white Orpington hen. Egg is life size and intact. To decide bet please wire collect approximate period required for complete digestion.

Jared Cutten had just penned the last sentence in a paper to be read before the Anthropological Society, and en-

titled "Can Monkeys Talk? They Can," when Mr. Cutten's telegram was handed to him.

Imagine, if you can, an amateur scientist, nature faker, or whatever one may be pleased to term such a queer individual as Jared Cutten, presumed to be the court of last resort in matters snaky, receiving a telegram like that without being able to answer it! Contemplate for a moment the blow to Jared Cutten's vanity—he who had studied the habits of every snake in every zoo in the world, and any number of snakes not confined in zoos—Jared Cutten, author of "Serpent Worship," the man who knew every kink and fold in the spine of a snake from the time it was a fish until it became neither fish, flesh, nor fowl, but a pterodactyl, and flew, and had a two-foot bill with teeth in it, and gradually grew into a snake and crawled! Imagine his humiliation when he discovered that for once in his life he was stumped!

Now, to be stumped by a stranger is nothing, but to be caught asleep at the switch by the discoverer of the ferocious Argentine ant in America, and that man a mere nephew, was a matter which didn't sit well on Uncle Jared's stomach. The buck was clearly up to him, and he realized that unless he could answer the question he might as well go to the end of the class.

A snake had swallowed a white Orpington egg—a simple thing like an egg, and here he was, appealed to by the only nephew who had ever appealed to him as worth the powder to—ahem! ahumph! that is, appealed to as the High Priest of Reptilian Lore—and unable to deliver the goods! It was terrible.

Uncle Jared realized that James R. Cutten was not a frivolous man, for he had discovered the Argentine ant. He realized that he was not an avaricious man, for he had requested his answer collect. He had not seen James for many years, but he had understood from hearsay evidence that James was doing well. Come to think of it, James' brother, who called religiously twice a week, had informed him upon

the occasion of his last visit that James had retired, and was supposed to be worth considerable money. Consequently, and in view of the fact that he had written James, congratulating him on the ant discovery, this telegram could, by no possibility, be a far-fetched scheme to patch up the silence and—er—neglect of years. On the contrary, there was every reason for Jared Cutten to believe that his nephew had inherited his—Jared's—penchant for scientific research, and, if so, Uncle Jared could not afford to be caught four-flushing. He would spar for time, and in the interim dig into the authorities on snakeology. So he sent this message to James R. Cutten:

What kind of a snake?

Three hours later, with the problem still unsolved, he received this reply:

Spilotes couperi, unusually large.

It was the knock-out blow! While Uncle Jared did not know it, Mr. Cutten, at the suggestion of his brother-in-law, had looked up the word gopher snake in Webster's Unabridged Dictionary, and fastened onto that Latin designation like a bulldog to a tramp.

"Ha!" gasped Uncle Jared. "A burrowing colubrine, commonly known as the gopher snake. By Jupiter, James is no dub himself, when it comes to snakes. I can't fence with him another minute, and this affair is worthy of investigation. I'll confess my ignorance."

So he wired his nephew:

No data obtainable on colubrinæ. My observations of digestion of nonvenomous snakes rather perfunctory, or could answer your query immediately. Intensely interested in case now under your notice. Am coming down to investigate. Line cardboard box heavily with cotton batting, thus minimizing danger of snake threshing body against sides of box and crushing egg prior to digestion. Confine snake in box and handle very carefully. Watch snake continuously until I arrive, noting signs of gradual collapse of egg, if any. Make note exact hour snake swallowed egg, if such data obtainable. Will arrive your town eight-forty-three. Meet me at the station.

That telegram reached Mr. Cutten at five o'clock next morning, being deliv-

ered to him in the hen house, where he had sat all night, overcoated and blanketed, among his Orpingtons, watching every movement of the snake by the light of an electric torch, which he kept burning steadily. The snake, after successfully negotiating the egg, had endeavored to escape, but Mr. Cutten had tickled its nose with a straw each time it appeared over the edge of the box, so that the snake quickly withdrew and lay coiled in the nest, considering the situation. Eventually, becoming sleepy and torpid, he tied himself up in a lover's knot and went to sleep.

We are reliably informed that when young Lochinvar came out of the West and eloped with the bride, there was considerable racing and chasing around the home of the bride's parents. Well, that may be, but the racings and chasings that went on around the Cutten establishment following the receipt of that telegram made all the racings and chasings of history look like the demure activities of a Dorcas Society.

For the first time in her married life Mrs. Cutten got up early and cooked breakfast for Mr. Cutten. Marshall, who hitherto had occupied the spare bedroom, was given terse orders to vacate and thereafter sleep on a couch in the dining room, and Mrs. Cutten flew to make the guest chamber ready against the arrival of the honored guest.

She was too happy for anything. To think of receiving a letter, two telegrams, and a visit from the rich relation, all within the short space of one week! She resolved that no stone should be left unturned to make his stay a pleasant one, to the end that, upon his death, it might be discovered that he had been kind to her husband. Already she considered Uncle Jared's estate as good as settled in Mr. Cutten's favor, and her mind was busy with half-formed plans for the rehabilitation of the Hackfords and her own social aggrandizement.

The news that his learned relative had condescended to share with him his observations, even in such a comparatively unimportant matter as the digestion of an egg in the stomach of a

gopher snake, filled the honest Mr. Cutten with a sort of holy joy. Leaving Marshall to watch over the snake, with instructions to call him in case the significant lump should commence to subside, Mr. Cutten raced for the house, swallowed a cup of hot coffee—for he was chilled and cramped after his night in the hennery—and then commenced a frantic search of the house for a suitable cardboard box and a roll of cotton batting. To his great distress neither were to be found, so, springing into the racy roadster, he tore uptown through the silent streets with his cut-off open, rang the night bell of the local druggist, secured the box and a huge roll of absorbent cotton, and, disregarding the earnest queries of the druggist as to who had been injured, he returned to the house.

Here he arranged the receptacle for the snake as per his uncle's instructions; then, drawing on a heavy automobile glove, he got his courage in hand, grasped the snake firmly by the middle, and gently deposited him in his snowy couch. Marshall was then, to his huge disgust, requested to get busy and clean up the chicken yard, and accomplish sundry other little chores to make the place tidy, while within the house Mrs. Cutten was frantically sweeping and dusting.

"Marshall," said Mr. Cutten, as the hour for the arrival of the train drew near, "take the runabout and go down to the station for my uncle. You'll recognize him immediately. He's a Cutten from heels to hair. Apologize to him for me for not coming in person, but tell him I dassen't leave the snake."

So Marshall went to the station, while Mr. Cutten remained on watch. About nine o'clock Marshall returned with Uncle Jared, and the formalities of greeting over with Mrs. Cutten, the old gentleman went at once to the garage and greeted his nephew. His old eyes glowed with interest when Mr. Cutten called his attention to the bulge in the reptile, showing where the undigested egg reposed.

"A remarkable case, nephew," said

he. "A truly remarkable case. Knowing of my interests in such matters, it was thoughtful and kind of you, indeed, to apprise me of the facts. I appreciate it, I assure you. And now, as you have been on watch all night, I suggest that you retire for some much-needed sleep, and leave the case to me."

Mildly protesting that he was not in the least fatigued, Mr. Cutten nevertheless permitted himself to be persuaded to abandon the garage for his bed, where he slept soundly until five o'clock, when he arose and relieved Uncle Jared for dinner. After dinner Uncle Jared retired and slept until midnight, when he arose and relieved Mr. Cutten, who thereupon went to bed and slept until seven next morning.

"Any new developments, uncle?" he inquired, as he entered the garage.

"None—so far as the egg is concerned. But the snake appears nervous and uncomfortable."

"That's to be expected." Mr. Cutten bent over the prisoner. "His eyes are glazed and half closed," he added. "I do believe he has indigestion."

"Well, that's to be expected, also," replied the author of "Serpent Worship." "According to all available information, he has been eating an egg a day, and if he's swallowed them whole his system must be plumb full of eggshells. The glazed eye is significant of a state of coma, common to all reptiles after gorging, although his actions for the past two hours are in direct contravention of that torpidity which we have every reason to suspect, under the circumstances. I do not recall a more marvelous case."

"Well, he appears to have quieted down," suggested Mr. Cutten. "So you had better go in to breakfast. In the event of any new symptoms I will call you."

"By all means do," replied Uncle Jared, and departed for the house. After breakfast he lay down for forty winks. About the forty-first wink, which happened to be late in the afternoon, he was awakened by Mr. Cutten shaking him gently.

"What's up?" he demanded.

"The snake is dead!"

Mr. Cutten made the announcement with as much solemnity as if the departed had been a warm personal friend.

"The devil you say! And the egg is——"

"Is still undigested."

"We'll have a post-mortem," announced Uncle Jared, springing out of bed and into his slippers. "Got a good sharp knife, James?"

Mr. Cutten had such a weapon, and together they repaired to the garage. Mr. Marshall Hackford was there also, surveying the defunct, egg-swallowing snake, and as Uncle Jared lifted the carcass out of the box and stretched it on the floor of the garage, Mr. Cutten saw Marshall turn away to hide a snicker.

"What are you laughing at—you?" demanded Mr. Cutten sternly. He desired no undue hilarity at such a moment, and in the presence of his serious-minded relative.

"Wait," replied Mr. Hackford, with suppressed emotion. "You'll see for yourself in a minute."

And so they did. Uncle Jared deftly slit the snake up the belly, removed the egg, and tapped it tentatively with the blade of the knife.

"The egg appears to be in perfect condition," began Uncle Jared. "The acids of the stomach have had no apparent effect—— *Holy Sailor!*"

Marshall Hackford whooped aloud, bent double, and sat down in uncontrollable mirth as Uncle Jared picked up the gory relic and thrust it under Mr. Cutten's nose.

It was a porcelain nest egg!

"Well, James," said Uncle Jared frigidly, "all I've got to say is that you're a peach of a scientist, you are!"

"Har-r-r-r!" shouted Mr. Hackford, and rolled on the floor of the garage.

Mr. Cutten flushed a rosy red, and hung his head. "I didn't know it," he said humbly. He looked about him, as if in search of a hole into which he might plunge, and his pitiful glance fell upon his worthless brother-in-law rolling on the floor and chortling with glee

at the horrible predicament in which James R. Cutten was involved.

"You—you knew this right along, didn't you, Marshall?" he said weakly.

Mr. Hackford finished his laugh before it occurred to him to have the manners to nod his head affirmatively.

"It was unkind and ungenerous of you not to tell me," said Mr. Cutten sadly. "I must confess my surprise and chagrin, Marshall. I am deeply pained."

"It was too good," said Marshall, wiping away the tears of mirth. "If you'd only looked for yourself a little closer—har-har—before the snake— Oh, Lord, this will be the death of me—before the snake swallowed the egg, you'd have noticed it, Jimmy. You need spectacles, Jimmy. You've worked—har-har—too long under electric lights—har-har-har—" And Mr. Hackford leaned against the wall of the garage and commenced all over again. Jared Cutten stood staring at him, apparently undecided whether to fly into a rage and proclaim himself insulted, or take the whole thing as a joke.

"Yes, Marshall," said Mr. Cutten sadly. "I have worked under electric lights too long. But I worked for the Hackfords, and I was a fool to do it. This is my thanks—"

"The sight of you two serious-minded old nuts watching that snake would have made a cow laugh," proclaimed Marshall.

The world swam red before Mr. Cutten's eyes. He saw the trap into which the artful Marshall had led him; he thought of all he had done for the lazy beggar; of the miserable, selfish, greedy Hackford nature against which he had struggled so cheerfully all of his married life, only to be made a fool of in the end; and the monstrous imposition which was being practiced upon him by this overgrown baby, Marshall, was for the first time really apparent to Mr. Cutten. His learned, his brilliant Uncle Jared had been made the laughingstock of this contemptible laughing jackass—Jared Cutten, author of "Serpent Worship," patron of science, had been re-

ferred to as a serious-minded old nut! And Uncle Jared was his guest; true, an uninvited guest, brought down from the city on a crazy errand, but an honored and a welcome guest nevertheless.

Mr. Cutten, from long practice, could readily assimilate a shabby deal directed against himself, but against his honored guest such a joke took on the dimensions of a deadly insult, and with a sudden lust for murder, Mr. Cutten cast about him for a weapon. Nothing presented itself except the limp corpse of the victim of misplaced confidence, but that would do.

"You big bum!" he snarled. "You great, contemptible, malingering, beggarly, lazy leech! I've supported you in idleness for my wife's sake, and you have imposed on my good nature. You have humiliated me, and now you have the nerve to stand there and snicker at my Uncle Jared. I've stood for all that I'm going to stand from you, and now I'm through. Take that, you tramp!" and he struck Mr. Hackford a stinging blow with the late lamented.

He continued to strike until Marshall, with a shriek of horror, broke from the garage, and fled for the house and the protection of Mrs. Cutten. Uncle Jared, filled with alarm at the sight of Mr. Cutten's terrible anger, attempted to restrain his nephew.

"Leggo!" shouted Mr. Cutten. "Leggo, I tell you. I'm a boob! I'm an ass! I'm a monkey, but too much is plenty, and enough is always sufficient. I've been taking dirt from the Hackfords for twenty years, but to-day it ends. Leggo, I tell you! I've got a little housecleaning to do, and I'm going to do it."

So Uncle Jared let him go, and he departed on the trail of the viper he had been nursing in his bosom.

From the interior of the house presently came the sound of a terrible hubbub. Uncle Jared heard Mrs. Cutten scream; then he saw the front door open, and down the steps came Mr. Marshall Hackford on the toe of Mr. Cutten's good right foot.

"Skidoo, you hobo! Out of my house, and stay out"—kick—"and if

you ever come back"—another kick—"I'll kill you. Skip, you simpleton, and hustle your daily bread. Work or starve"—swat—"you poor, dear, delicate—"

Words failed Mr. Cutten. Besides, he was pursuing Mr. Hackford up the street, and he required his breath for running. Marshall scrambled over a fence, and disappeared across a vacant lot, running for dear life. Mr. Cutten shook his fist after him.

"Yes, I'll put up three thousand dollars to buy you a pool parlor, won't I? You bet I will—not!" and, hurling a cuss word after the vanquished one—a thing Mr. Cutten had never done in all his previous life—he returned to the house, where Uncle Jared was endeavoring to soothe Mrs. Cutten.

"You brute!" she shrilled at Mr. Cutten, as he entered the front door.

"Cut that," said Mr. Cutten. "Chop it—quick. Where do you get that chatter?" He came close to her, and suddenly she calmed, for there was a gleam in Mr. Cutten's eye which showed he meant business. He continued:

"My love," and his voice was as calm and gentle as it had ever been, "you choose right now between your husband and your family. Understand!" Mrs. Cutten hung her head, and a crocodile tear started across her cheek. "Any time you want to separate yourself from a good thing you'll invite that contemptible rascal back to this house, or let me catch you giving him money and my shirts and neckties! One Hackford's enough for me, Mrs. Cutten. Two is a crowd, and I'm not so old that I can't put up a rattling good scrap when my guest is insulted under my roof. Marshall is off our list, and off for keeps. Never forget it!"

Mrs. Cutten departed up the stairs, sobbing softly. Mr. Cutten turned to Uncle Jared.

Uncle Jared was smiling at him approvingly. "James," said he, "I was always of the impression that you were a mild man—too mild, in fact."

"Oh, I have my off days," replied Mr. Cutten carelessly. "I'm a devil when things go wrong, and every once in a while I have to prove that I'm old man Bluebeard around this ranch."

Uncle Jared slapped him on the back. "Quite right, my boy. Quite right. A man must assert his authority occasionally, but for all that you shouldn't be so quick-tempered. It was a rattling good joke, come to consider it, although I was angry myself for a minute. However, James, you have been very severe. I suggest that you go upstairs and apologize to your wife."

Mr. Cutten laughed—a short and ugly laugh. He shook his head.

"You don't know James R. Cutten," he said. "I rule my house with a rod of iron. I have to. Sorry to have had this vulgar domestic row during your visit, but he who hesitates is lost. I maintain peace in my family if I have to fight for it."

Right then Uncle Jared made up his mind that James R. Cutten was his favorite nephew and legitimate heir. All his life he had harbored the notion that Mr. Cutten was a milksop. He was mistaken. The man was every inch a man. He was firm as adamant. He had character and courage. He was all right.

Uncle Jared slipped his arm through Mr. Cutten's.

"James," he said, "let's go back and bury that dog-gone snake."



TEN TIMES A HERO

REPRESENTATIVE ROTHERMEL, of Pennsylvania, deserves a gold medal for his services as a life-saver. Up in his district there is a woman condemned to death for the murder of her husband.

Up to date Mr. Rothermel, using thousands of law books and the large brain cells which infest his head, has had her reprieved ten times. At this writing he is preparing for the eleventh.

The Chivalry of Carbon County

By Charles E. Van Loan

Author of "The National Commission Decides," "A Right Leg or a Reputation," Etc.

Why Bud left home. The story of a unique ball game played in the little town of Saratoga, Wyoming, high and dry among the sage of Carbon County; a game in which the contestants are the Baltimore Bloomer Girls' B. B. C. and a bunch of mere men that thought they knew something about playing ball

HIS back was turned to me, but the mournful howl of an automobile siren caused him to crane his neck anxiously, thus furnishing me with a mental snapshot of his profile. It had been three years since together we had flicked battered trout flies across the pools of the North Platte, forty miles south of Fort Steele, in Wyoming. At that time he had not worn the gaudy habiliments of the ridiculous curbstone ornament scornfully recognized in certain portions of the West as a "city cow-puncher," yet, in spite of his bizarre disguise, I recognized Bud McKinstry at once.

Bud was the friend of a friend of a very dear friend of mine, and his home, when he had need of one, was in the little town of Saratoga, Wyoming, high and dry among the sage of Carbon County. But what he was doing in the shade of the Flatiron Building on Manhattan Island, and why he wore an enormous gray, flop-brimmed sombrero with a snakeskin band, a blue flannel shirt with a red-and-yellow bandanna for a tie, high-heeled boots, and a few other obsolete trinkets, were things which required explanation, if not apology.

So I tapped him gently upon the shoulder, and, "Where is the fancy-dress ball?" I asked.

Bud jumped when he felt the weight

of my hand, and the face which he turned to me blazed with sudden suspicion. It changed immediately into a mask of pleased surprise.

"Well, well!" he cried, wringing my hand. "It's you, ain't it? Yes, it's you! And I thought it was a bunko steerer! I sure did. Well! L-o-o-ong time I no see you, eh? Why ain't you ever been out fishing again?"

This, and much more, came tumbling from Bud's lips, but when he caught me examining his regalia with a grin, the pleased ejaculations dribbled away into embarrassed silence. I must say for Bud that he had the grace to seem ashamed of himself.

When at home—in Carbon County, Wyoming—Bud clerks in a dry-goods store, and wears clothes which are, to quote the catalogue of the Chicago mail-order house, "the last, expiring sigh of fashion's latest whimsy; elegantly simple, simply elegant, cut, fit, and texture guaranteed," which is to say that the coats run to phenomenally long, slender lapels, buttons in unexpected places, and the trousers to three-inch cuffs.

"Why the masquerade?" I demanded. "Is there a warrant out for your arrest? Have you done anything which you couldn't tell a friend? If Baldy Sisson could see you now——"

Bud's face shamed the bandanna's flaming scarlet.

"Oh," said he, "I guess you ain't

Van Loan's new series of baseball stories began in the first May POPULAR. Back numbers can be obtained from news dealers.

heard the news. I'm in the show business now."

"And therefore can't look any one in the eye," I said. "Which is it—wild West, vaudeville, or the moving pictures? Out with it!"

"It's the movies," said Bud, with a sickly grin. "Ye-eh, I'm a regular actor now, riding the range in New Jersey while Larry turns the crank. Quite a bunch of us came over at the same time—under contract. Two carloads of brons. Some of 'em outlaws."

"Tell it to the press agent!" I said sternly. "You ride an outlaw? *You?* Bud, I'm ashamed of you!"

"Shucks!" said Bud uneasily. "Of course, they ain't none of 'em what you might call man-eaters, but they're ferocious enough for New Jersey. Run the film fast and it looks like the real thing."

"But I didn't know you could ride at all!" I persisted cruelly.

"Aw, let go!" pleaded Bud. "What folks don't know won't never keep 'em awake nights. I can sit up in the middle of 'em all right; I got a strap fixed through the saddle, and——"

"Pulling leather, eh? I'll certainly have to write a letter to Baldy Sisson!"

"Don't you do it!" cried Bud quickly. "Don't you! I might want to go back to that town some day. They laughed me out of it once, and I wouldn't wish to have 'em do it again. And, Baldy, he's the longest, strongest laughter of the bunch. You can hear him plum' to Wolcott when he gets tuned up. Don't you write him, if you got any humanity in you at all. Besides," he continued lamely, "I don't want to get my fool neck broke for a measly twenty-five a week—not right in front of a picture machine, anyway. You wouldn't, either. I never claimed to be a Thad Sowder, nor yet a Harry Brennan, and—well, anyhow, the strap won't show in the films." He paused and eyed me with a curious mixture of importunity and defiance. "Don't you go and write Baldy!" he repeated.

"I won't," I promised, "if you can give me any good excuse for traipsing

around New York in a Pawnee Bill make-up."

"Why, sure!" said Bud hastily. "That's *easy!* I was working over there in the jungles this morning. Something went wrong, and they gave us all half a day off. I didn't have no time to change. That's on the level. And, anyway"—was there a trace of disappointment in Bud's voice?—"people here don't seem to pay any attention to you, no matter *what* you wear."

"Of course not," I said. "Long-haired men and short-haired women create no excitement in this town, Bud. These people have seen everything in the freak line, and they wouldn't turn around to look at you if you walked up Fifth Avenue on your hands. They'd think you were advertising Rattlesnake Oil, or peddling souvenirs from the Alamo. You look the part."

"Aw, dry up!" said Bud weakly. "Some of the boys are worse'n I am. There's Charlie Fothergill. He wears blue angora chaps day *and* night. You remember Charlie. He used to work in the drug store at Saratoga. The bluest blue you ever saw, and a green silk shirt, with a canary handkerchief. That's going *too* far, it seems to me. Say, is there any place in this town where a fellow can go and see things on his afternoon off?"

"Why, yes," I said. "A fellow might go down to the Aquarium and give the fish a treat—they've got some Wyoming trout down there that would probably be tickled to death to see even an imitation cow-puncher. Or a fellow might run out to the Museum of Natural History, and see the stuffed animals. Then there's the baseball game. You ought to be interested in baseball; seems to me you pitched for the 'Antelopes.' Come on out to the Polo Grounds and see the Giants and the Cubs; that's always a fight worth the money."

"No, sir!" said Bud, shaking his head vigorously. "Don't mention baseball to me. I'm off that game for life." He spoke bitterly and, it seemed to me, with a great deal of unnecessary heat. "But

for a ball game I wouldn't be here. I'd choose the stuffed animals for mine. Lead me to 'em!"

Bud had twice hinted at a story, but I knew him better than to attempt to extract his confidence, corkscrew fashion. When time and mood were ripe he would tell me, and not before, but I believed I knew a sure way to hasten the ripening process.

With this end in view, I carefully steered him into that wing of the museum which contains the American bird groups, each in a marvelous stage setting of its own, where real earth, grass, and foliage blend into painted canvas so skillfully that the sharpest eye cannot trace the dividing line between the real and the unreal, and the brain is tricked into impressions of far horizons and deep vistas of open country.

"This," said Bud disgustedly, "is the bunk! D'you believe a bird ever had a neck like that?" He indicated a flamingo with a jerk of his thumb. "Let's go back and see old dinah-what-you-may-call him again; him with the bones. It says on the card that he came from Wyoming. If he did, it must have been before my time. If I'd ever met anything like that, rambling over them hills, I'd surely have taken the pledge."

"Just a minute," I said. "And don't hurry so. You've got the whole afternoon."

Then Bud, who was in front, paused with a gurgle of pure delight.

"Hey!" he called. "Come here, and look at these little old sage hens! Ain't they natural, though? Watch that fellow strut! Say, that's what I call *neat*. That's just the way you see 'em out in Carbon County."

"Ever seen that country before?" I inquired innocently.

Bud fell back a pace, and his eyes swept the canvas background.

"Moses and the prophets!" he ejaculated, seizing me by the arm in his excitement. "Look! Ain't that Elk Mountain over there? It *is*, as sure as you're a foot high! There's the cañon where the trout creek comes down! Say, *this* ain't no fake; this is the real thing! It's a little chunk cut out of

God's country. It's home, that's what it is—*home!* Carbon County right here in New York! M-m-m-m-mph! Oh, lordy!"

My moving-picture cow-puncher sat down on a bench and babbled incoherently to himself, while his eyes took in each faithful detail of a well-remembered scene. The artist had contrived to counterfeit the deep crystal atmosphere of that wonderful land which lies along the ridgepole of the continent, and, as one sense calls to another, to see Elk Mountain lying purple in the distance was to smell again the clean wind of that mile-high country—the wind and the odor of the sage.

From mutterings and ejaculations, Bud passed into a reverie, chin in his hands. After some time he arose suddenly, shook himself like a wet spaniel, and started for the exit.

"Come on!" he said thickly. "I want to get out of this bird theater as quick as I can. Your blame' pinny-poppy show has made me homesick!"

Under the trees outside I waited for what I knew must come.

"We've still got time to go to the ball game," I hinted.

Bud's language, in response to this suggestion, would not be a pretty sight in type. More silence.

"Say," demanded Bud, "did you ever see a female baseball club?"

I said that I understood there were such organizations, but that I had never seen one. Bud drew out a sack of tobacco and a packet of brown papers.

"You're lucky!" he said. "Wisht I never had!"

And then, with the spell of the sagebrush upon him, and a two-thousand-miles-away look in his eyes, my New Jersey roughrider opened his heart.

"Speaking of baseball," said he, by way of preface, "that team we had in Saratoga wasn't the softest in the State by no means. We whaled the everlasting daylights out of everything between Green River and Laramie. Of course, the Rawlins bunch put one over on us when they hired five professionals from Cheyenne. They beat us three to two in eleven innings, and if it hadn't been

for the 'ringers' they wouldn't have stood a show in the world.

"One day last June I met Baldy Sisson on the street. He was waving an envelope, kind of excitedlike. Baldy used to run the team—him and Comstock.

"'Say, Bud,' says Baldy, 'I've got a game for next Saturday!' and then he opens up the letter. Right across the top of the page it says, in big, blue print: 'Baltimore Bloomer Girls' Baseball Club.' Just like that. Well, of course, I'd heard about female ball clubs traveling through the country, and giving a kind of a burlesque on the game, but none of 'em ever came our way.

"'You ain't a-going to stack us up against anything as soft as that, are you?' I asks.

"'How do you know they're soft?' says Baldy. 'They beat a lot of teams in Colorado. And they ought to be a good attraction.'

"Well, that part of it sounded reasonable. But there's a lot of difference between a good attraction and a good show. Ever think of that?

"'I'm going to telegraph that manager to come running,' says Baldy.

"You'd be surprised to know what an excitement was kicked up in that town when word got around that a she-male ball team was coming. In a day or so Baldy got a big roll of advertising posters in the mail. All colors. On the top was a picture—made from a photograph it was—of a girl in a baseball uniform. Well, not a *regular* uniform exactly. Part of it sort of looked like a skirt to me. Loose and bunched up at the knee. Under the picture it said:

"MISS PANSY DEMARR,

"The Peerless Shortstop of the Baltimore Bloomer Girls' B. B. C.

"You know how a fellow's mind will get to running on photographs and things. The minute I saw Pansy's picture I was glad Baldy had made the date for us. She was a bird, Pansy was, young, and considerable of a looker. You can't fake up an old girl so that she looks like sweet sixteen; it

shows through somehow, even in a photograph. Yes, Pansy was young, and as cute as a little sage rabbit. I wasn't the only one in town that took a shine to her. Curt' Mahaffey stole one of the posters and took it home with him.

"Well, there was other things on the poster, too. 'A genuine scientific exhibition of inside baseball,' was what it said, 'as played by the leading female exponents of the national game.' There was a lot of that kind of hog-wash, and then came a string of newspaper write-ups, and not a knock amongst 'em. Down at the bottom was a string of scores. According to the posters, the girls had cleaned up mostly all of Kansas, and by awful one-sided figures at that. It got us to thinking.

"'You don't suppose this is on the level, do you?' says Henry Kamphefner, our first baseman. 'Did they beat all these clubs, or is this just an advertising fake? And them newspaper accounts! Did they pay for them, or how?'

"Well, we talked it all over, and made up our minds that we couldn't afford to have a lot of bloomer ladies traveling through Wyoming, advertising that they had licked the Saratoga 'Antelopes.' That sort of thing would set the town back ten years, and make us the laughingstock of the State.

"'Here's how we'll do it,' says Jeff Bloodgood, our catcher. 'We'll *play* these girls, all right enough, and we won't be any rougher with 'em than we have to be. We'll hand them a nice, polite, gentlemanly trimming—say about twenty-five to nothing—and if they paste up any lies about us we'll sue for libel and defalcation of character. Anyhow, we'll *tell* 'em we'll sue, and that'll scare 'em. None of these fly-by-night shows like to get mixed up with the courts.'

"'Yes,' says Fred Gilroy, the shortstop. 'We can do that 'r else take a poke at their manager. He's a man, ain't he?'

"But we decided that wouldn't answer. Jeff's idea was the best.

"Well, Saturday morning came, and most of us were down at the depot to

see the bloomer troupe come in. I didn't hardly think they'd wear 'em in the streets, but Jeff Bloodgood did. He said they'd do it for the advertising.

"As soon as the train came in sight, we spotted an extra coach—a Pullman sleeper it was.

"'Humph!' says Billy French, one of our boys. 'They put on plenty of dog, don't they? Private car! You lose, Dan!'

"Dan McLaurin, our second baseman, was pretty much peeved about that private car, and I don't blame him. Dan runs the hotel, and he'd been figuring on some transients. Had the whole place cleaned up on purpose, and went out at daylight to catch a mess of trout for dinner. I'd have been sore, too.

"Well, we stood around and watched 'em switch the Pullman onto the siding by the depot. That car was a regular rolling hotel, with a cook house and everything complete, and when Dan saw the smoke coming out of the roof he said he didn't care *how* bad we'd beat 'em, but he hoped it wouldn't be less than fifty to nothing.

"I got a peek at one of the bloomer ladies. She was setting by a window, combing her hair and fixing up a lot of yellow puffs and things, and her mouth was full of hairpins. I knew right away that *she* wouldn't answer to the name of Pansy. No, there wasn't nothing delicate about that lady. Or young, either. Some folks like these big preferential blondes; some don't. Me, I'd just as lieve their hair and eyebrows would be the same color.

"While we were sort of standing around, waiting for something to happen, the yellow-headed lady looked out and saw us. You might have thought it would embarrass her some to be caught doing her hair in public that way, but this lady certainly wasn't the embarrassing kind. She was the sort that can look straight at a fellow until he begins to wonder what there is about him that's so peculiar.

"She opened the window and stuck her head out. I took off my hat because I'm always polite, but she didn't

seem to pay any attention to good manners.

"'What's the matter with you yaps?' says she, and her voice was like her face—hard. Kind of shrill, too, like a parrot. 'What are you staring at, little boys?' she goes on. 'Ain't you ever seen a lady before? Or haven't you got the price to see the game? This ain't no free show, so beat it while your shoes are on your feet! Git!'

"Some more of the bloomer ladies showed up at the windows and passed out quite a line of conversation. I didn't see Pansy among 'em, so I came away. Jeff Bloodgood said afterward that he stuck around and jollied 'em back. Jeff always was a liar. He couldn't *think* fast enough to hold up his end in a kidding match with those ladies. Yes, sir, they seemed to know exactly what to say that would be the hardest to answer right off the reel.

"Well, we went up to Dan's place and talked some more. We decided that a real licking might take some of the freshness out of the bloomer people. Then in came Baldy Sisson with a big whale of a man that had a kind of a wry neck. Baldy introduced him as the manager of the girl team.

"Of course, him being a man, we could talk to him, and we started in. I don't know yet who made the first break, but all at once out comes a big roll of bills, and the wryneck said he'd take the short end of any two-to-one betting that might be flying around. He was mighty near mobbed, and I suppose, all told, we dug up close to two hundred dollars. Dan locked the money up in the safe until after the game.

"I guess everybody in Saratoga that could walk turned out that afternoon. People came from away down by Tilton's ranch and over on Jack Creek. It was the biggest bunch I ever saw at a ball game in the town.

"We were practicing, along about two o'clock, when all at once the crowd began to cheer and yell, and here came the bloomer ladies, walking two by two, the big blonde out in front. There was a lot of laughing mixed up with the applause that I didn't quite understand

at first, but I mighty soon tumbled. There, at the tail end of the line, was two of the biggest old battle-axes I ever saw in my life, one of 'em with a wind-pad, a catcher's mitt, and a mask; and the other one with an armful of bats. I began to laugh, too, until I noticed that the one with the bats had a wry neck; then I got up closer. Both of 'em had on bloomers and about forty dollars' worth of store hair, and they were painted and powdered and fussed up to beat the band, but a blind man could have seen that those two battle-axes were *men* dressed up in women's clothes!

"Well, there we were, up against it. For a minute we didn't know whether to make a kick or not. Henry Kamphefner was our team captain, and he had bet forty bucks on the game.

"'Look at them ringers!' says Henry. 'Maybe we ought to call the bets off.'

"'Call off nothing!' says Dan McLaurin. Dan hadn't put up any two to one, you understand. 'We'd be joshed to death about it. Let 'em have their gentlemen friends for a battery if they want 'em. The *rest* of 'em are women, and if we can't beat seven women and two men, we'd ought to be arrested.'

"That was reasonable again. I took a look, and there wasn't any question about the rest of the bloomer outfit. Most of 'em had been women so long that there wouldn't have been any excuse for mistaking 'em for anything else. Some of those bloomer ladies must have been playing baseball ever since the war.

"They knew their business all right enough. First thing they did was to scatter through the crowd and take up a collection. There wasn't any fence around the ball grounds, but if any of the folks in the crowd thought they were going to see that game for nothing, they had another think coming.

"I was warming up with Jeff Bloodgood when I caught sight of Pansy, and forgot about everything else. She was a little late getting on the field. The posters hadn't flattered her a little bit; they hadn't even given her all that was coming. She was just about the neat-

est, modestest little trick a man ever treated his eyesight to, and nothing like the others. They looked kind of loud in that foolish baseball uniform, but Pansy—why, to look at her, you'd say she never ought to wear any other kind of clothes! Slim and neat and graceful as a cat. The others looked big and clumsy beside her.

"The bloomer ladies went through that crowd, joshing everybody right and left, and bawling out the cheap ones something scandalous, but Pansy, she didn't have a word to say. I know, because I went over and borrowed a dollar from George Bainbridge, and when she came my way I dropped it into her cap. She looked up at me kind of surprisedlike, and then she smiled. Gee! It gave me a warm chill all over! I remember thinking at the time that it was a privilege to give money to any lady as pretty as Pansy was. Did I tell you she had brown eyes?

"Well, the bloomer ladies didn't take much preliminary practice, but the wry-neck, he got out and heaved a few to the other fat he-male, and then him and Henry Kamphefner tossed a coin. The wryneck called the turn, and sent us to bat first.

"Pansy went skipping down to short, the rest of the bloomer ladies took their places, and the big, fat catcher buzzed a couple down to second a mile a minute. Pansy came across to the bag like a big leaguer, took the throws as pretty as you would want to see, and chucked 'em back just like a boy. My, how the crowd cheered her! Pansy was the hit of the show, right from the start.

"Martin Carey umpired, and Fred Gilroy, our shortstop, led off for us. The wryneck sort of uncoiled himself, and broke a fast one across Fred's letters, and all the bloomer ladies began to chirp.

"'That's pitching!' they yelled. 'You've got everything to-day, Pearl! He couldn't hit you with an ironing board, girlie!'

"'Pearl and girlie! What do you think of that for gall?'

"Well, of course, that first strike and

all the joshing he got from the bloomer ladies made Fred mad, and he took an awful wallop at the next one. It broke toward him this time, and he missed it a foot. That rattled him so that he stood still and let Carey call the third one on him, and what the bloomer people did to Fred when he walked away from the plate was certainly plenty. I've seen some pretty fair single-handed joshers in my time, but the bloomer ladies had it figured down to scientific teamwork.

"'Ain't he the cute thing?' chirps the big blonde over on first base. 'I'll bet his best girl saw him stand up there like a cigar-store Indian and let 'em call a third strike on him!'

"'Mother's darling boy!' squawks the old lady over on third. 'Don't let Hazel make you angry, Clarence!'

"There was plenty more of the same kind, and the crowd laughed fit to bust. It was as good as a show for them.

"Pete Townes, our third baseman, batted next. Pete chopped at the first one, and poked a little foul over back of first. The big blonde ran right into the crowd, and made a nice one-handed stab. All the bloomer ladies yelled: 'Nice work, Hazel!' Then they whirled in on Pete, and told him a few things about himself.

"I'd been watching the wryneck, and beginning to see that we wasn't up against any tapioca. That old fat boy was *there!* He had swell curves, a dandy fast ball with a nice hop to it, and a change of pace, and when you come right down to it, that's all the *best* of 'em have got—that and control, and the wryneck didn't have no trouble putting 'em where he wanted 'em to go.

"While I was studying him, he pulled a stunt on Charlie Kennedy, our center fielder, and the best hitter we had, that made me respect the wryneck more than ever. He had a strike on Charlie to begin with, and he put another one right in the same place. Charlie took a good toe hold, and lammed that ball over third base pretty near a mile on a line. It struck foul, though, and that made two strikes. The wryneck saw that he couldn't afford to let Charlie hit

any more as hard as that, and what do you think he did? He'd been pitching right-handed, but he faced the other way in the box, *and lobbed up the third strike with his left!* When you're all set for right-handed pitching, and looking for a wide outcurve, it balls you up something awful to have the next one break from two feet outside the plate and come in toward you. Charlie was so paralyzed that he stood still, and never even offered at the ball. I'd heard of pitchers who could do that stunt, but I never saw one before. Amphibious pitchers are scarce in any man's country!

"I saw then that I was going to have to do some pitching myself, and when I walked out into the box I sort of timed myself to meet Pansy on the way. She gave me another smile. I'd noticed particular that when all the other bloomer people were yelling that Pansy kept her mouth shut, and attended to business. That made her stronger with me than ever. I like the quiet ones myself.

"Well, of course, I was out there to show those bottle blondes that they didn't have the only pitcher on earth. Up came the old third baselady. 'Maudie,' they called her. Two of the women were in the coachers' boxes, and as soon as I got my toe on the slab they started after me. I usually stand that sort of thing pretty good—from men. But what can you think of to say to a lady that wears bloomers? They opened up on me for fair. They talked about my face and my feet and the way my clothes fit me. It was fierce. I know my foot is *long*, but I take a narrow last.

"'Come on, Maudie!' they squalled. 'Here's Oswald, with the big feet! He's out there on the hill, and he ain't got a thing in the world but a chew of tobacco and a prayer!'

"Now, that's a fine way for ladies to talk, ain't it?

"I didn't fool much with Maudie. She wanted to bunt, but I kept 'em too high for her, and she never even got a foul. Then came Hazel, the big blonde. I owed her something for what she

said down at the depot, and I put the first one so close to her nose that she could have smelled it when it went by. She was hugging the plate, anyway, and I wanted to drive her back. Hazel didn't scare worth a cent. She shook her bat at me, and danced up and down, and said if I 'beaned' her she'd bust it over my head. What's more, I think she meant it.

"I fed her the old McKinstry special, the wide outdrop, and she missed two of 'em. Hazel was no piker. She'd swing at anything she could reach. I figured she'd be looking for a third one, so I banged the ball straight over, she shut her eyes, and popped a fluky little 'Texas leaguer' back of first base. Pure luck. Hazel wasn't built for speed, but any fat lady could have made first on that hit. I was mad enough to fight until I looked up and saw Pansy at the plate—Pansy and her cute little bat.

"'Come on, girlie!' squalled the coaches. 'Here's where we put the rollers under Oswald! Get a hit, girlie, get a hit!'

"I hated to do it, but I slipped Pansy one over the inside corner that nearly took Jeff off his feet. I was going to show *her* that I was a pitcher if I didn't do anything else. I tried it again; Pansy swung with all her might, and the ball came back at me like it was shot out of a gun. I just had time to get my glove up in front of my face when bam! the ball hit right in the middle of it and stuck there. I chucked it over to Henry Kampherner on first, and we doubled Hazel by forty feet, but somehow I felt kind of rotten about robbing Pansy of that hit.

"'Take the horseshoes out of your pockets, Oswald!' squalls Hazel when she finally got it through her head that we'd stopped 'em with a double play. 'Pretty lucky! Pretty lucky!'

"I ran into Pansy again as we changed sides, and this time she grinned when she saw me coming.

"'Pretty tough, little one,' I says. 'A foot on either side, and that ball would be going yet.' She never said a word; just trotted out and picked up her glove.

"Well, that's the way it started. Skipping the details, the wryneck pitched swell, elegant baseball, and when he got in a hole, he'd switch and roll a few down the alley with his left. He had us all swinging like a farmyard gate, and when you've got a team doing *that*, you've got the boys guessing. We put some men on the bases here and there, but we didn't seem to be able to hit 'em around, and there wasn't much nourishment in trying to steal—not with Pansy covering the bag and handling the throw. The wryneck hit me an awful soak in the ribs in the third inning, and I did my level darndest to steal second, because I wanted to be where I could talk to Pansy. I'm supposed to be a pretty fast little fellow on my feet, and I was up and gone with the wryneck's wing, but that fat catcher slammed the ball down like a white streak, and when I arrived, feet first, Pansy had the ball waiting for me.

"Along about the sixth we slipped a run across. Pete Townes drew a base on balls, Charlie Kennedy pushed him along with a sacrifice bunt, and Billy French brought him home with a single to center. You bet that one run looked mighty good to us. We'd forgotten all about beating those bloomer ladies forty to nothing, and, considering the way the wryneck was going, we were thankful for that ace. It looked big enough to win with, but in the eighth we had another guess. Old double-barrel tied the score on us.

"I hadn't been worrying so much about the wryneck being a hitter, because he'd been swinging at anything, but he came up first in the eighth and tied into one good and plenty. It would have been a home run if he hadn't been so fat. Of course, he blamed it on the altitude. He got as far as third base, and then he sat down on the bag with his tongue hanging out a foot. His bloomer friends certainly knew the fine points of the game. Hazel broke a shoe lace, and took five minutes to fix it, and then Pansy had to stop to do up her hair, and Maudie's belt got twisted, and between 'em all they gave

the old rascal a fine breathing spell. At that I'd have left him marooned on third base if Fred Gilroy hadn't played ping-pong with a ball that Myrtle hit straight at him. Fred made a high peg to the plate, Jeff had to jump for it, and he came down square on top of the wryneck. I've never seen a hippopotamus slide to the plate, but I don't need to. I saw the wryneck, and there we was with the score tied up and the ninth inning coming.

"By this time we was pretty much worked up about them two-to-one bets, and the bloomer ladies were chirping like a lot of canaries. That one run put a lot of life into 'em.

"We didn't do any good in our half of the ninth, and then here was Maudie again, leading off for the ladies. Maudie was tolerable soft for me. She was afraid of a fast ball, and I didn't give her anything else. Three strikes for Maudie. The bloomer ladies rooted hard for Hazel, but I got her in a hole, and made her swing at a curve, and *she* went back.

"Pansy waltzed up to the plate. She had a bigger bat this time. Pansy hadn't hit a ball out of the diamond all the afternoon, and Henry Kampfner, who'd been reading the magazines, and thought he knew all about inside baseball, wigwagged to the outfielders to get in close.

"When I saw that big bat I had to laugh. It was 'most as big as Pansy was.

"'Hey, little one,' I sings out, 'what are you going to do with that telegraph pole?'

"Pansy laughed back at me, waved her hand, and then I hope I may choke if she didn't throw me a kiss! Honest Injun, that's just what she did! You could have knocked me down with a lead pencil.

"Next thing I knew there was a terrible racket over back of first base. Hazel and Maudie and Myrtle and Jennie and all the rest of the bloomer ladies were yelling at Martin Carey:

"'Mister Umpire! Oh, Mister Umpire!'

"'Well, what's wrong now?' says

Martin. The crowd hushed up to listen to their kick. Hazel cut loose with a howl that you could have heard half a mile away.

"'You make that pitcher stop flirting with Pansy!' she bawls. 'He's been making goo-goo eyes at her all through the game! You make him quit it!'

"Well, she got the crowd a-going, and I suppose that's what she wanted. Laugh? They laughed their heads off. First thing I knew my ears were burning up, and I didn't hardly know what end I was on. I'll bet if I'd took off my shoes and dropped my glove I'd have gone straight up in the air like a balloon.

"'Come on there!' yells Hazel. 'Quit stalling and pitch! Call time on him, Mister Umpire!'

"I must have been pretty badly rattled. Wasn't that bawl-out enough to rattle anybody? I set myself to pitch, but I was so plum' full of other ideas and things that I mislaid the plate entirely, and before I knew it there was Hazel and Maudie and the rest of those squaws doing a ghost dance along the side lines, and the crowd roaring like a menagerie at dinner time.

"'What's the count, Martin?' I says. You can tell how upset I must have been to ask a question like that.

"'Three balls and no strikes,' says Martin. 'For the love of Heaven, Bud, take a brace! Don't let those old battle-axes scare you. Steady down and get 'em over!'

"Well, I knew I had to do it. I aimed the next one straight down the groove, and there wasn't a thing on that ball but the cover—not a thing. With three and nothing, I figured that Pansy would wait me out for a base on balls, and I heaved that one up there as straight as I knew how, looking to cut the plate where it was biggest.

"Pansy saw that it was a groover, and back went that big bat, and then bing! she landed on it as hard as she could swing! I got one flash at the ball as it went out over my head. It was another one of those low line drives. I whirled around, and there was Charlie Kennedy and Billy French and George

Perkins, all hitting the high spots in the direction of the river. Kamphefner had pulled 'em in close, and Pansy had crossed us by lamming it out over their heads.

"The next thing I noticed was Pansy rounding second base, and *run?* She could have given a coyote a head start and run him breathless around them bags! She was straightened out for third before Charlie caught up with the ball at all. Dan McLaurin had the best wing in the infield, and he ran back to handle the relay. Charlie let fly just as Pansy rounded third base, and Dan made a chain-lightning peg to the plate, but little Pansy hit the dirt like an avalanche, and Jeff never did find her in the dust she kicked up.

"*'Safe!'* yells Martin Carey, and there went our old ball game, two to one, and licked by the bloomer ladies! Jeff Bloodgood heaved the ball away, he was so mad. I don't blame him."

Bud paused and rolled another cigarette, whistling between his teeth as he did so. I offered some consolatory remarks, but Bud held up a restraining hand.

"Wait!" he said. "The worst is yet to come. I wouldn't have left home for a little thing like that."

He lighted his cigarette, blew a few clouds from deep down in his lungs, and resumed his narrative:

"After the game the wryneck took off his wig, and so did the catcher, and they went up to the hotel with our bunch. The girls beat it back to the private car. Dan got the money out of the safe, and turned it over to the wryneck. I got to say for him that he acted like a true sport, and did the right thing by the gang. Then Dan said we'd all have one on the house and we did; and then some more of the boys had a stroke of enlargement of the heart, and then the wryneck started it all over again. It got to be quite a party after a while. The wryneck, he said we'd given him the toughest battle of the season so far, but then I guess he was just salving us a little. Goodness knows he could afford to.

"Other folks dropped in, and finally there must have been fifty or sixty of us. Then some one—no, it wasn't me—suggested that it would be a right cute little idea to go down to the depot and give three cheers for the bloomer girls, just to show 'em that we were true sports, and knew how to lose like gentlemen. Everybody thought well of the scheme, and then Luke Fosdick got up on a table, and said if we were going to do anything of that sort we might just as well do it *right*.

"We'll get the band boys together, and go down there and give 'em a serenade!" says Luke. Luke played the E-flat cornet, and thought he was quite a bunch on that solo business.

"Well, that wasn't any trouble, because most of the band boys were with the gang. They rustled out their instruments, and away we went across the bridge and over toward the depot, the band taking an awful fall out of that 'Hot Time in the Old Town' piece. We marched up alongside of that private car, and opened the celebration with three cheers. Then the band played some more—rotten, it was—and the wryneck went into the car and brought out some of the bloomer ladies and introduced 'em. They didn't look any better to me in their regular clothes.

"I rubbered and I rubbered, but I didn't see anything of Pansy, so after a while I edged over to Hazel, who had borrowed the bass drum, and was leading the band, and I asked her about it.

"Where's the little shortstop?" I says. 'Why don't you trot her out? This is her party, and she oughtn't to run out on it this way.'

"Hazel threw back her head, and began to laugh, and she laughed so long and so loud that all the gang gathered around to find out what was so funny.

"Oh, Joe!" says Hazel to the wryneck. 'Pansy has made another mash! Oswald says he'd like to meet her.'

"Of course, the boys had the laugh on me, but shucks! they was just as anxious as I was to see her. They began to yell:

"Pansy! Oh, Pansy! We want Pansy! and things like that.

"'All right, boys,' says the wryneck. 'I'll go in and coax her to come out. Pansy ain't very strong for the rough stuff, but I guess I can persuade her.' And he climbed into the car.

"He was gone quite some time. We bunched up around the car steps and waited, and while we were waiting we made it up among ourselves to give her three regular ring-tail peelers and a tiger the minute she poked her nose out-doors.

"Finally the door opened, and there was the wryneck.

"'Gentlemen,' says he, 'the young lady was dressing, or she wouldn't have kept you waiting. Allow me to present to you Miss Pansy DeMarr, the greatest lady shortstop in the world!'

"He made a flourish with his arm like a ringmaster in a circus, and there was Pansy, standing in the vestibule and looking down at us. She had on what looked like a long robe of some sort, all embroidery and lace, and she smiled when we gave her a real Wyoming send-off with a tiger that started the dogs to barking for miles and miles.

"'Speech! Speech!' yells Charlie Patterson, and we all took it up like a lot of parrots.

"Pansy looked over at the wryneck, and he nodded at her. She put one hand up to her hair, and the other one went to her throat. I could see that she was fumbling with the catch to that robe, and just as I was beginning to wonder what was coming off next, two things came off at once—Pansy's head of hair and her dressing gown! She kicked the robe backward, and hopped down on the car steps—as

pretty looking a boy as ever you saw in your life!

"Maybe you've heard the sound that goes through a crowd at a prize fight, when one lad slips over a fluke knockout, and takes everybody by surprise, including himself? A sort of a cross between a grunt and a sigh. I'll bet there wasn't enough wind left in the whole lot of us to fetch out one decent, healthy cuss word! Flabbergasted? That ain't no name for it. And before we could get breath enough to say anything, Pansy made the speech we'd been asking for—made it in the kind of a voice that goes with pants.

"'Where's that rube pitcher?' says he. 'I want to give him a kiss!'"

There was a long silence, while Bud traced patterns in the gravel with his boot heels.

"At that," he remarked defiantly, "I wasn't fooled any worse'n the rest of 'em. That kid could have fooled anybody. Why, he used to be on the stage. One of those female impersonators. But you know how it is in a small town. Once they get anything on you, they never let go. They just keep riding you and riding you, and I got sick of it. Baldy Sisson had everybody in Carbon County calling me 'Pansy.' I couldn't stand that, so I ducked, but if you've got a heart at all you won't tip it off to Baldy what I'm doing now."

Bud rose, stretched himself, and looked at his dollar watch.

"I feel quite some better!" he said. "Come on, let's go down to that fish place, and see those Wyoming trout. Somebody must have fooled them, too, or they wouldn't be here!"

"Blacklisted," is the title of Van Loan's next story. He tells how a pitcher came under the displeasure of organized baseball. In the Month-end POPULAR, on sale June 23rd.



ANOTHER WOMAN IN POLITICS

CLYDE H. TAVENNER, who was elected to the new Congress last fall at the tender age of thirty years, attributes his success to his wife.

"While I was traveling over the district delivering the hot air," he explained, "she had charge of my campaign headquarters, and was taking in the cold cash."

The King and Captain O'Shea

By Ralph D. Paine

Author of "The Quest of the Golden Table," "The Guests of Captain O'Shea," Etc.

Before Johnny Kent settled down on his farm in the State of Maine to live the quiet life of a landsman he had taken part in many varied adventures on the ocean wave. Ralph Paine has told us of some of the exploits of this sturdy old engineer who, with his bosom friend, Captain Mike O'Shea, had sailed the seas in all sorts of craft. Here is the hitherto untold narrative of how Captain O'Shea and Johnny Kent did their best to place a king on his throne. A breezy romance of shipmates twain whose imagination and love of adventure led them into a danger-fraught enterprise.

(A Novelette)

CHAPTER I,

INTRODUCING HIS MAJESTY.

YOUNG Captain Michael O'Shea, shipmaster, sat by a window of the Jolly Mermaid tavern, at Blackwall on the Thames, below London. His companion, Johnny Kent, was a stout, red-faced, gray-headed man who had sailed the seas in many kinds of steamers as chief engineer. These two leisurely drank mugs of bitter beer, and gazed with professional interest at the crowded shipping of that great seaport thoroughfare which sailormen call London River.

The Jolly Mermaid was one of a jostling row of ancient buildings with bow windows and balconies painted in bright hues, which overhung the tide at Blackwall to remind one of the maritime London of towering frigates and high-pooed galleons and stout seamen of Devon. The near-by shore was filled with shipyards and weedy wharves, and a little way downriver was the entrance of the vast inland basin called the East India Docks, where soared a wonderful confusion of spars and rigging, and

the red funnels of the Union Castle liners lay side by side.

On the turbid river moved in procession a singular variety of craft—drifting Thames barges with dyed sails, square-riggers in tow, Norwegian tramps half hidden beneath uncouth deckloads of lumber, rusty Spanish fruited, coastwise schooners, spray-stained steam trawlers from the Dogger Bank, stubby Dutch eel-schuits, stately mail boats homeward bound from the tropics, sooty colliers from Cardiff.

They slid past with an incessant din of whistles, which, warning, expostulating, shouted the rules of the road in the language of the sea.

These familiar sights and sounds pleased Captain O'Shea, and he was contented with his seat by the window of the Jolly Mermaid and the excellent brew dispensed by the apple-cheeked young woman behind the bar. Amphibious loafers drifted in and out, or cast anchor on the wharf alongside—riggers, watermen, dock laborers, sailors who seemed to have a world of time on their hands. Their gait was slouching, their attire careless, and their con-

versation peppered with sanguinary references to their eyes.

"'Tis a restful place, Johnny, and as diverting as a theater," observed O'Shea.

The chief engineer returned rather fretfully:

"I'm willing to be idle in this bit of slack water for a while, and sort of pull myself together, Cap'n Mike. But this don't earn wages, and I ain't makin' much headway toward buyin' that farm down in the State o' Maine."

Whimsical amusement lighted O'Shea's bold, smooth-shaven features as he replied:

"I am not a man to seek a humdrum life, afloat or ashore, you impatient old pirate! There was a lot of fuss kicked up at home about that last voyage of ours, as ye well know. And there was a strong chance that we would be laid by the heels in one of Uncle Sam's jails for breaking the laws between nations. We are better off where we are."

"Governments are touchy, but it's dog-goned foolishness to hold it against us," grumbled Johnny Kent. "We were peacefully runnin' a cargo of guns and cartridges ashore for them rebellious patriots in the Caribbean, and most strictly mindin' our own business. That Spanish gunboat got in our way, and her intentions was plain blood-thirsty. What if we did ram her and then blow her up? She interfered with men who were tryin' to make an honest livin' on the high seas."

"Argue as far as you like, Johnny. It won't alter the fact that it was healthier for you and me to make ourselves hard to find."

"But it's discouragin' to look for another ship here in England, Cap'n Mike. We can't show Board of Trade certificates. We're fish out of water. American masters' and engineers' papers are no good among these Britishers."

"'Tis not easy to find our kind of a ship anywhere," O'Shea reminded him. "Big risks and big wages is our game. There are no revolutions popping the lid off in Central or South America, and we will sit tight and trust in my

lucky star. I have a gold piece or two left in the toe of the sock where I stowed it against times like this. And we have not sunk so low that we must sign on for a lawful voyage in a ship that does not dodge every smoke she sights."

Johnny Kent crooked a finger at the barmaid, and sought consolation in another mug of bitter, while Captain O'Shea turned to a morning newspaper and ran his eye down the ship-news column to note the arrivals and departures. Then he cast a cursory glance at the foreign dispatches, which might perchance disclose some disturbance of the world's peace and an opportunity for venturesome men used to alarms and stratagems. There was a report of the seizure of a German steamer for smuggling arms to a Persian Gulf port. O'Shea brightened, and decided to investigate the contraband trade of the Persian Gulf and ascertain who was instigating it.

Johnny Kent was moved to begin an aimless yarn about a certain wicked skipper of Yankee clipper fame who fetched his second mate all the way home from Cape Town doubled up in a hencoop as a punishment for impertinence. It was one of those garrulous, interminable yarns which box the compass without maintaining steerage way. O'Shea listened politely, but with a manner slightly absent-minded, having heard the tale of the unfortunate second mate and the hencoop in at least five different ports.

The yarn was cut short, and the two men screwed around in their chairs to stare at a visitor whose presence in the humble longshore tavern of the Jolly Mermaid was most extraordinary.

He was an elderly and very dignified gentleman, of a spare figure and the stiffly erect carriage of an army officer. His features, thin and rather refined than forceful, were given an air of distinction by a white mustache and imperial. From the silk hat and frock coat with the ribbon of an order in the lapel to the tan gaiters and patent-leather shoes, he was dressed with fastidious nicety. In a club window of

Pall Mall, he would have been a conspicuous ornament. In the dingy tap-room of the Jolly Mermaid, he was startlingly incongruous.

The stranger had the grand manner, and it fitted him like a glove. He was not offensively self-important, but one knew him to be a personage who expected the world to show him deference. The barmaid, who was no dunce at reading human nature, bobbed a curtsy, and withheld the flippant persiflage which was wont to delight the nautical patrons of the place.

A moment later there entered the tavern a brisk young man with a sandy complexion and a roving eye, who was smartly, but a trifle showily, attired—a keen, up-to-snuff young man, who knew his way about. With a respectful bow he addressed the impressive elderly gentleman:

"I told him to meet us here, if your majesty pleases."

The apple-cheeked barmaid was threatened with a fainting spell at the intimation that royalty stood within the tavern walls, but rallied bravely to suggest, in a fluttered voice:

"There's a tidy little back room, your royal 'ighness, where you can set quiet and privatelike without common folks starin' and gawkin' at your worship."

"Thanks. I am rather tired after tramping about the docks," amiably replied the personage, in the pleasantly modulated accents of the cultivated Englishman. To the brisk young man he said:

"Let us sit down, and look over some of the memoranda while we are waiting."

"Certainly, your majesty," quoth the young man; and with this they passed into the little back room and closed the door. A beefy dock laborer ripped out an oath of amazement, and clattered from the bar to tell his friends that "one o' them blighted, bleedin' kings was in the Jolly Mermaid, large as life, so 'elp me!"

That brace of exiled mariners, Captain O'Shea and Johnny Kent, gazed blankly at each other, and, being seasoned persons of wide experience, tac-

itly agreed to wait and try to fathom the riddle. They had dealt with presidents of uneasy republics near the equator, and had violently interfered in affairs of state; but a real king, to be surveyed at close range, was a fascinating novelty.

Johnny Kent had carefully adjusted his spectacles to his nose to survey this rare spectacle, and he now shoved them up beyond his bushy brows before he hoarsely confided to his comrade:

"I thought they went about disguised, Cap'n Mike, same as we run a blockade with no lights and the steamer's name boards covered up. Is he the real king, or is it just play actin'?"

"Europe is full of kings that have been kicked out of their berths," answered O'Shea. "Maybe this one is a has-been, but he doesn't look to me like a counterfeit. And I would not set him down for a lunatic out for a stroll with his keeper."

"He handles himself as sane as you or me," agreed the chief engineer. "But this is surely a dog-goned queer place to find a stray king."

"'Tis worth watching, Johnny. I'm on my beam ends for puzzlement."

Ere long there appeared from the street a bow-legged, barrel-chested, hairy-fisted man with a rolling gait, whom a landlubber might have classified as a rough and hearty British seaman accustomed to command vessels in the merchant trade. A captious critic would have, perhaps, surmised that he had been pickled in rum as well as in brine. Glancing at a card held between a grimy thumb and finger, he asked the barmaid:

"Is Baron Frederick Martin Strothers hereabouts, my girl? Captain Handy's compliments."

"If you mean the dashin' young man with the red weskit, 'e is settin' in yonder with his majesty."

"Right you are!" exclaimed Captain Handy. "My business with his majesty, but the baron has charge of the arrangements as minister of finance. A nipper of Scotch whisky, neat, miss, before I talk to 'em."

"What sort of a king is 'e, and what's

his bloomin' handle?" she eagerly besought him. "Are you makin' gyme of me?"

The hearty British shipmaster looked inscrutable, tossed the whisky into his heated coppers, and slowly assured her:

"Women's curiosity is the fatal weakness of the sex, my dear. A king is a king wherever you find him. And my advice to you is not to go bragging about and telling all hands that his majesty has patronized the Jolly Mermaid."

He trudged to the rear room, hat in hand, and timidly knocked on the door. As it opened, the quick ear of Captain O'Shea heard the mysterious personage saying to the brisk young man:

"A steamer of the tonnage of this *Tyneshire Glen* is what I wish. If your investigation has satisfied you that she is thoroughly seaworthy, and in good repair, and Captain Handy also recommends her——"

The door closed behind Captain Handy; and O'Shea, glancing in that direction, smiled cynically, and observed to Johnny Kent:

"Did you size him up? You know the kind. Every big port has them—broken shipmasters, disrated mates, beach combers that aren't fit to take a scow to sea."

"Sure! They've borrowed money off me from Baltimore to Singapore. As long as they can find a decent suit of clothes and the price of a shave, they'll throw bluffs at anybody that will listen to 'em. This Captain Handy must have sighted an easy mark in the offing."

O'Shea pondered for a moment, and asked:

"Did ye hear mention of the *Tyneshire Glen* steamer just now? Do you happen to know the vessel? I can't place her."

Johnny Kent grunted as if he had sat upon a tack, and answered with heated emphasis:

"Maybe it's the old *Tyneshire Glen* that was carryin' cotton out of Savannah years ago. I went aboard to see her chief once, and her plates was rusted so thin that I could have thrown a wrench through 'em."

Captain Handy had left the door of the back room unlatched, and a gusty draft of sea breeze blew it partly open. The watchful pair in the taproom had a glimpse of Captain Handy standing stolidly between his majesty and the minister of finance, and heard him huskily declaim:

"The *Tyneshire Glen* is a bargain at thirty thousand pounds—and you needn't take my word for it. Baron Strothers here has interviewed the brokers that have her for sale, and he knows the price they put on her. And they won't take a penny less."

"I have full confidence in the judgment of my minister of finance, with Captain Handy's expert opinion to assist him," easily replied his majesty.

"Most of my papers were lost at sea," hastily put in Captain Handy, as if to forestall an awkward question. "They were tied up in a packet, your royal 'ighness, when the *Falls of Clyde* steamer went down, and I saved the lives of forty-seven passengers, and was the last man to leave her when she foundered under my feet. The newspapers praised me so that a modest man 'u'd blush to repeat it."

"Baron Strothers has examined your record, so he informs me, and advises me that you are to be depended upon," was the warm assurance.

In the taproom, O'Shea chuckled skeptically, and said to Johnny Kent:

"'Tis likely enough he lost his papers, but I mistrust his version of the story. What kind of a flimflam is this, anyhow? The king and the minister of finance are discussing a rotten ship and a rotten skipper as if the both of them were to be taken seriously."

After more conversation which the listeners failed to catch, the trio in the back room ended the session, and prepared to leave the tavern. As they walked out past the bar, Captain Handy was arguing with awkward gestures, the elderly personage was listening courteously, and the brisk young man was alertly keeping an eye on both, as if he had an absorbing interest in the interview. In front of the tavern they parted, Captain Handy to turn in the

direction of the East India Docks, the puzzling pair of notables to seek the railroad station.

Upon O'Shea and Johnny Kent there fell a prolonged spell of silence. Each was piecing theories together, and discarding them as unsatisfactory. They were uncommonly shrewd men of their kind, but in this instance conjecture was all adrift. Of one thing they were convinced: This royal visitation had not been an elaborate hoax, and the explanation of lunacy was finally and emphatically dismissed.

"'Tis no case of barnacles on the intellect," was the verdict of O'Shea, "barring the fact that he ought to have more sense than to listen to the palaver of a rascal like this Captain Handy. Why didn't we think to follow them up and see where they went?"

"I'm too short-winded to make a good sleuthhound, Cap'n Mike, and it ain't dignified for a man of my years."

"Well, then, who is this Captain Handy?" demanded O'Shea. "We'll try another tack."

He questioned the barmaid, who was disappointing.

"He never showed hisself in 'ere before," said she. "You're more likely to find out about 'im at the docks."

"Say, Cap'n Mike," exclaimed Johnny Kent, with puckered brow, "ain't there some kind of a book written about kings, their habits and their names, and the various breeds of 'em? And where you're most apt to find 'em? Do they generally run around loose?"

"I'm not personally acquainted with a whole lot of them, Johnny, but as a rule 'tis safe to bet they don't come wandering into sailors' taverns conveyed by the minister of finance."

CHAPTER II.

A ROYAL VICTIM OF LAND SHARKS.

Next morning they carefully scrutinized the "Court Circular" of the *London Times*, and were more at sea than ever at discovering that the only visiting royalty comprised an unimportant cousin of the house of Hanover from

a German duchy, and the dusky ruler of a native state of India. That a full-fledged king and a minister of his cabinet, both indubitably Englishmen, could be strolling about London unnoticed by the newspapers, and unknown to the public, was fairly incredible; and yet no mention could anywhere be found of the illustrious patrons of the Jolly Mermaid, although O'Shea bought the morning journals by the fistful. For the present they had to set aside the episode as prodigiously odd and inexplicable.

O'Shea took it in his head to pay a call at a ship brokers' office down in Leadenhall Street, and Johnny Kent rode with him on top of a bus. They had made the acquaintance of the managing partner of the firm under the palms of a Venezuelan seaport, and he had cherished a strong friendship for this pair of adventurous rovers. He was anxious to find a ship for O'Shea, and the latter dropped in now and then in search of news.

The comrades twain were about to dodge through the traffic of Leadenhall Street and enter the office of their friend, when O'Shea plucked Johnny Kent by the sleeve and pulled him back into an adjacent doorway. A brisk, sandy-haired young man was also doubling among the stream of vehicles which roared from curb to curb, and aiming his course for the ship brokers' office.

"'Tis the minister of finance, Johnny," cautiously spoke O'Shea. "Look at him. There he goes, right into Tavistock & Huntley's, the same destination as ours."

"Why not go in and meet him? Maybe George Huntley will introduce us, and we can slip in a few questions."

"Because I do not like this sprightly right bower of royalty, Johnny. I took a violent dislike to the Baron Frederick Martin Strothers at first sight. And my hunches about people are worth heeding when they take hold of me as strong as this one did."

From their strategic place of observation, they waited while O'Shea came to the conclusion that the brisk young

man would bear a deal of watching. Flanking them, and across the narrow street, were the offices of steamship lines sailing to every part of the watery globe, the windows emblazoned with the house flags and names of companies familiar to the ports of the Orient, Australasia, and South America. This stretch of old Leadenhall Street, down in the quaint, labyrinthian City, was one of the cosmopolitan four corners of civilization. Surely with all these fleets of steamers whose business was dispatched in the low gray buildings, there was one that needed as skilled and resourceful men as Captain O'Shea and Johnny Kent. These gentlemen of fortune thought otherwise, however, and took little interest in the companies whose ships voyaged over the regular, orderly routes of traffic.

They surmised that the brisk young man with the red waistcoat must have business to transact with Tavistock & Huntley, for he remained inside for a good half hour. Then the watchers caught no more than a farewell glimpse of him as he hastily emerged and popped into a passing hansom. Thereupon they sauntered into the ship brokers' office, and were cordially greeted by George Huntley, managing partner, a stocky, bald-headed person with mutton-chop whiskers, who looked as substantial as a brick house. The spirit of romance was in him, however, and he secretly envied O'Shea his illogical pursuit of hazards for sheer love of them.

Steering them into a small private room, he plumped himself into the chair at the desk, waved them to a leather-covered lounge, and inquired, with much gusto:

"And how are my disreputable friends this morning? Anything in the wind?"

"'Tis still blowing a dead calm for us, but the weather is suspicious in one quarter of the compass," answered O'Shea, who was never one to beat about the bush. "Tell me, George, what do you know about the young man that just now whisked out of here—the fancy lad with the loud vest and the high-steppin' manner? If it is not

meddling with your private affairs, I should like to get a line on him."

Huntley tilted his chair, clasped his hands across a comfortable waistband, and replied, in his deliberate way:

"I have laid eyes on him only twice. His name is Strothers, I believe, and he calls himself a baron. One of those Continental titles, I fancy. This day of last week he came into our place with Captain Handy, who used to sail in the Blue Anchor service."

"Got in trouble with his owners, didn't he?" interrupted O'Shea at a guess.

"Yes. He lost a steamer in the Bay of Biscay, and the evidence went to show that he was drunk at the time. His certificate was taken away or suspended. I forget the details. He has had no ship since then. A rather shabby lot is Handy. As I was about to tell you, O'Shea, the pair of them—Captain Handy and this spruce young man, Strothers—came in to ask our cash selling price for the *Tyneshire Glen*, which is laid up in the East India Docks. We have no interest in the vessel beyond representing the owners, who want to get rid of her."

"And did you give the precious pair of two-spots a price on her?" blandly inquired O'Shea, as pleased as a kitten with a saucer of cream. He was fitting together a few pieces of the puzzle, and felt confident that they were about to dovetail very neatly.

"I offered them the *Tyneshire Glen* for twenty-four thousand pounds as she stands," replied Huntley. "It's all she's worth. She is a big steamer, almost five thousand tons, but she will need a lot of repairs. Captain Handy claimed that he had found a possible buyer in whose interests young Strothers was acting. Of course, we were willing to pay Handy a decent commission if the deal went through."

O'Shea looked sidewise at Johnny Kent, who on occasions was bright enough to see through a hole in a grindstone. They kept their thoughts to themselves, and O'Shea commented noncommittally:

"Of course Captain Handy is entitled

to a commission if he finds you a customer for the steamer, George. 'Tis an honest chance for the poor devil to pick up a few dollars. And so the young man—Strothers—came back this morning? Do I show too much curiosity in asking what he had to say?"

"You are welcome to all I know. He told me that the gentleman whose interests he represented had inspected the *Tyneshire Glen* yesterday, and thought she would answer his purpose. The price was satisfactory, and he would like a three days' option, which I was very willing to give him."

"And the price was still twenty-four thousand pounds?" violently put in Johnny Kent, with a snort as if his steam were rising.

"Precisely twenty-four thousand pounds, or one hundred and twenty thousand dollars of your Yankee currency, or thereabouts. Are you thinking of buying her yourself, Johnny?" said Huntley, with a broad smile.

"God forbid!" was the fervent response. "I'd be afraid to sneeze on board of her in the docks for fear her rivets would fly off."

"Oh, she isn't as bad as all that. A well-built steamer is the *Tyneshire Glen*, with lots of service in her."

"What she needs is a new hull, boilers, and engines," grunted Johnny. "Say, George Huntley, did this young man Strothers mention anything about buyin' the steamer for a king that is roamin' around London without any tag to him——"

"A king!" ejaculated the ship broker, blinking like an astonished owl. "Are you chaps ragging me?"

"No. Maybe the joke is on us, or else this English bitter beer ain't agreein' with us, and Cap'n Mike and me have been seein' visions and hearin' things that ain't so."

Huntley cast an appealing glance at O'Shea, who said:

"'Tis evident that you are not acquainted with our particular king, George. You do not move in royal circles. You are not in our class. We will tell you about it later. About this

young man that calls himself a baron—did he leave any address behind him?"

"Yes. He is staying at the Carleton, but I shall have no occasion to communicate with him. If the option expires I shall take it for granted that he doesn't want the steamer. If he pays down the cash I shall be ready to make out the papers and give Captain Handy his commission. Now you ought to tell me why you are so keen on knowing all about the business. If you refuse to explain, you are a worthless pair of blighters, and no friends of mine."

O'Shea hauled Johnny Kent to his feet, and remarked:

"We thank you kindly, George. You are a good-natured man, and we have made nuisances of ourselves. 'Tis the honest truth that we know very little more about this young man and the *Tyneshire Glen* than ye know yourself. But what we do know we will first investigate."

"You are conspirators born and bred," laughed Huntley, rather pleased to have what seemed an ordinary business transaction wrapped in romantic mystery. "Come and dine with me as soon as you have unraveled the plot."

They agreed to this, and straightway betook themselves to the nearest public house, where in a quiet corner a council of war was convened. Lengthy exposition of the facts was unnecessary. It was obvious that they had run athwart a scheme to defraud the confiding purchaser of the *Tyneshire Glen*. And their sympathies went out strongly to the royal victim. Whether or not he was a real king was beside the mark. He was very much the gentleman, and he had trusted too much in the loyalty and integrity of that enterprising young man who was called the minister of finance.

"'Tis as plain as the big nose on that red face of yours, Johnny," exclaimed O'Shea. "The two crooks are standing in together. Captain Handy recommends the ship as all right. This Baron Frederick Martin Strothers backs him up, and advised his majesty to buy her.

The two blackguards get a price of twenty-four thousand pounds from George Huntley, and they tell this innocent potentate that the price is thirty thousand pounds. The difference is six thousand pounds, thirty thousand dollars, which this pair of land sharks will split up and stick in their own pockets. And they will doctor the bill of sale so the poor, deluded monarch will never know what happened to him."

"That was what we heard 'em say in the Jolly Mermaid, Cap'n Mike. The price was thirty thousand pounds. And these Britishers call us a nation of Yankee grafters!"

"'Tis my opinion that a minister of finance like this one could bankrupt a kingdom, give him time enough," said O'Shea. "He is working the game for all it's worth. He will loot the treasury as long as it looks safe and easy, and then he will resign his what-do-ye-call-it—his portfolio—and leave his bunkoed majesty to figure out the deficit."

"That poor king deserves to be delivered from his lovin' friends," replied Johnny Kent, "or he'll have to hock the crown jewels to pay for his board and washin'. What's the orders now?"

"We will ring up full speed ahead, and find this king. If the minister of finance is at the Carleton Hotel, 'tis a good bet that his majesty is not far away. That busy young man will not separate himself from a good thing."

CHAPTER III.

THE BARON INTERVENES.

The fashionable Carleton was unfamiliar territory to the inquisitive mariners, but they strolled boldly through the corridors until they fetched up in front of a desk presided over by an immaculate clerk with a languid manner, who coldly regarded them, and appeared indifferent to their wants. After waiting for several minutes for some recognition, Captain Michael O'Shea sweetly remarked:

"Will ye answer a civil question, or

will I climb over the counter and jolt you wide awake?"

The languid person looked attentively at the resolute features and masterful eye of the speaker, and hastily responded:

"Beg pardon—beg pardon—what can I do for you, sir?"

"Tell me if a king is stopping in this hotel of yours, and does he have a minister of finance called Baron Strothers?"

"Ah, you mean his majesty, King Osmond of Trinadaro." And the clerk delivered these resounding syllables with unction. "Yes, he is a guest of the hotel."

"He is a real one—do you get that?" soberly whispered O'Shea to his comrade before he again addressed the clerk:

"We wish to see him on important business. We will write our names on a card."

"Baron Strothers receives such callers as are personally unknown to his majesty," the clerk explained.

"We don't wish to see the young man," said O'Shea.

"My orders are to send all cards and messages to him."

The two visitors drew apart from the desk, and put their heads together.

"The minister of finance will not let us get within a cable's length of his boss if he thinks we are seafaring men," whispered O'Shea.

"The swindler may have took notice of us in the Jolly Mermaid," growled Johnny Kent. "We might send up a card, and make headway as far as this Strothers person. Then I could knock him down, and sit on his head while you rummaged the royal apartments and found the king."

"Your methods might strike these hotel people as violent, Johnny. You're a good man at sea, but I would not call ye a diplomat. Anyhow, we will take a chance on running the blockade that this crooked minister of finance has established to prevent honest men from talking to his employer."

Returning to the desk, O'Shea picked up a pen, and wrote on a blank card:

Captain Michael O'Shea and John Kent, Esq., U. S. A., to see King Osmond on a matter that he will find interesting.

Promptly in answer to this message came word that Baron Strothers would see the gentlemen. A hotel attendant conducted them to a suite of rooms on the second floor which must have cost the royal treasury a pretty penny. At the threshold of a sort of anteroom they were met by the brisk, self-possessed young man, who gazed sharply at the sturdy, sunburned strangers, hesitated a trifle, and invited them to enter. Offering them cigars, he bade them be seated, and again scrutinized them, as if striving to recall where he might have seen them before.

Captain O'Shea, at his ease in any company or circumstances, and particularly now when he held the whip hand, asked at once:

"Are we to have the pleasure of paying our respects to his majesty?"

"You Americans are so jolly informal," smiled the minister of finance. "This sort of thing is done only by special appointment. An audience is arranged beforehand if I consider it worth while."

"But this king of yours takes a special interest in ships and sailors," suggested O'Shea. "And we have information that he will find useful."

Baron Frederick Martin Strothers changed color just a trifle, and his manner was perceptibly uneasy as he explained:

"I am awfully sorry, but he is not in at present. He will be disappointed, I'm sure. You are shipmasters or something of the sort, I take it."

"You guess right," was the dry comment of O'Shea. "I have heard that you are fond of talking to seafaring men yourself."

The shot went home. The young man moved in his chair, and looked painfully uncomfortable. Nervously twisting a cigar in his fingers, he replied:

"Ah, yes, now I know! You must have seen me at the East India Docks."

"There or thereabouts; but no matter," said O'Shea. "His majesty is not

in, you say. And when will he be in the hotel again?"

"Not for several hours, I fancy. He went out with the minister of foreign affairs to keep an important appointment. Will you state your business to me? That is the customary procedure, you know."

Johnny Kent was for denouncing the young man to his face in a vocabulary well stored with brimstone; but O'Shea nudged him, and smoothly made answer:

"It would please us better to see the king himself. We will come again, or we can look for him on his way in and out of the hotel."

The young man could not dissemble signs of impatience to be rid of these pertinacious intruders.

"If you have a ship to sell, or you are looking for positions, this is only wasting time," said he. "I presume you heard something of our errand among the docks."

"Yes, we have heard of it." And O'Shea bit off the words. "Well, Johnny, shall we go below and wait till his majesty heaves in sight? This minister of finance will give us no satisfaction. And I am not used to dealing with understrappers."

"You are impertinent!" cried the young man. "I have been as courteous as possible. You will leave at once, or I shall ask the hotel management to put you out."

Up from a chair rose the massive bulk of Johnny Kent, and his ample countenance was truculent as he roared, in a voice like a gale of wind:

"You'll throw us out, you pin-headed, half-baked, impudent son of a sea cook? No, Cap'n Mike, I won't shut up. I ain't built that way. Diplomacy be dog-goned! I'm liable to lose my temper!"

"'Tis a large-sized temper to lose, and I hereby hoist storm signals," said O'Shea, with a grin, as he neatly tripped the minister of finance, who was endeavoring to reach an electric push button and summon the police.

The fervid declamation of Johnny Kent must have echoed through the

apartments. It sufficed to attract the notice of a spare, erect, elderly gentleman in another room, who opened a door and stared curiously at the strenuous tableau. At sight of the kindly, refined face with the snowy mustache and imperial, O'Shea gleefully shouted:

"The king—God bless him! So this bright young minister of finance was a liar as well as a thief!"

Comically abashed, Johnny Kent mumbled an apology for making such an uproar, at which the elderly gentleman bowed acknowledgment, and said to the perturbed and rumpled Strothers:

"My dear baron, will you be good enough to explain?"

"These ruffians insisted on seeing you, and when I tried to discover their business they called me names and assaulted me," sputtered the young man, in a heat of virtuous indignation. "I was about to have them ejected."

"He was afraid of the truth," cried O'Shea. "We came to tell your majesty that he has cooked up a job to cheat ye out of six thousand pounds, and we can prove it up to the hilt. We caught him with the goods."

"That sounds a whole lot better to me than diplomacy," approvingly exclaimed Johnny Kent.

Bewildered by the vehemence of these outspoken visitors, King Osmond I. of Trinadaro turned to the sullen minister of finance, and inquired, still with his sweet kindness of manner:

"These men do not look like ruffians, my dear baron. They impress me as having more than ordinary intelligence and force of character. What are their names, and who are they? And what is the meaning of this grave charge they bring against your integrity?"

"I am O'Shea, shipmaster, hailing from the port of New York," spoke up the one.

"I am Johnny Kent, chief engineer to Captain Mike O'Shea," said the other, "and I hail from the State o' Maine. And we can show you our papers. *We* didn't lose 'em in the Bay of Biscay."

Strothers stood biting his nails and

shifting from one foot to the other, for once stripped of his adroit, plausible demeanor; nor could he find, on the spur of the moment, the right word to say. The royal personage said it for him:

"I think you had better retire. I wish to hear what Captain O'Shea and Mr. Kent may have to say to me."

The amiable monarch was unconsciously swayed by the virile personality of O'Shea, who dominated the scene as if he were on the deck of his own ship.

Baron Frederick Martin Strothers made a last attempt to protest, but Johnny Kent glared at him so wickedly, and O'Shea moved a step nearer with so icy a glint in his gray eye, that there was a moment later a vanished minister of finance.

CHAPTER IV.

OPENING THE KING'S EYES.

The etiquette of courts troubled O'Shea not in the least as he cheerily yet respectfully suggested to the perplexed elderly gentleman:

"Now, King Osmond, if you will please sit down and let us talk things over with ye as man to man, we'll tell you how it happened."

The personage obediently did as he was told; nor could he feel offended by the shipmaster's boyish candor. O'Shea chewed on his cigar, and his eyes twinkled as he glanced at the stubborn visage of Johnny Kent, which was still flushed and stormy. His majesty began to get his wits together, and to wonder why he had permitted this brace of total strangers to take him by storm. O'Shea broke into his cogitations by explaining:

"You are surprised that you chucked the trusted minister of finance out of the room and consented to listen to us at all. In the first place, we are not asking anything of you. What I mean is, we felt bound to put you next to the dirty deal that was framed up to rob ye."

"We saw you in the Jolly Mermaid

tavern, and we liked your looks," ingenuously added Johnny Kent. "We decided to do you a good turn whether we ever saw the color of your money or not."

"And we didn't like the cut of the jib of your minister of finance," resumed O'Shea. "And we were dead sure that Captain Handy was rotten."

King Osmond earnestly interrupted:

"But I have had all the confidence in the world in Baron Strothers; and as a British sailor of the tarry breed, Captain Handy——"

"The two of them are tarred with the same brush," exclaimed O'Shea. "They fixed it up between them to pay twenty-four thousand pounds for the *Tyneshire Glen*, and sell her to you for thirty thousand. 'Tis a simple matter to produce the evidence. Send a messenger to Tavistock & Huntley, in Leadenhall Street. The managing partner will be glad to come here at once. He named the price to Captain Handy and your precious minister of finance. 'Tis a clear case."

"You can buy her yourself from George Huntley, and he'll be darn glad to get his price," chimed in Johnny Kent. "That ought to prove it. But if you'll listen to me you'll have nothin' to do with the *Tyneshire Glen*."

The faith of King Osmond in human nature had been severely jarred, but somehow he could not doubt the statements of these headstrong, rugged men, who drove their words home as with a sledge hammer. Toward the graceless minister of finance he felt more sorrow than anger as he wove together in his mind this and that circumstance of previous transactions which should have made him more vigilant. But the culprit was the son of a dear friend, and his credentials had been impeccable. The king had become fond of him.

"I shall obtain from Tavistock & Huntley confirmation of your story, as you suggest," he slowly replied to O'Shea. "In the meantime, I wish you would tell me about yourselves."

"We are looking for big risks and

big wages," said O'Shea, with a smile. "Johnny Kent and I are better known in the ports of the Spanish Main than in London River. We have made voyages to Haiti and Honduras and Cuba without the consent of the lawful governments, and we know our trade."

King Osmond reflectively stroked his white imperial, and his face assumed an expression of vivid interest. These men were different from Captain Handy. They would neither cringe nor lie to him, and they looked him squarely between the eyes. He desired to draw them out, to let them talk at their leisure.

"Will you be good enough to come into my own rooms?" said he. "We shall find more privacy and comfort. I should like to hear of your adventures along the Spanish Main."

With a courteous gesture, he showed them into a much larger and more luxurious room, which was furnished and used as a library or private office, inasmuch as a large, flat-topped desk was strewn with books, pamphlets, and documents, and many more of them were piled on tables and on shelves against the walls. As a temporary headquarters for royalty at work, the room suggested industry and the administration of large affairs.

So friendly and unconventional was the reception granted them that Captain O'Shea and Johnny Kent were made to feel that their intrusion demanded no more explanations or apologies. Their curiosity fairly tormented them. It was on the tips of their tongues to ask the host what kind of a kingdom was his, and where it was situated; but this would be rudeness. O'Shea took note of several admiralty charts on the desk, two of them unrolled, with the corners pinned down, and a rule and dividers for measuring distances.

King Osmond, sympathetic and tactful, encouraged O'Shea to spin the yarn of his latest voyage—of a contraband cargo of arms, a steamer that fought her way clear of the enemy and all but foundered before she was beached and abandoned on a lonely coral key.

While O'Shea was telling the story, Johnny Kent let his eyes wander to a small table at his elbow. It was covered with magazines, government reports, and newspaper clippings. One of the latter was so placed that he could read it from where he sat, and with absorbed interest he perused the following paragraphs:

Colonel Osmond George Sydenham-Leach, of the ancient Norfolk family, has lived on the Continent for the last dozen years, and is better known to the boulevards of Paris than to London. He was never considered eccentric until quite recently, when his claim to the island of Trinadaro, in the South Atlantic, as a sovereign realm aroused much interest and amusement. He has assumed the title of King Osmond I.

It is said that he has created an order of nobility, and that the Insignia of the Grand Cross of Trinadaro has been bestowed upon the fortunate gentlemen comprising his cabinet and circle of advisers. A court circular is expected to appear shortly, and a diplomatic service will be organized.

Until his majesty is ready to sail for Trinadaro to occupy his principality, the royal entourage will be found in the state apartments of the Hotel Carleton. Elaborate preparations are in progress for colonizing the island of Trinadaro, and a shipload of people and material will leave London in a few weeks.

King Osmond the First has a very large fortune. He is unmarried, and his estates, at his death, will pass to the children of his only brother, Sir Wilfred Sydenham-Leach, of Haselton-on-Trent. The kinfolk of his majesty are alarmed, so it is reliably reported, lest his wealth will be squandered on this curiously medieval conception of setting up an independent principality upon an unproductive, volcanic island in mid-ocean which no nation has taken the trouble to annex.

Slowly and carefully Johnny Kent waded through this information, with never a flicker of a smile. His face was enjoyably absorbed. The solution of the mystery of King Osmond I. impressed him as neither grotesque nor curiously medieval. The blustering, simple-hearted chief engineer was in his own way a dreamer of dreams, a follower of visions, although he assumed that he had linked himself with the troubled fortunes of Captain Mike O'Shea merely for the sake of double wages and a bonus at the end of the voyage. In all London the King of Trinadaro could not have found two

men of readier mind to fall in with his project and his pretensions than these. To play at being a king on a desert island, to have the means to make it all come true—why, thought Johnny Kent, and he knew O'Shea would instantly agree with him, every living man with the spirit of youth in him would jump at the chance.

He was anxious to pass the tidings on to O'Shea, and when the conversation slackened he edged in, with an excited flourish of his fist:

"We must be on our way, Cap'n Mike. His majesty is good-hearted to listen to us, but it ain't polite to talk his ear off."

With this speech went so eloquent a wink that O'Shea comprehended that the engineer had something up his sleeve. Their host cordially declared that he must see them again, and made an appointment for ten o'clock of the next forenoon. They took their departure after friendly farewells, and steered a course for Blackwall and the haven of the Jolly Mermaid.

O'Shea was as delighted as a boy to learn that King Osmond was about to found an island kingdom. It was a more attractive revelation than if he had been discovered to be the inconsequential ruler of some effete little domain of Europe. And if one planned to set himself up in business as a sovereign it was proper to use all the pomp and trappings and ceremony that belonged with the game. O'Shea was heart and soul in sympathy with the dreams and plans of the gentle elderly eccentric who had the imagination to play the part with scrupulous attention to detail.

"If he is to have a navy," cried O'Shea as he pounded his comrade on the back, "I know where he can find an admiral and a fleet engineer."

"Not so fast, Cap'n Mike. I have a notion that he'll have his own troubles gettin' to his kingdom. Any man that can be bunkoed as easy as he was is liable to have all his playthings took away from him before he has a chance to use 'em. I'll feel safer about him when he gets clear of London River."

CHAPTER V.

THE POTENTIAL LAWBREAKER.

Before seeking the royal audience next morning, they went to Leadenhall Street to see George Huntley. The ship broker greeted them indignantly.

"You would try to hoodwink me, would you?" exclaimed he. "I have found out who your mysterious king is. I received a letter from him last night, asking information about the price of the *Tyneshire Glen*. By Jove, I had no idea it was this crazy Colonel Sydenham-Leach, who calls himself ruler of Trinadaro."

"Own up like a man, George," shouted O'Shea. "You would like nothing better than to be this kind of a king yourself."

The stolid-looking ship broker laughed, and confessed:

"You have read my thoughts like a wizard. It would be a jolly lark—what! But, confound you, you have spoiled the sale of a steamer for me. How about that?"

"We've tried to keep an estimable king from going to Davy Jones' locker in a floating coffin that ye call the *Tyneshire Glen*," severely retorted O'Shea. "If he will sign us on as councilors, we will find him a real ship, and we will recommend him to deal with you. Have ye any steamers that will pass honest men's inspection?"

"Plenty of them," promptly answered Huntley.

"Then we will look at two or three of them after we have paid our respects to his majesty. We'll not let him be cheated out of his eyeteeth. We have decided to protect him. He belongs to us. Isn't that so, Johnny?"

"He needs us bad, Cap'n Mike."

Huntley became serious, and took them into the rear office before he confided:

"I don't know, I'm sure, whether you chaps are joking or not. However, here is a bit of news for you on the quiet. I met a friend of mine—a barrister—yesterday. We had luncheon at the Cheshire Cheese, and something or other set him to talking about this

Sydenham-Leach affair. It seems that the lawyers are quite keen about it. The family relations are planning to kick up a devil of a row, to bring proceedings under the lunacy act, and prevent this King Osmond from sailing off to his silly island of Trinadaro. They hate to see a fortune thrown away in this mad enterprise, as they call it."

O'Shea was righteously wrathful as he flung out:

"The mean-spirited, meddling skunks! Would they interfere with a gentleman and his diversions? Hasn't he a right to spend his money as he pleases? Have ye ever seen him, George? He is a grand man to meet, and 'tis proud we are to be his friends."

"Oh, I fancy they will have a job to prove he is insane," said Huntley. "But they may make a pot of trouble for him."

"I suppose they can pester him with all kinds of legal foolishness, and haul him before the courts, and so on," agreed O'Shea. "It would break his heart, and spoil all his fun. 'Tis an outrageous shame, George. What is the system in this country when they want to investigate a man's top story?"

"I asked the barrister chap," replied Huntley. "The friends of the person suspected of being dotty—generally the near relatives—lay the case before one of the judges in lunacy, and he orders an inquiry, which is held before one of the masters in lunacy. Then if the alleged lunatic demands a trial by jury he gets it. If he can't convince them that he is sound in the thinker, then his estate is put in charge of a committee duly appointed by law."

O'Shea listened glumly, and glowered his intense displeasure. If the law could interfere with a man who wished to be a king on an island which nobody else wanted, then the law was all wrong.

"And these indecent relatives who want his money will wait and spring a surprise on him," said the aggrieved shipmaster. "They will take his ship away from him, and knock all his beautiful schemes into a cocked hat."

"I imagine he would not be allowed to leave England if the proceedings were started," said Huntley.

Johnny Kent, who had been darkly meditating, aroused himself to shout explosively:

"We'll get him to sea in his ship whenever he wants to sail, and the relatives and the judges and the masters in lunacy be darned. It ain't the first time that you and me have broken laws in a good cause, Cap'n Mike. You come along with us, George Huntley. We're on our way to have a confab with his majesty, and maybe you can do some business with him right off the reel. He ought to load his ship and head for blue water as quick as the Lord will let him. If he's a lunatic, then the most of us is queer."

"Without bragging about ourselves, I guess we can take his majesty to sea whenever he wants to go," quoth Captain O'Shea.

CHAPTER VI.

A REGULAR YANKEE TRICK.

Behold, then, that pair of exiled Yankee mariners, Captain Michael O'Shea and Johnny Kent, stanchly enlisted on the side of King Osmond I. of Trinadaro against the designs of all who would thwart his gorgeous and impracticable purposes. That his rank and title were self-assumed, and his realm as yet unpeopled, impressed these ingenuous sailormen as neither shadowy nor absurd. Their services were at his disposal. They would cheerfully face any risks and obstacles to make that distant island in the South Atlantic what O'Shea called "all shipshape and ready for the king business."

Once they had gained the royal ear, it was a matter of course that they should win the royal confidence. King Osmond I. was an elderly gentleman of a singularly guileless disposition, and the notoriety attending his unique project had caused him to be surrounded by persons who knew precisely what they wanted. Of these the vanished minister of finance, Baron Frederick

Martin Strothers, of the brisk demeanor and the red waistcoat, had been a conspicuous example.

It was really a rare piece of good fortune for the amiable monarch that there should have come to his aid two such hard-headed and honest adventurers as O'Shea and Johnny Kent. Their advice concerning things nautical was eminently sound; besides which, they were apt to prove a match for the attempts of the relatives of King Osmond, formerly known as Colonel Sydenham-Leach, to prevent him from sailing away to his distant principality.

The result of several conversations was that O'Shea and Johnny Kent were engaged to select a steamer for purchase, and to take charge of her for the voyage to Trinadaro. Their qualifications were warmly indorsed by the well-known ship-broking firm of Tavistock & Huntley, of Leadenhall Street. The managing partner, George Huntley, that solid man with the mutton-chop whiskers and the romantic temperament, was delighted with the arrangement, and took a boyish interest in every detail of the picturesque enterprise. It would have been a temptation not easy to resist if King Osmond had offered him the place of minister of marine, with the bestowal of the insignia of the Grand Cross of Trinadaro.

The august personage was prodigiously busy. Several secretaries and stenographers toiled like mad to handle the vast amount of clerical work and correspondence. To establish a ready-made kingdom from the ground up is no small task. The king planned to carry with him a sort of vanguard of subjects, or colonists, who were to erect buildings, set up machinery, till the soil, prospect for mineral wealth, and otherwise lay the foundations of empire. These pioneers were largely recruited from his own estates and villages in Norfolk, and formed a sturdy company of British yeomanry.

Concerning the natural advantages and resources of Trinadaro as a theater for this drama of royal ambitions

and activities, the king and Captain Michael O'Shea became involved in earnest argument. The shipmaster was never one to smother his opinions from motives of flattery or self-interest, and what information about Trinadaro he had been about to pick up on his own account was not dyed in glowing colors.

"I have not seen the island meself, your majesty," said he; "but the 'Sailing Directions' set it down as mostly tall rocks, with a difficult landing place and a dense population of hungry land crabs as big as your hat. And if it was any good would not some one of these benevolent powers have gobbled it up long ago?"

King Osmond appeared untroubled, and to such objections as this he pleasantly made answer:

"Several years ago I made a long voyage in a sailing ship on account of my health, Captain O'Shea, and we touched at Trinadaro to get turtles and fresh water. It was then that I conceived the idea of taking possession of the island as an independent principality. Although it has a most forbidding aspect from seaward, there is an inland plateau fit for cultivation and settlement. It contains the ruined stone walls of an ancient town founded by the early Portuguese navigators. And it is well to remember," concluded the monarch of Trinadaro, with a whimsical smile, "that available domains are so scarce that one should not be too particular. Trinadaro appears to have been overlooked."

"'Tis the rule that the Christian nations will steal any territory that isn't nailed down," was the dubious comment of O'Shea. "They must have a poor opinion of Trinadaro; but, as ye say, 'tis about the only chance that's left for a king to work at his trade with a brand-new sign over the door."

Johnny Kent spent most of his time downriver among the London docks. Wherever seagoing steamers were for sale or charter his bulky figure might have been seen trudging from deck to engine room. George Huntley showed him the best vessels the firm had to

offer, but the gray-haired mariner was bound to do his own investigating, explaining with brutal candor to the friendly ship broker:

"You're a nice man, George, and I'm fond of you, but you ain't sellin' ships for your health, and you can't help bein' a mite prejudiced in your own favor."

At length, with the royal approval, O'Shea had the purchase papers made out for the fine steamer *Tarlinton*, which was berthed in a basin of the East India Docks. She was a modern, well-equipped freighter of four thousand tons which had been in the Australian trade and could be fitted for sea at a few days' notice. The transfer of ownership was given no needless publicity. George Huntley attended to that. He had another interview with his friend, the barrister, who hinted at forthcoming events which gravely threatened the peace and welfare of Osmond I., the kingdom of Trinadaro, and the ship in which the ruler, his court, his colonists, and his cargo were to sail.

O'Shea and Johnny Kent discussed this latest information at supper in the Jolly Mermaid tavern, with a platter of fried sole between them.

"'Tis this way," explained O'Shea: "There is no doubt at all that this grand king of ours will figure in the lunacy proceedings that we heard was in the wind. His relatives are getting greedier and more worried every day. And until the matter is decided one way or another they will use every means the law allows to head him off from spending the good money that belongs to him."

"And how can they stop him from scatterin' his coin for these wise and benevolent purposes of his?" demanded the engineer.

"Well, George Huntley says the law will permit them to clap some kind of a restraining order on the ship and hold her in the dock, with the judges' officers aboard, till the proceedings are over. And they can serve the same kind of documents on King Osmond to prevent his chasing himself beyond the jurisdiction of the court, says George."

"But all this infernal shindy can't be started unless there's proof positive that his majesty intends to fly the coop, Cap'n Mike."

"Right you are, Johnny, you old sea lawyer. They can't bother the king until he is actually on board, and the ship is cleared, so the barrister lad tells George."

"Then they'll be watchin' the *Tarlington* like terriers at a rat hole," exclaimed the engineer.

"No, they won't," cried O'Shea, with tremendous earnestness. "About once in so often I have a bright idea, Johnny. One of them has just now hit me between the eyes. Do ye mind how we slipped out of Charleston harbor in the *Hercules* steamer, bound on the filibusterin' expedition to Honduras? 'Twas a successful stratagem, and it could be done in London River."

"Sure it could!" And Johnny Kent chuckled joyously. "And the king needn't know anything about it."

"Of course we will keep it from him if we can," agreed O'Shea. "I will do anything short of murder to keep him happy and undisturbed. And it would upset him terribly to know that he must be smuggled out of England to dodge the rascals that would keep him at home as a suspected lunatic."

"We'd better put George Huntley next to this proposition of ours," suggested Johnny. "He itches to be a red-handed conspirator."

The ship broker admired the scheme when it was explained to him. Yes, the old *Tyneshire Glen*, which they had so scornfully declined to purchase, was still at her moorings, and they were welcome to use her as a dummy, or decoy, or whatever one might choose to call it. O'Shea could pretend to load her; he could send as many people on board as he liked, and put a gang of mechanics at work all over the bally old hooker, said Huntley. If the enemies of King Osmond took it for granted that the *Tyneshire Glen* was the ship selected to carry him off to Trinadaro, that was their own lookout. It was a ripping good joke, and a regular Yankee trick, by Jove!

CHAPTER VII.

PLANNING A COLOSSAL FARCE.

O'Shea and Johnny Kent took great care to avoid being seen in the vicinity of the *Tarlington*. Such inspection and supervision as were necessary they contrived to attend to after dark. The king was up to his ears in urgent business, and was easily persuaded to leave the whole conduct of the ship's affairs in their capable hands, and to waive preliminary visits to the East India Docks.

O'Shea employed a Scotch engineer—who wasted no words and understood that his wages depended on his taciturnity—to oversee such repair work as the *Tarlington* needed, and to keep steam in the donkey boilers.

All signs indicated that the *Tarlington* was preparing for one of her customary voyages to Australia. Soon the cargo began to stream into her hatches. The ostensible destinations of the truckloads of cases and crates and bales of merchandise were Sydney, Melbourne, Wellington, Freemantle, and so on. One might read the names of the consignees neatly stenciled on every package. This was done under the eye of Captain O'Shea, who in his time had loaded hundreds of boxes of rifles and cartridges innocently labeled "Condensed Milk," "Prime Virginia Hams," and "Farming Tools."

But the place to find roaring, ostentatious activity was on board the old *Tyneshire Glen*. Captain O'Shea visited her daily, and Johnny Kent hustled an engine-room crew with loud and bitter words. It appeared as if the ship was in a great hurry to go to sea. While O'Shea was stirring up as much pretended industry as possible, the question of a cargo was not overlooked. It was shoved on board as fast as the longshoremen in the holds could handle it. Nor did these brawny toilers know that all these stout wooden boxes so plainly marked and consigned to Trinadaro via S. S. *Tyneshire Glen* contained only bricks, sand, stones, and scrap iron.

They were part of the theatrical

properties of Captain O'Shea, who could readily produce a make-believe cargo for a faked voyage in a steamer which had no intention of leaving port.

The London newspapers showed fresh interest in the schemes and dreams of King Osmond I. of Trinadaro. The *Tyneshire Glen* was visited by inquisitive journalists with notebooks and cameras. Captain O'Shea welcomed them right courteously, and gave them information, cigars, and excellent whisky. They returned to their several offices to write breezy columns about the preparations for the singular voyage in the *Tyneshire Glen*. So severe are the English libel laws that never a hint was printed of the possible legal obstacles which might bring the enterprise to naught. For purposes of publication, King Osmond was as sane as a trivet unless a judge and jury should officially declare him otherwise.

Nevertheless, the intimation had reached the newspaper offices that the relatives of Colonel Sydenham-Leach were likely to take steps to prevent him from leaving England. And reporters were assigned to watch the *Tyneshire Glen* up to the very moment of departure.

Now and then Johnny Kent quietly trundled himself on board the *Tarlinton*, and was gratified to find that progress was running smoothly in all departments. So nearly ready for sea was the big cargo boat that the time had come to devise the final details of the stratagem.

Accordingly Captain O'Shea went boldly to the customhouse, and took out clearance papers, not for the *Tarlinton* to Australia, but for the *Tyneshire Glen* to the island of Trinadaro. The chief officer whom he had selected to go with him held a master's certificate, and the ship was cleared in his name.

As for the *Tarlinton*, which was really to sail, while the *Tyneshire Glen* remained peacefully at her moorings in the East India Docks, O'Shea decided to omit the formality of clearances. As he explained it to Johnny Kent:

"The less attention that is called to the *Tarlinton* the better. Once at sea,

we will hoist the flag of Trinadaro over our ship, and his majesty's government will give her a registry and us our certificates. 'Tis handy to be an independent sovereign with a merchant marine of his own."

The services of an employment agency enabled O'Shea to muster several score bogus colonists or subjects of King Osmond, persons of respectable appearance, who were glad to earn ten shillings apiece by marching on board the *Tyneshire Glen* with bags and bundles in their hands. There could be no room for doubt in the public mind that the eccentric, grandiose Colonel Sydenham-Leach was on the point of leaving his native shores with his people and material for founding his island principality.

It seemed advisable to Captain O'Shea to take the *Tarlinton* out of the docks late in the afternoon, swing into the river, and anchor until King Osmond should be brought aboard in a tug furnished by George Huntley. There was much less risk of observation in having the royal passenger join the ship after nightfall, and away from the populous docks, in addition to which O'Shea preferred to get clear of the cramping stone basins and gates, and hold his ship in the fairway, with room for a speedy departure in the event of a stern chase.

He artlessly explained to the king that this arrangement would allow his majesty to spend several more hours ashore in winding up his many final details of business, and he would avoid the tedious delay of warping the steamer out of the docks. The plausible shipmaster also made it clear that sailing at night would enable him to catch the turn of the tide and find high water over the shoal places in the channel.

The unsuspecting monarch approved these plans, and had no idea that they were part of an elaborate conspiracy to smuggle him out of England under cover of darkness because the authorities intended to detain him as one whose sanity must be investigated.

As a final device to throw the enemy

off the scent, O'Shea conceived what he viewed as a master stroke. George Huntley was called into consultation, and promptly sent for a superannuated clerk of his office staff who had been pensioned after many years of faithful service. He proved to be a slender, white-haired man who carried himself with a great deal of dignity, and at the first glimpse of him O'Shea exclaimed delightedly:

"You couldn't have done better, George, if you had raked London with a comb. Put a snowy mustache and chin whisker on him, and he will pass for King Osmond of Trinadaro with no trouble at all."

"I think we can turn him into a pretty fair counterfeit," grinned Huntley. "And when he walks aboard the *Tyneshire Glen* at dusk, by Jove, and all those bogus subjects, at ten shillings each, raise a loyal cheer, the hoax will be complete. This is the artistic touch to make the job perfect."

"And what am I to do after that, Mr. Huntley, if you please?" timidly inquired the elderly clerk. "If it's only a practical joke, I don't mind——"

"Play the part, Thompson. Acknowledge the homage of the ship's company, and go below at once. The ship will probably be watched by persons keenly interested in your movements. If they poke a mess of legal documents at you, accept them without argument, and walk ashore and return to London. The meddling gents will leave you alone after that. They will merely keep close watch of the ship to make sure that you don't go back to her. Once in London again, pluck off the false whiskers, and be sure to come to my office in the morning and be handsomely rewarded for your exertions."

CHAPTER VIII.

ONE KING SHY.

The genuine colonists of King Osmond stole on board the *Tarlinton*, singly and by twos and threes, some before she pulled out of the docks, others by boat after she swung into

the stream. At the same time the imitation voyagers from the employment agency were making as much noise and bustle as possible as they trooped on board the *Tyneshire Glen*.

Captain O'Shea intended to convoy the king from the hotel to the *Tarlinton*, but at the last moment he was detained to quell a ruction among a group of drunken firemen in the fore-castle. George Huntley had been unexpectedly summoned to the Hotel Cecil to see an American millionaire who was in a great hurry to charter a yacht. O'Shea therefore sent a message to his majesty, directing him to have his carriage driven to a certain landing on the river front of the East India Docks, where he would be met by the chief officer of the *Tarlinton* and escorted aboard the ship.

Within the same hour the dignified elderly clerk by the name of Thompson could have been seen to enter a carriage close by the Hotel Carleton, and those standing near might have heard him tell the driver to go to the steamer *Tyneshire Glen*, in the East India Docks.

The chief officer of the *Tarlinton*, waiting not far from an electric light at the landing pier abreast of which the steamer was anchored in the stream, felt a certain responsibility for the safe delivery of King Osmond, and was easier in mind when he saw a carriage halt within a few yards of him. The window framed the kindly features, the white mustache and imperial which the chief officer instantly identified. Hastening to assist his majesty from the carriage, he announced apologetically:

"Captain O'Shea sends his compliments, and regrets that he is detained on board. The ship is ready as soon as you are."

The king murmured a word or two of thanks. The chief officer carefully assisted him to board the tug, which immediately backed away from the pier and turned to run alongside the *Tarlinton*. The important passenger mounted the ship's gangway, and stood upon the shadowy deck, whose row of lights had been purposely turned off

lest the figure of the king might be discernible from shore.

Captain O'Shea had delayed on the bridge to get the ship under way as soon as the skipper of the tug sang out to him that his majesty was safely aboard. It was no time for ceremony. The business of the moment was to head for the open sea and beyond the reach of the British law and its officers.

A few minutes later Captain O'Shea hastened aft to greet his majesty and explain his failure to welcome him on board. Meeting the chief officer, he halted to ask:

"Everything all right, Mr. Arbuthnot? Did he ask for me? Did he give you any orders?"

"All satisfactory, sir. The king said he was very tired and would go to his rooms at once."

"I wonder should I disturb him?" said O'Shea to himself, hesitating. "'Tis not etiquette to break into his rest. Well, I will go back to the bridge and wait a bit. Maybe he will be sending for me. My place is with the pilot till the ship has poked her way past Gravesend and is clear of this muck of upriver shipping."

The *Tarlinton* found a less-crowded reach of the Thames as she passed below Greenwich, and her engines began to shove her along at a rapid gait. She had almost picked up full speed, and was fairly bound out for blue water when the noise of loud and grievous protests arose from the saloon deck. The commotion was so startling that O'Shea bounded down from the bridge, and was confronted by a smooth-shaven, slender, elderly man, who flourished a false mustache and imperial in his fist as he indignantly cried:

"I say, this is all wrong, as sure as my name is Thompson! I never bargained with Mr. George Huntley to be kidnaped and taken to sea. I don't want to go, I tell you! These people tell me that this steamer is bound to some island or other thousands of miles from here. I stand on my rights as an Englishman! I demand that I be taken back to London at once!"

O'Shea gazed stupidly at the irate clerk so long in the employ of Tavistock & Huntley. For once the resourceful shipmaster was so taken aback that he could only blink and open and shut his mouth. At length he managed to say, in a sort of quavering stage whisper:

"For the love o' Heaven, what has become of the real king? Who mislaid him? Where is he now?"

"I don't know, and I'm sure I don't care!" bitterly returned the affrighted Thompson. "I was an ass to consent to this make-believe job."

"But how did you two kings get mixed?" groaned O'Shea. "You're in the wrong ship. Have ye not sense enough to fathom that much? You were supposed to go aboard the *Tyneshire Glen*, you old blunderer!"

"The man who drove the carriage told me this was the *Tyneshire Glen*. I had to take his word for it. How was I to know one ship from another in the dark? I was told to pretend I was the genuine king, wasn't I? So I played the part as well as I could."

"Ye played it right up to the hilt. My chief officer will vouch for that." And O'Shea held his head between his hands. He sent for Johnny Kent, whose chin dropped when he beheld the miserable, crushed demeanor of the master of the *Tarlinton*, who announced briefly:

"We're shy one king, Johnny. The deal was switched on us somehow. Our boss was left behind."

"Great sufferin' Cæsar's ghost, Cap'n Mike!" gasped the other. "Say it slow. Spell it out. Make signs if you're so choked up that you can't talk plain."

"The real king went in the discard, Johnny. We've fetched the dummy to sea. The one that came aboard was the other one."

"Then what in blazes became of our beloved King Osmond I.?" cried Johnny.

"You can search me. Maybe his affectionate relatives have their hooks in him by now and have started him on the road to the dotty house."

"It ain't reasonable for us to keep on our course for Trinadaro without the boss of the whole works," suggested the chief engineer. "This is his ship and cargo."

This was so self-evident that Captain O'Shea answered never a word, but gave orders to let go an anchor and hold the ship in the river until further notice. Then he turned to glower at an excited group of passengers, who had mustered at the foot of the bridge ladder and were loudly demanding that he come down and talk to them. They were loyal subjects of the vanished monarch—his secretaries, artisans, foremen, laborers—who ardently desired an explanation. They become more and more insistent, and threatened to resort to violence unless the steamer instantly returned to London to find King Osmond.

O'Shea gave them his word that he would not proceed to sea without the missing sovereign, and during a brief lull in the excitement he thrust the bewildered Thompson, the masquerader, into the chart room, and pelted him with questions. The latter was positive that he had directed the cabman to drive to the *Tyneshire Glen*. Could the cabman have purposely sought the wrong ship? No, for he was particular to stop and ask his way when just inside the entrance to the docks. And while he was talking to the informant, who looked like a watchman, another person had stepped up to volunteer the desired information.

The watchman had moved on, and the cabman and the second stranger held a conversation which Thompson was unable to overhear.

"And did ye get a look at this second party?" sharply queried O'Shea.

"The carriage lamp showed me his face for a moment, and I saw him less distinctly as he moved away. He was a young man, well dressed, rather a smart-looking chap, I should say. I think he had on a fancy red waist-coat."

"Sandy-complected? A brisk walker?" roared O'Shea, in tremendous tones.

"I am inclined to say the description fits the young man," said Thompson.

"'Twas the crooked minister of finance, Baron Frederick Martin Strothers, bad luck to him!" And O'Shea looked bloodthirsty. "I'll bet the ship against a cigar that he sold out to the enemy. He stands in with the king's blackguardly relatives and the lawyers. And we never fooled him for a minute. 'Tis likely he switched the real king to the *Tyneshire Glen*, where the poor monarch would have no friends to help him out of a scrape. Strothers and a pal bribed the two cabmen—that's how the trick was turned. Just how they got next to our plans I can't fathom, but we will not discuss it now."

"Then it is hopeless to try to secure the king and transfer him to this steamer?" asked Thompson, easier in mind now that he understood that he had not been kidnaped.

"Hopeless? By me sainted grandmother, it is not hopeless at all!" cried Captain O'Shea, as he fled from the chart room to confer with his chief officer. Johnny Kent, restless and unhappy, had made another journey from the lower regions to seek enlightenment. O'Shea thumped him between the shoulders, and confidently declared:

"We've finished with all the foolish play acting and stratagems. 'Twas done to spare the sensitive feeling of King Osmond, and this wide-awake Strothers has made monkeys of us. He stacked the cards, and dealt us the wrong king. Now we're going to turn around and steam back to London and grab this king of ours, and take him to sea without any more delay at all."

"I like your language," beamingly quoth Johnny Kent. "We're due to have a little violence, Cap'n Mike."

CHAPTER IX.

THE ABDUCTION OF KING OSMOND.

While the good ship *Tarlington* swings about and retraces her course, there is time to discover what befell the genuine Osmond after he had en-

tered a carriage at the Hotel Carleton and set out to join Captain O'Shea's steamer. If it is correct to surmise that the unscrupulous Baron Strothers was the active villain of the plot, then he may have tampered with King Osmond's cabman, or employed an agent to attend to the shabby business, before the equipage left the hotel.

At any rate, the king was rapidly driven to the East India Docks, and the carriage drew up alongside the *Tynes-shire Glen*. The royal occupant had been informed by Captain O'Shea that his ship would be out of the docks by now, and that a tug would be waiting to transfer him. In the darkness the shadowy outline of one steamer looked very like another, and King Osmond thought that perhaps the plan of sailing might have been changed at the last moment.

The cabman strenuously assured him that this was the *Tarlinton*, and he decided that he had better go aboard and look for Captain O'Shea. If a mistake had been made, it ought to be an easy matter to find the landing pier and the waiting tug.

No sooner had the deluded king reached the deck than he was convinced that he had been directed to the wrong steamer. The people who stared at him curiously were utter strangers. There was not a subject of Trinadaro among them; nor did any of the officers of the ship step forward to greet him. He was about to accost the nearest spectator when an officious man, dressed in seedy black, confronted him, flourished a formidable-appearing document under the royal nose, and pompously affirmed:

"A writ from the judge duly appointed and authorized by the Lord Chancellor to take cognizance of such cases, distraining Colonel Osmond George Sydenham-Leach from attempting to quit the jurisdiction of said court pending an inquisition *de lunatico inquirendo*. Take it calm and easy, sir. This won't interfere with your liberty as long as you obey the writ."

Another minion of the law—a fat man with a well-oiled voice—thereupon

formally took possession of the steamer, explaining that because clearance papers had been issued for a voyage to Trinadaro the court held that a departure from England was actually and speedily contemplated. The presence of Colonel Sydenham-Leach on board in person was also evidence after the fact.

The blow was staggering, humiliating, incredibly painful. It shook the amiable gentleman's presence of mind to the very foundations. To be interfered with as an alleged madman was enough to bewilder the most sapient monarch that ever wielded scepter. As a landed proprietor, a retired officer of the militia, a Conservative in politics, King Osmond had profound respect for the law and the constitution of his native land. He was not one to defy a judicial writ, or to grapple with the situation in a high-handed manner. In other words, he was rather Colonel Sydenham-Leach in this cruel crisis than the sovereign ruler of the independent principality of Trinadaro.

No help or comfort was to be obtained from the company around him. These spurious voyagers from the employment agency were whispering uneasily among themselves, and regarding the unfortunate Osmond with suspicious glances. They had not bargained to entangle themselves in the affairs of an alleged lunatic on board of a ship which had been seized in the name of the law. Ten shillings was not enough for this sort of thing.

"It don't look right to me," said one of them. "The job is on the queer. I say we hook it before the bloomin' bobbies come and put the lot of us in jail."

This sentiment expressed the general view of the situation, and the counterfeit subjects of Trinadaro began to flock down the gangway and to scatter in a hunted manner among the gloomy warehouses. Presently Colonel Sydenham-Leach was left alone with the two court officers, with never a friend in sight. Recovering somewhat of his composure and dignity, he declared that he must consult with his legal advisers

at once before consenting to leave the ship. He clung to the hope that delay might enable Captain O'Shea to come to his rescue, although he was unwilling to try to send a message to the *Tarlington*. This would reveal to the officers of the law that the wrong ship had been detained, and put them on the track of the right one.

There was no legal reason why the luckless king should not remain in the *Tyneshire Glen* until his lawyers could come and confer with him; wherefore the captors grumblingly sat themselves down in the cabin to wait. The king had nothing more to say to them. They were beneath his notice. He was absorbed in his own unhappy reflections. His dreams had turned to ashes. His island empire would know him not. He felt very old and helpless and sad.

Thus he sat and brooded for some time. At length he heard the sound of men tramping across the deck above his head. He roused himself to look in the direction of the doorway. A moment later it framed the well-knit, active figure of Captain Michael O'Shea. Behind him puffed stout Johnny Kent. They paused, said something to each other, and advanced to bid the drooping captive take heart.

"'Twas a good guess, your majesty," cried O'Shea. "We thought you might have gone adrift and fetched up aboard this old tub. What's the matter? Who are your two friends?"

"Officers from the bench of one of the judges in lunacy," reluctantly admitted King Osmond. "They have served distraining papers on me and on the ship."

"On this ship?" exclaimed Johnny Kent. "How ridiculous! What'll we do with this pair of bailiffs, or whatever you call 'em, Cap'n Mike? Make 'em eat their documents?"

"No; we will take the two meddlers along with us," sweetly answered O'Shea. "We can't afford to leave them behind to tell how it happened."

"But they have all the power and authority of the British government behind them," spoke up King Osmond.

"And they have a long voyage ahead

of them," said O'Shea. "Your majesty can give them jobs in your own judicial department, and they will grow up with the country."

"I cannot countenance such actions," began the king; but Johnny Kent interrupted to remark, with much vehemence:

"Excuse us, your majesty, but this ain't no time for arguments about the British constitution. Cap'n Mike and me agreed to take you and your ship to Trinadaro. It was a contract, and we propose to earn our wages. If you won't come easy and willin', then we'll just have to call a couple of our men from the boat that's waitin' alongside, and escort you anyhow. We're stubborn, and we aim to live up to our agreements."

O'Shea wasted no more words. Suddenly grasping one of the officers by the back of the neck and the slack of his garments, he propelled him rapidly toward the deck, fiercely admonishing him to make no outcry unless he wished to be tossed overboard with a bullet in him.

The other man had started to flee, but Johnny Kent caught him in a few heavy strides, tucked him under one mighty arm, clapped a hand over his mouth, and waddled with his burden to the nearest open cargo port.

"Drop them into the boat," commanded O'Shea. "Ahoy, there, below! Catch these two lads, and sit on them good and hard, and let them make no noise. The end of an oar handle behind the ear will make them subside if they object."

The astonished King Osmond had followed the abductors out of the cabin. Before he could renew the discussion, Captain O'Shea, breathing hard, but calm and smiling, faced him with the courteous invitation:

"After you, your majesty. We are at your service. A few minutes in the boat, and you'll be aboard the *Tarlington*, and heading for the open sea."

It was obviously so futile to protest that the king meekly descended to the boat, steadied by the helping hand of

Johnny Kent. The seamen shoved off, and the oars thumped in the tholepins as O'Shea steered for the long, black hull of the steamer visible a few hundred yards down stream. Unable to voice his confused emotions, the king suffered himself to be conducted up the gangway of the *Tarlington*.

His loyal subjects—the real ones—cheered frantically at sight of him. It was an ovation worthy of his station. He bowed and smiled, and was himself again. Already the recollection of his detention as a madman seemed less poignant. It was like a nightmare. He would try to forget it.

He felt the ship tremble under his feet as her engines began to drive her toward the blessed sea and the long road to wave-washed Trinadaro. Had it not been for the bold and ready conduct of his two faithful mariners, he would now be a broken-spirited old man in London, a butt of public ridicule. He went below to the staterooms which had been suitably fitted for his comfort and privacy, and discovered that he was greatly wearied.

Before retiring, he sent one of his secretaries to request Captain O'Shea and Johnny Kent to give him the pleasure of their company at breakfast next morning.

"That makes me feel a bit more cheerful," said O'Shea to himself. "Maybe he has decided to forgive us. We were guilty of high treason, disobedience, and a few other things in packing him off to sea while he was trying to tell us he couldn't go at all. Poor old Johnny Kent was worried for fear he would order our heads chopped off."

The *Tarlington* was in blue water next morning when the captain and the chief engineer bashfully entered the private dining room of his majesty. The latter greeted them with marked affability, and said:

"I take great pleasure, my dear friends, in conferring on you the insignia of the Grand Cross of Trinadaro as a recognition of your invaluable loyalty and assistance. You will be entitled to call yourselves barons of

my realm by royal warrant. While I must confess that I could not ordinarily approve of such summary methods as you made use of——"

"It looks different now that old England is dropping astern," suggested O'Shea. "The British constitution doesn't loom as big as it did. Your own flag is at the masthead, your majesty, and you can make treaties if ye like. I thank you with all my heart for the reward you have given me."

"It pleases me a heap more to be a member of the nobility of Trinadaro than to earn big wages for the voyage," warmly assented Johnny Kent.

CHAPTER X.

IN SIGHT OF THE ISLAND KINGDOM.

Freed of all anxieties and besetments, the royal passenger resumed his labor of planning the occupations of his subjects. His enthusiasm was delightful to behold. He seemed to grow younger with every day of the voyage southward. His was to be a kingdom of peace and good will, of a benevolent ruler and a contented, industrious people. He was the stanchest kind of a royalist, and Trinadaro was to be a constitutional monarchy, with an aristocracy which should be recruited after the pioneering work had been accomplished. The existing theories and examples of republican government he regarded with peculiar disfavor.

The relations between the king and his mariners twain became those of pleasant, informal intimacy. They learned to know him much better during the long weeks at sea, and felt toward him an affectionate, tolerant respect. He was wrapped up in his one idea. His belief that he was indeed a king was as natural as breathing.

The ship had crossed the equator, and was plowing through the long blue surges of the South Atlantic when Captain O'Shea, after working out the noon observations, informed the king:

"A couple of days more, and we'll begin to look for a sight of the peaks of Trinadaro. If the weather holds

calm, we can begin to put the people and the cargo ashore right after that."

"The peaks of Trinadaro!" fondly echoed King Osmond. "Do you know, Captain O'Shea, I have wondered if you considered me a crack-brained old fool. Many men in England think so, I am sure. I know that my relatives do."

"'Tis my opinion that you wish to make folks happy, and that you will do no harm with your money," was the reply. "And there's few rich men that can say the same. No, 'tis not crack-brained to want to be a king. Power is what men desire, and they will trample on others to get it. I have heard ye talk on board ship, and I have admired what you had to say. You will live your own life in your own way, but you will not forget to make this island of yours a place for men and women to call home, and to be glad that they have found it."

"I thank you, Captain O'Shea," said the other. "I cannot help thinking now and then of what will be the fate of my principality when death comes to me. If I am spared for ten or fifteen years longer, I shall have time to set my affairs in order, to make Trinadaro self-sustaining, to win the recognition of foreign governments, to arrange for an administration to succeed my reign."

"May you live to be king until you are a hundred!" cried O'Shea. "And a man who is as happy and contented as you are is pretty sure of a ripe old age."

"I hope that you and Mr. Kent will consent to sail under the flag of my merchant marine and navy as long as I live," earnestly said the king. "I have learned to depend on you, and I need not tell you that the financial arrangement will be more favorable than you could make elsewhere."

"We are restless men, your majesty," replied O'Shea, with a smile; "but we have no notion of quitting your service. 'Tis up to us to see the kingdom fairly under way before we turn rovers again."

It was early in the morning of the second day after this that the officer

on watch roused out Captain O'Shea with the news that land had been sighted on the starboard bow. The master of the *Tarlington* stared through his binoculars at a black, jagged foreland of rock which lifted itself from the sea. He sent word to the passengers that Trinadaro lay ahead of them.

King Osmond had left word that he should be called whenever the first glimpse of his island should be revealed. But he came not to the bridge in response to the message from Captain O'Shea. In his stead appeared his physician, with a demeanor terribly distressed. His voice was unsteady as he said to Captain O'Shea:

"It is my sad duty to inform you that his majesty passed away some time during the night. His heart simply ceased to beat. It had been somewhat feeble and irregular of late, but the symptoms were not alarming. His strength was overtaxed during those last weeks in London."

O'Shea bared his head, and stood silent. The announcement was very hard to believe. Pulling himself together, he murmured to the chief officer:

"The king is dead. Please set the flag of Trinadaro at half mast."

As soon as the word was passed down to the engine room Johnny Kent sought the bridge, and his eyes were filled with tears as he exclaimed:

"It don't seem right, Cap'n Mike. I ain't reconciled to it one mite. He deserved to have what he wanted. And he dies within sight of his kingdom!"

"Yes, he has slipped his cable, Johnny. There are cruel tricks in this game of life."

"What will you do now?"

"I haven't had time to think. But one thing is certain. I will carry King Osmond to his island, and there we will bury him. 'Tis the one place in all the world where he would want to rest. And the peaks of Trinadaro will guard him, and the big breakers will sing anthems for him. And he will be the king there till the Judgment Day."

The *Tarlington* slowly approached the precipitous coast line, and changed

her course to pass around to the lee of the island. As the deeply indented shore opened to view, and one bold headland after another slid by, a comparatively sheltered anchorage was disclosed.

There, to the amazement of Captain O'Shea, rode two small cruisers. One of them flew the red ensign of England, the other the green and yellow colors of the navy of Brazil. He guessed their errand before a British lieutenant in white uniform came alongside the *Tarlinton* in a steam launch and climbed the gangway which had been dropped to receive him.

Gazing curiously at the silent company and the half-masted flag of Trinidad, he was conducted into the saloon, where Captain O'Shea waited for him to state his business.

"This steamer belongs to Colonel Sydenham-Leach, I presume," said the visitor. "I should like to meet him, if you please. Sorry, but I have unpleasant news for him."

"If it is King Osmond of Trinidad you mean, he is dead, God rest his soul. He went out last night."

"You don't say! Please express my sympathy to the ship's company," exclaimed the lieutenant. "How extraordinary! We received orders by cable at Rio to proceed to Trinidad in time to intercept this vessel of yours."

"And what were the orders, and why is that Brazilian man-of-war anchored alongside of you?" asked O'Shea.

"It is all about the ownership of this island," the lieutenant explained. "Nobody wanted it for centuries, and now everybody seems keen on getting hold of it. The English government suddenly decided, after you sailed from London, that it might need Trinidad as a landing base for a new cable between South America and Africa, and sent us to hoist the flag over the place. Brazil heard of the affair, and sent a ship to set up a claim on the basis of an early discovery. The Portuguese have presented their evidence, I believe, because their people made some kind of a settlement at Trinidad once upon a time."

"And the forsaken island was totally forgotten until poor King Osmond got himself and his project into the newspapers," slowly commented O'Shea.

"That is the truth of the matter, I fancy." The naval lieutenant paused, and commiseration was strongly reflected in his manly face. "Tell me," said he, "what was the opinion at home about this King of Trinidad? He was a bit mad, I take it."

"No more than you or me," answered O'Shea. "He had a beautiful dream, and it made him very happy, but it was not his fate to see it come true. And no doubt it is better that he did not live to know that the scheme was ruined. His island has been taken away from him. It will be wrangled over by England and Brazil and the rest of them, and there is no room for a king that hoped to enjoy himself in his own way. The world has no place for a man like Colonel Osmond George Sydenham-Leach, my dear sir."

"Too bad!" sighed the lieutenant. "And what are your plans, Captain O'Shea? Do you intend to make any formal claim in behalf of the late king?"

"No. His dreams died with him. There is no heir to the throne. I'm thankful that his finish was so bright and hopeful. There will be funeral services and a burial to-morrow. I should take it as a great favor if detachments from the British cruiser and the Brazilian war vessel could be present."

"I will attend to it," said the lieutenant.

When the coffin of King Osmond I. was carried ashore, it was draped with the flag of Trinidad, which he himself had designed. Launches from the two cruisers towed sailing cutters filled with bluejackets, who splashed through the surf and formed in column led by the bugles and the muffled drums. The parade wound along the narrow valleys, climbing to the plateau on which the ruler had planned to build his capital.

There the first and last King of Trinidad was laid to rest, and the guns of the cruisers thundered a

requiem. The British lieutenant counted the guns, and turned to Captain O'Shea to say:

"It is the salute given only to royalty, according to the navy regulations. It is the least we can do for him."

"And it is handsomely done," muttered the grateful O'Shea as he brushed a hand across his eyes.

"Will you take your ship back to England?"

"Yes. I can do nothing else. 'Twill be a sad voyage, but God knows best. As it all turned out, this king of ours had to die to win his kingdom."

When the mourners had returned to the *Tarlinton*, Captain O'Shea and Johnny Kent went into the chart room and talked together for some time. At

length the gray, portly, simple-hearted chief engineer said wistfully:

"I'm glad we stood by and did what we could for him, Cap'n Mike, ain't you?"

"You bet I am, Johnny! He was a good man, and I loved him. Here's to his majesty, King Osmond of Trinaro! He wanted us to sail under his flag as long as he lived. There'll be trouble waiting for us in London River, for we have to account for the pair of court officers we kidnaped and the ship that took out no clearances. But we will face the music. 'Tis not much to do for him that was so good to us."

"Well, anyhow, they can never take his kingdom away from him," softly quoth Johnny Kent.

There is another story about Captain O'Shea and Johnny Kent coming in the next issue of the POPULAR.



THE ARMY KEPT BY HEARST

ONE evening Mr. and Mrs. William R. Hearst went to the offices of the Hearst paper in New York. Mr. Hearst wanted to print an interview with a visiting statesman, and, most of all, he wanted to get it in a hurry.

"Please tell Brown to go out," said Hearst, "and get me a good story from Senator Blank."

"Oh," responded the secretary, "Mr. Brown is acting night editor, Mr. Hearst."

"Oh, very well. Send Craig."

"But you see, Mr. Hearst, Mr. Craig is assistant night editor to the acting night editor," replied the puzzled secretary.

Just then Mrs. Hearst, who has far more than the average allowance of wit, looked up from a magazine, and said dryly:

"This place reminds me of a Central American army—all officers and no privates."



CONSERVATION AND CONVERSATION

WILLIAM ATHERTON DUPUY, the writer, and M. O. Leighton, of the Geological Survey in Washington, wrote the first magazine article ever published regarding conservation.

Not long ago DuPuy met Leighton, and remarked:

"As we wrote the first story about it, we must be the fellows who put the 'con' in conservation."

"Yes," said Leighton, "and they've been putting it there ever since."

Bucking the Hoodoo

By Robert V. Carr

Author of "Range Manners," "Things That Count," Etc.

This is the tale of an automobile that shattered the peace of a big, good-natured Westerner. A hoodoo car, yet there is one man in the live-stock commission business who takes off his hat to it

SPEAKIN' of hoodoos reminds me of what Doc Strate said about a friend of his he called "Tombstone Seth."

Says Doc: "I'm not what you-all could call superstitious, but just as sure as that feller Tombstone darkens my door, I know that something unlucky is due to happen. Last time he called was a Sunday, and, come to find out, there wasn't a drop of licker in the house. Seems Miz Strate had give the last of our corn juice to Deacon Sniffkin's wife for medicinal purposes. The deac was feelin' so poorly that he dreened the jug. And there me and Tombstone set that whole blessed Sunday as dry as burned boots, and everything closed."

Personally, I never like to start on a trip of a Friday; and when Friday falls on thirteen—well, I just sit tight and wait for something to drop. And on the thirteenth day of the thirteenth month of the thirteenth year, which happened a day or so ago, I thought it just the mercy of a kind-hearted creator that the world didn't come to an end. Still, I ain't what you could call downright superstitious; just a little shy of one or two things.

But a man rustlin' live-stock shipments for as wide awake a commission man as Billy Dayton has no business layin' in his room just because it happens to be Friday the thirteenth. Yet I wish I'd had the sense to circle around the hoodoo instead of coaxin' it to land

on me. But, as I've said before, a man on the road can't let feelin's interfere with business. If he does he's mighty liable to wake up some pretty mornin' with a can tied to him, and his little job among the fatally injured.

But let's hop into the action.

Phil Brayton owned a big general store, and one of the finest cow ranches in the blessed West. He was a big, good-natured old scout, and always looked like he'd wintered well. He ate beef three times a day, laughed a whole lot, and, if he'd any troubles, he told 'em only to the Lord.

Everything around Phil looked fat and happy. Hosses always in good condition, cattle the best on the range.

Never a meal on the Brayton Ranch but what a dozen or fifteen travelers or neighbors threwed their feet under the big table. And nobody paid for grub or hoss feed at Phil's ranch.

He was the big man of his town and country. Man, woman, or child in trouble always went to Phil, and he always helped them. Belonged to no church, talked pretty rough, and the gossips said he was a swift old traveler; but, take it from me, folks who needed help instead of advice sure knew Phil Brayton was the old boy to go to.

Phil and me were great friends, but for some reason unknown to me I could not land his business for the Dayton Live Stock Commission Company. Every time I'd tackle him he'd just

The last story of Carr's dealing with the experiences of the live-stock commission man appeared in the February Month-end POPULAR.

laugh and tell me a funny story. After a time I quit talkin' business to him; just kidded along, and let it go at that.

Then one fatal day Phil got what he called an automobile. And it was *some* auto! Class? Yes; and tell the neighbors I said so. Call me up over long distance at a dollar a second, and I'll put in a day tellin' you that there was class to Phil's auto.

It was right close to calf-brandin' time when I falls off the varnished cars and heads into Phil's store. He'd just sold a young rancher a cook stove and a baby buggy, and is joshin' the newly-weds. He's right glad to see me, and later on we go down to the White Front and tea up a little.

A few drinks and a lot of joshin', and then Phil says: "I tell you what I'm goin' to do with you, Johnny; I'm goin' to take you out to the ranch in my automobile."

"Your automobile!" I cheeps, some surprised. The skunk wagons hadn't invaded the range yet, and I was as much set back as though he'd told me he'd bought a flyin' machine.

"Yes, indeedy," Phil cinches his offer. "I'll take you to my ranch—and you know it's a hundred miles—in less time than a cat could spat a bulldog's eye. Startin' fairly early, we'll hit the ranch to-morrow afternoon in time for a late dinner.

"It's a great little machine," he goes on, as proud and happy as a new daddy. "Folks in Chicago I buy goods of sent it along as a present. Haven't tried it out yet; but it will run O. K.—that is, accordin' to the directions that come with it. First automobile in this country, and you'll have the honor of bein' the first passenger. It's a ding-daisy."

I thinks that while Phil's mind is little weak on his auto I'll slip up on his blind side with a business proposition. So I asks him square if he is goin' to ship his cattle to Billy Dayton. But the old cutie don't pay any attention to my cow talk; he's all wrapped up in his auto.

Says he: "Ain't it marvelous what they're doin' these days with machinery! Now, that little car of mine——"

I saw there was no use. When a man gets to callin' a coal-oil can, four pieces of rubber, and some balin' wire "my car," look out. He may not get violent, but he ought to be watched.

I stood back a little from Phil, and looked him over, but I kept still. When a man has automobilous, you never can tell which way he'll jump.

But I thinks that in time Phil will be himself again, and I concludes to take up his invite. I'm lonesome for the range, anyway, and there's always a chance for new business.

So we rigs it up that Phil is to call for me in the mornin' at the hotel, and I'll hop into his wonderful little benzine buggy for a hundred-mile spin.

We fools around a good share of the day and night, and then parts, I to my room and Phil to his house. And we was both glad there was no snow on the ground, for it would have taken a crab to follow our corkscrew trails. Such is friendship.

Next mornin' after breakfast I'm in the hotel office rollin' a cigarette. All of a sudden I hears what sounds like the battle of Gettysburg and a wreck on the elevated combined. And along with that was a lot of little sounds. One, for example, sounded like the broken drivin' rod of a limited engine poundin' the ties.

It had another little sound, that started out with *blac-blac-boom-ber-rang*, and then *rik-a-chickie—rik-a-chickie—spow-eeek—s-s-sh—bang!*

I yells to the hotel clerk: "Freight run into the coal chute?"

But the slick-head don't show no excitement, and I calms down and quits dodgin'.

He yawns a little behind a glass diamond ring, and explains: "Only Phil Brayton tunin' up his auto-go-devil. When she gets to goin' good, get out your ear muffs. She's just whisp'rin' now—sort of gettin' used to her own voice. Soon's she comes into her real voice everybody has to make signs, and run and tie down all the bronks in town. Runs like a rock crusher with a lump in its neck."

He stabs his pen into a fresh potato,

and takes a high-priced cigar out of the case; he was workin' on a salary. Then he takes up his little thread of thought, as the feller says.

"Phil's sure mashed on that machine. But personally I wouldn't have it as a gift; and I wouldn't ride in it for all of John D.'s greasy coin. The blamed thing shoots seven distinct different ways, and all of them fatal."

"So?" says I.

"Uh-huh!" comes back the clerk, gentlelike.

The horrible sound kept comin' nearer and nearer. *Pow—wak—a-wak—kiz-kiz—ber-oomp—bang!* And then, *oosh!* like she'd died in the ditch, with none to weep and none to care.

I forces myself to go out on the hotel porch, and finds Phil settin' in *his car*.

She was still breathin' in short jerks, and he made signs for me to get in the hind seat. He looked as happy as a kid with a pair of red-top boots.

If I must say it, I'm game when I'm drove into a corner. I couldn't argue with Phil, as it wears you out quick to argue in the sign language. I didn't like the looks of the thing—wanted to back out, but I couldn't see my way clear. I had to come clean or take the count.

So I fogs back into the hotel, and makes signs to the clerk to wire my wife in case anything happens, and grabs up my grip and rain coat. Then I happens to look up at the big clock. Suffrin' Moses! It's *Friday the thirteenth!*

Right then I concludes not to go with Phil.

I goes out and yells in his ear, stallin' about not feelin' well. It's no go. He bawls back that the trip will do me a world of good. Then I has to tell him that it's on account of *Friday the thirteenth*.

He laughs until I can hear him above the windmill clatter of *his car*. Then he kind of subdues the corn sheller, and begins to coax me. But I'm rock-set and cemented; nothin' doin' with Johnny Reeves on *Friday the thirteenth*.

Finally Phil says: "Tell you what I'll

do: hop in and go out with me, and, if we has any *real sort of accident*, I'll ship my cattle to your outfit as long's I've a hoof. I'm makin' it an object to you, when you ought to feel honored. I like your company. We'll go through as slick as butter in a hot skillet. Ain't my proposition a fair one? Come on and get in. *Friday the thirteenth!*" he laughs. "Lord love me, that's my lucky day. I always used to go courtin' on that day. Get in, get in; you've only one life to live."

For a spell I stood thinkin' it over. I feels a cold hunch that something will happen—and that it will be *bad*. Still, business is business, and Phil had give me his word about his cattle.

I therefore crawls into the hind seat, and yells: "Let her rip!"

Phil pulls out a stopper or two, and she says: "*Yure-it—yure-it—awk-awk!*" Then Phil twists a crank, and she remarks: "*Oomph-etty-oomph—sis-s-s—e-e-ek!*" but refuses to budge.

She's a queer-lookin' flyin' jinny, with ropes runnin' back around her wheels. She's built like a mountain wagon, and looked like a cross between a hay baler and a pianola.

Phil keeps on a-monkeyin' with her, feelin' her pulse, lookin' down her neck, and tryin' to use reason. But she won't move.

"Sorry I didn't bring my bed," I says. "We could camp right here."

Phil don't say nothin'; just keeps on twistin' cranks and pullin' levers.

Finally he admits: "She's just a little mite peevish this mornin'."

By that time quite a crowd has gathered, and everybody is offerin' advice. If there's anything the American is free with, it's advice. Seems like most of us know what everybody but ourselves should do.

"Maybe you got her checked up too high," says one feller; "or maybe you forgot to grain her."

"Throw a drink into her," suggests another.

"Call her sweetheart," cheeps a bright mind.

But Phil don't let 'em rattle him; just keeps on workin'.

At last he twists the right snivvie, and she gives a cough.

"Left lung almost gone," says some sport. "Run for the doctor."

She coughs again, and Phil twirls to the keyboard and pulls out the alto stop. And he just does it in time, for, with flags flyin', whistles blowin', gongs beatin', bands playin', and every hoss in town kickin' his stall down, she's on her way.

Phil heads her for the open country. First thing we meets is a rancher settin' half asleep on a sagged-down seat, and drivin' a pair of dead-on-their-feet bronks. Do them bronks come to life? Seems like I remember that they did. Gettin' down to facts, I might say them plugs climbed right up the side of the sky, and you could hear 'em snort for miles. I catches a glimpse of a pair of broom tails pushin' aside the air away over yonder some place; and sees the rancher settin' in a plowed field with a wagon tire around his neck, and lookin' sort of stunnedlike at a piece of rein in his hand. He was for days rememberin' his post-office address, and the last I heard of him he thought he was *Little Eva*, in "Uncle Tom's Cabin."

On we go like the end of the world and no place to land. *Blang-blang—ber-run! Sooie—ik-ik-ik—enkety-unk—unkety-unk!*

Phil's workin' like one of them fancy piano players at the levers. I'm holdin' down the hind seat, hopin' that I'll make a decent-lookin' corpse, and that they'll spell my name right in the papers.

Pretty soon we meets a bunch of cow-punchers—the new, would-be kind—comin' to town with their chaperderoes and their taperderoes and their flapperderoes on. And then we hits them. For a time it rained catalogue cow-punchers worth ten cents a gross f. o. b. Chicago. I remember seein' a bronk standin' on his left ear, with a so-called cowboy wrapped around his neck like an old shawl. The air was full of useless junk and rattlesnake hatbands. One of the bronks has heart failure entirely, and lays off one side, his eyes bulgin' like them big glass marbles set in a sack of meal. I don't suppose that

bronk was ever the same afterward, and prob'ly aged fast. I could just hear that hoss say: "What's the use to try to wake up—it's only the nightmare."

Phil bawls back at me: "Stay with her, Johnny; she's workin' fine! Ain't she a little humdinger?"

I didn't try to reply. I just hung on, and hoped the end would be painless. I never like the idea of bein' all cut up. To take the big jump is nothin', but I'd like to go whole and not a piece at a time.

We goes whackin' across the first big divide like a bat out of hell, roars down the slope, and up the other side onto the next divide.

For miles the range cattle, with their tails as straight as ramrods, are runnin' off the face of the earth. Even the prairie dogs turn back somersets, and fall out of sight. Believe me, a prairie dog has some sense. Right then, if I'd been one, I'd dug down to China.

Then, in the middle of a big gumbo flat, twenty miles from nowhere, she gives a terrible wheeze, gets something crossways in her Sunday throat, and stops, sayin': "*Phush—phush—pow—phush—phush—pow!*"

Phil pulls four or five stoppers, but she don't go. She quits breathin', turns her face to the wall, and seems to pass in her checks.

We gets out.

"Now what?" I asks. "Looks to me like I was goin' to get them cattle of yours."

Phil laughs, and says, as cheerful as a jay bird: "This is nothin'. I'll have her fixed up in no time. The directions say she is liable to act this way. I think we overheated her."

Phil goes to tinkerin'. After a spell he gets sore. He's covered with grease and oil, and is hot and sweaty. He's taken a gallon of burs and bolts out of her, and covered the prairie with old iron.

Right then I laughs a mean, dirty, miserable little laugh.

He looks at me a minute, and then says: "Don't drive me too fur, Johnny."

Then he goes back and gets the jug

out of the back end of the concern, and takes a drink.

"Of course," I says to a meadow lark near by, "we can walk back; it's only thirty miles."

Phil don't say nothin'. He goes back to his work, pulls out a tube, looks at it, tries to put it back, sees it don't fit, and then finally says: "Johnny, you're a kind-hearted feller, but, when a man comes to know you, you're as cruel as an Injun."

All of a sudden he plum' loses his patience. He throws wrenches, bars, and thing-a-ma-jigs at that machine, and *cuss!* Don't you know that when one of them good-natured fellers gets mad, you can smell sulphur for days afterward.

Grits Phil between his teeth, with that low, mean, bitter style of cussin': "You winrow of night-bloomin' holly-hocks, if I had an ax I'd break your sweet little backbone, you nice old thing! What right has a gumbo-headed dash-and-so-forth to live who will take up with a tin pan on four spools when he has a good team in the barn. A man that will do a trick like that is a——"

You can figger out the rest to suit yourself. Phil was sure sore. He hits the jug after he'd sort of quit rockin' and tremblin', and again takes up his weary work.

All of a sudden the old fly-by-night sneezes.

"Don't know what I've done, but I've done it!" yells Phil. "She's comin' to."

She gradually comes out of her trance. *Spumph—spumph—spumph—pha-rik—pha-rik—rik-a-chickie! Rik—chick—chick—phosh!* She comes to life long enough to say good-by to all her folks, leave everything to charity, and then make another bluff at croakin'.

"She's all in this trip," I says. "Might as well order her coffin."

"Ain't that just naturally hell!" says Phil, so softlike that a range steer jumped off in a water hole on whose edge he'd been hangin' since we come. "Wouldn't that just naturally knock the —— Oh, well, let's have a drink."

He h'ists the jug in the hollow of his arm, and I seconds him.

"Maybe some one will come along and haul us in," I offers, as a chunk of hope.

"Nary hoss in the country will come near us," glooms Phil.

He was right. A team sighted us a mile away, and, in spite of all the driver could do, made a broom-tailed circle a half mile to the east of us. They were travelin' at a stiff run.

I've reached the point where I don't care. I know the hoodoo is workin' fine, and I am prepared for anything. I've give up.

So I takes out the lap robe and spreads it on the ground. Says I, not carin' whether I live or die, says I: "Let me know when you're ready to walk back. If I should fall asleep, do not wake me too swiftly, for I come up fightin'. Farewell."

I rolled a cigarette and lay back.

"*Pah-fung!*" says the machine, just that and no more. Phil jumped for it, and began pullin' levers, but no use. They were her dyin' words. *Pah-fung* was automobilese for *good night*.

Then, just when we're clear down and out, the old corn shucker comes to life, bawlin', bellerin', and blowin' smoke. Phil had yanked the right lever.

"Jump in!" bellers my friend, and we both made it on the wing.

She's runnin', but Phil can't control her. She leaves the road, and goes foggin' off through the sagebrush. I see the old shebang is bound to have our lives, and that she is headed straight for a gully.

Phil sees there is no use, and sets back waitin' for the end like a nervy man. She stops within seven inches of the jump-off, and begins whisperin: "*Ush—ush—ush.*"

We gets out once more, and I walks around her. Also I see what kind of a load we are carryin'. In the back of the old rattletrap is a case of dynamite along with the jug and other necessities. Then, as a finish, I looks at the old shingle mill's number. Drop me in my tracks if it ain't one-thirty-one—a thir-teen goin' or comin'. Read it backward or forward, it was thirteen. Says I:

"Well, wouldn't that get your Rocky Mountain goat!" There seemed to be no show to get out alive.

Just as a polite question, I asks Phil: "Has that box of sudden death been under me all this time?"

Phil tells me that he's takin' the powder to the ranch to blast out a spring. He seems kind of surprised that such a thing was worth askin' a question about. Funny thing about some men. Finest kind of fellers will have a weak spot in their head. Phil was careless about powder. If he was lookin' for something, he'd throw aside a box of dynamite the same as if it's cordwood. He buys and sells lots of it, and I suppose some day he'll land on the other side before the gatekeeper can punch his ticket. Phil didn't look crazy, but then you never can tell. There's something wrong with a man who will start out on Friday the thirteenth in a locoed automobile with a box of dynamite under the seat. He may be able to stall along for years and keep out of the jimmy corral, but some day he'll let go all holts, and it's the giggle house for him.

I comes up close to Phil, and says to him, just as gentle and kind as can be:

"Poor, suff'rin' critter, you don't know what you're doin'. I don't want to hurt your feelin's, but, if you must know it, I am about to bid farewell to your little old torpedo boat. On this, the thirteenth day, known as Friday, I will leave you with your darlin'."

Phil shook his head, and went to tinkerin'. That's the way with the nutty ones; soon's they go bugs they think everybody else is crazy.

My poor, unfortunate friend keeps on a-fussin' with Miss Helen Trouble, and pretty soon she begins to show signs of life. But just as we are feelin' hopeful she gives a tired little moan, and turns up her toes.

"No use, Phil," I says. "The hoodoo has got you for fair. All you can do is to leave her, walk back to town, and make arrangements to ship your cattle to Billy Dayton. You are what is popularly known as a gone goose."

But Phil has a stubborn nature—

same as a cow in a mudhole. He keeps on tinkerin'. I lay back and smoke.

Pretty soon it gets chilly and the wind rises. In a little while it banks up black in the north, and there comes a rumble of thunder. Then the fun starts. An electric storm on the Western prairie is no picnic. And if you want to see lighnin' that is lightnin', you'll find it on the range.

"Come away from that machine!" I howls at Phil, as the long streaks of death and destruction tear the sky in two. The old boy sees I am right. That machine is the only lightnin' mark for miles.

It's dark now, and we are flounderin' through gullies and washouts, and doin' our best to get away from that machine.

And then comes the wind-up. An awful glare, and a rip that sounded like some one had tore the roof off of hell; a jar that rocked the world, a red blast, and then darkness.

"Would you call that *an accident?*" I asked Phil, as we crouched in a wash-out. "Don't forget your words spoken to me in front of the hotel."

He kept still, for at last the hoodoo had got his goat.

The storm soon passed, and a red sun come out. We concludes to try and make it to the nearest ranch—ten miles.

Thinks I: "That machine and all is gone, but we're alive. Yet it's still Friday the thirteenth; there is yet time to die."

We plugs down off the divide, and into the valley. We are headin' for a ranch on the crick. As we drags along we notices a couple of riders swing out from some cottonwoods and come toward us. We joy up at the sight of them, thinkin' they'll give us a lift. You can figger that we are some surprised when those gobblers ride up and throw their six-guns down on us, with that cute little remark: "Put 'em up—*quick!*"

Both bein' Western raised, we throws up our hands.

The two riders has handkerchiefs over their faces, but I tumbles to who they be; they was the Midbury brothers, a couple of hoss thieves and hold-

ups that had created a lot of disturbance on the other side of the territory. I knew one of them by the scar that run up along his temple. They were them sandy-complected, brocky, bench-legged kind, ornery, mean, and vicious.

Their hosses seemed fresh enough, but their clothes were rags. They had been drove by sheriff posses for two hundred miles, and they looked pretty ragged.

"Just about of a size," says one of the scoundrels.

"Right you be," comes back the other son of a gun.

With that they both hops off their hosses, and while one keeps the iron on us, the other cleans us. They took Phil's watch and ring, and tapped me for a roll of expense money.

There ain't much conversation at such times. You might think that you would talk a lot when bein' stuck up, but, as a general rule, you think of a lot of things to say, but don't say 'em.

For my part, I knew the hoodoo was workin' at high pressure, and that there was no use to kick. Phil looked kind of dazed.

When they'd searched us to suit, one of them shoves a gun against the small of my back, and says: "Strip to the hide."

The other holdup had his six against Phil's back, and Phil was obeyin' orders.

We stripped and stood out, and Adam had nothin' on us.

The holdups laughed something cruel.

Says the biggest one: "We need the clothes, boys. Besides, you fellers ain't goin' to run and tell all you know right now."

Me and Phil didn't say nothin'.

The two devils bundle up our clothes and hit the trail, leavin' us in bad shape.

I looked at Phil for a spell. I hated to rub it in, but I had to do it.

"Speakin' of accidents," I says, slow and cruel, "if anybody should happen to ask you, would you call this *an accident*?" He did not answer, and I went on with the Injun torture. "I must say that clothes make a heap of difference. As I remember you, Phil, when you had

your duds on, you were a fair-lookin' man. What you look like now I ain't got the heart to say."

"Johnny," says the old boy, kind of pitifullike, "we're in bad shape. They didn't even leave us our boots." He takes a step or two, like a turkey walkin' on hot iron.

"No," I agrees with him, "they did not leave us anything but our honor, and mighty little of that."

We then starts out. I guess we'd hobbled maybe a quarter of a mile when Phil stepped on a cactus. He sat down, yellin', and went to pickin' at his foot. But he got up in a second, as something moved under his knees. 'Twas only a lizard, but Phil thinks it is a rattler. For a big man he moved the quickest I ever see.

"Gawd forgive me!" he yells. Then, in a solemn, pained voice: "There must be something in that Friday-the-thirteenth thing. Johnny, we're Jonahed from start to finish. What'll we do? If the country gets onto this we're gone—never hear the last of it."

I looked at him for a minute or two. "Well, you great, big, beautiful doll, it's you for it. You got me into this deal, now get me out."

Phil balanced himself on one foot, and began pickin' cactus thorns out of the other.

"Bill Horner's ranch—ouch!—is just down the crick—ugh!—but I saw Bill in town this mornin'. Wife's to home—Lord love me!—I s'pose."

"Lead on, *Cleopatra*," I says. "Maybe we can get close enough to holler for one of the Horner kids to bring a pair of blankets."

Phil groans and leads the way.

It's comin' dusk when, with our feet in tatters, and bleedin' from a thousand scratches, and chatterin' with the cold, we gets in hailin' distance of the Horner Ranch. A lot of dogs run out, and we hear a woman callin'. We duck down behind some brush, yellin' for all we're worth: "Friends, friends! Send a boy with blankets—two blankets!"

Thank Heaven the dogs were friendly enough, though kind of surprised. We keep on yellin'.

A woman's voice calls: "What's wanted?"

I don't like the sound of her voice; it has a cold, desperate ring to it.

"It's Phil Brayton!" bawls my friend. "Send one of the boys with a pair of blankets!"

"You can't fool me, you scum of earth!" screams the woman; and then *bang!* goes a rifle, and a bullet whines *spee-wing* over our heads. The hoodoo is still up and doin'.

"Friday the thirteenth," I croaks, and burrows into the earth.

Another shot, and Phil begins diggin' like a badger. "Please, Missis Horner, don't shoot!" he yells. "Brayton! Brayton! Brayton!"

At last the woman catches a note in Phil's voice that convinces her that something is wrong.

She quits shootin', and screams: "What's the matter? Why don't you show yourself?"

Phil raises up a little, and bawls for all he's worth: "Holdups took clothes. Send your boy Harry with blankets."

Callin' her boy by name sort of convinced the spunky woman, although her "All right!" was a little doubtful.

Pretty soon a ten-year-old boy comes slippin' out. Phil coaxes and talks to the lad until he comes up to us and drops the blankets. But the kid don't linger; drops our new suits, and fairly skeedaddles for the house. We drapes the blankets around us, and follow the kid.

Missis Horner is in the door, rifle ready. When she sees that we're sure-enough friends, she laughs a little shaky.

"They got away with two hosses," she says, referrin' to the cusses who had took our clothes, "but I stood 'em off from the house. Come in."

We goes in, and Missis Horner sets down her gun and lights a lamp. Then she takes a look at us. And I be blamed if the woman didn't set down in a chair and laugh her head off—just laughed until she cried.

"Missis Horner," says Phil, mighty solemn, "this is no laughin' matter. But, while we're talkin', I want to say that I'd appreciate you keepin' still about this. You been wantin' that big range for some time, and I'll send it out the first chance I get. Also you was sayin', the last time you was in town, that you wanted a sofy for your front room, but couldn't afford it. The sofy will come along with the range, and no charge for the stove or it. Only kindly keep still."

The woman stuffed her apron in her mouth, and pointed at the bedroom. Later she threw in some of her husband's clothes, and we managed to make out.

Though worn down to a frazzle, we cat-napped till midnight. When I thought it about time, I lit the lamp, and looked at the clock Missis Horner had loaned us.

"Twelve-ten," I tells Phil. "The hoodoo's past." Then my mind hits back to business. "Tell me again," I requests, "do I get your cattle for Billy Dayton?"

Phil pulls up the blankets. "You not only get my cattle," he says, just as kind as can be, "but if I was runnin' goats you'd get 'em all. *Good night.*"



UNABLE TO MEET THE EMERGENCY

SENATOR and Mrs. Cummins, of Iowa, went one evening to dine in a Washington restaurant where colored waiters were employed. Mrs. Cummins, after she had taken up the menu, found that she had left her glasses at home, and therefore was unable to read. She handed the senator the card, and asked him to order the dinner, but he found that he also had forgotten his glasses.

Then he handed the card to the waiter, with the request:

"Will you please read the menu to me?"

The waiter bowed in a courtly manner, and answered, in a low tone:

"'Deed, suh, I'd like to 'blige you, but I ain't got no educashun, neither."

The Destroyer

By Burton E. Stevenson

Author of "The Mind Master," "The Boule Cabinet," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

France wakes one morning horrified to witness the destruction of one of her prized battleships, *La Liberté*, in the harbor of Toulon. Her powder magazines had exploded in some unaccountable manner, entirely wrecking the vessel and killing three hundred of her crew. There is some baffling mystery as to the cause of the catastrophe, and three of the greatest brains in France are set on solving it—Delcassé, the powerful minister of the marine; Lépine, head of the detective bureau; and Crochard the Invincible, a wonderful character and leader of the underworld. Crochard soon proves himself the master of affairs. Singular things come to light. First, two men, apparently foreigners, were seen at sunrise staring at *La Liberté* just as the ship blew up, then they disappeared. All their actions proved suspicious, but the authorities cannot place hands on them. Deductions lead to the conviction that they were German naval officers in disguise. Again, wireless telegraphy seems to have played an important rôle in the destruction of *La Liberté*. But how, and from whence? Delcassé and his allies are at a loss, when a most disquieting and significant discovery is made: Crochard finds a secret wireless station hidden in a grove on a neighboring hill. Further investigation confirms the worst fears—the two foreigners are identified as Germans, one of them undoubtedly Pachmann, head of the German wireless service. Crochard strikes another mysterious trail leading him to suspect and follow the fleeing footsteps of Vard, a Polish exile, and his daughter Kasia, bound for America on the liner *Prinzessin Otilie*. Lépine sends an aérogram to the commander of the speeding ship, asking him if Vard and daughter are on board, but the answer denies knowledge of them. The French authorities are nonplused. Meanwhile, on board the *Otilie*, Vard and Kasia are journeying in safety. Kasia meets an attractive, frank young American, Dan Webster, and takes him into her confidence. She tells him that her father is the most wonderful man in the world, and holds the destinies of nations in the hollow of his hand. Dan is duly impressed, but receives a momentary shock when he discovers that their conversation on the dark deck has been overheard by his roommate, Chevrial, an alleged wine merchant, who warns Webster that it is dangerous to hold such conversations—spies are about. Aboard, also, are Pachmann and a German prince, their mission being with Vard, who holds the secret of destroying navies by ether waves. It is Pachmann who "doctors" the wireless message to Lépine. Kasia, growing more friendly with Dan, gives into his charge the great device of her father's, the Vards being fearful of treachery. Meanwhile, Pachmann and Vard hold guarded conference about the invention and its ultimate use. But it is soon apparent that their talk has been overheard by some spy, and Pachmann is distraught.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SECOND CONFERENCE.

A GAIN a rope was stretched across the forward promenade, and, for the information of the curious, a sign attached to it bearing the single word, "Paint." Again a guard was stationed in front of the captain's cabin, but this time it consisted of two petty officers. Again the captain surprised his subordinates by mounting to the bridge, although the night was clear and fine. They noticed that he was lost in thought, and that he went often to the head of the ladder leading to the deck, and glanced down

it. The second officer was on duty, and he took occasion to look down, too, on one of his turns along the bridge, but all he could see was a stretch of empty deck and two petty officers leaning against the rail chatting together. The second officer wondered more and more at his commander's uneasiness, and surreptitiously inspected the barometer, tapping it with his finger; but he knew better than to ask any questions.

Meanwhile, in the captain's cabin, Vard, Pachmann, and the prince again faced each other. Perhaps it would be more exact to say that Vard and Pachmann faced each other, while the prince looked on from the side lines. In the

heart of that young gentleman, for the past three days, there had been a strange disgust, hitherto unknown among Hohenzollerns—the disgust of realizing that, if the truth were told, he was a poor thing who added not to the wealth of the world, but to its poverty, who was unable to support himself, but to support whom men, and women, and children toiled and starved.

He had never seen it just like that before; reared in the family tradition, it had seemed a law of nature that they should have subjects to work for them, and suffer for them, and die for them, if need be; he had been taught that it was God Himself who had given place and power to his house; and that, if other less-favored people lived in misery and died in want, why, that was doubtless God's will, too. And as for war—why, without war there could be no glory, no conquest, no chivalry. It was war which held a nation together, which made kings more powerful and thrones more stable! But now came a man with shining eyes who talked of the folly of war, of the waste of armies, of universal brotherhood, and a world governed by love! Wild words, foolish dreams, perhaps—and yet most dangerous to the idea of the divine right of kings! So, that evening, the prince sat and listened, and tried to understand.

It was Pachmann who did most of the talking, and a great deal of it was for the prince's benefit.

"We have been considering your proposal, Mr. Vard," he began, "and have discussed it thoroughly." As a matter of fact, he had not exchanged a word with the prince on the subject; he had distrusted him ever since Vard had offered him his hand, for that action showed that this anarchist, this socialist, this enemy of kings, had detected in this young descendant of kings sympathy and a certain understanding. Pachmann thought of it with disgust and horror. "We have discussed it thoroughly," Pachmann repeated, and the prince, who detected the contempt in the words, flushed hotly, but did not speak; "and there are certain objections to your plan which we wish to submit

to you. The first of these is that war does not depend upon explosives. Before gunpowder, men fought with swords, and lances, and arrows; before the discovery of iron and steel, with clubs and stones. Man has always been fighting, even when he had no weapons but his fists."

"That is true," assented Vard. "Pray continue."

"My argument is," went on Pachmann, dropping the plural once for all, "that, though you may render all explosives useless, and blow up forts, and battleships, and arsenals, you will not stop war. You will merely compel it to shift to another basis—to the old basis, probably, of brute strength, of hand-to-hand combat. And if you do that, the old days of barbarian invasions will return. The Turk will sweep down again on southern Europe; the Tartars will invade us from the east. You will not assist civilization; you will set it back a thousand years. It will have to fight again for its very existence, as it did in the Middle Ages."

But Vard shook his head.

"I have thought of that," he said. "In the first place, it will be permitted to continue the use of explosives against the barbarians—for defense, you understand, not for aggression—until such time as we can persuade them, too, to lay down their arms. As to your other objection, it falls to the ground the moment you agree with me that all the nations of the world must ultimately become democracies. At first, it is true, men fought of their own volition, but it was to secure food, to guard their homes, or to replenish their supply of women. But since those very early days, all wars have been wars not of the people, but of their rulers. They were wars of revenge or ambition, in which the people joined because they had no choice. They were driven into the ranks, were sometimes sold by one power to fight for another. Left to their own choice, they would have remained quietly at home, tilling their fields, rearing their families. The only great exception I know of is the early wars of Napoleon. To those

wars, the French people did undoubtedly rush; but they were still drunk from the Revolution, and their ardor soon passed. Your own people, the people of Germany, are a peaceable, home-loving people. You have always had to keep them under your thumb by forced service, by conscription, by the most rigorous laws; you have always had to drive them to war."

"Another exception occurs to me," said Pachmann, disregarding the last sentence, "and one to which I would call your attention, since it occurred in a country where the people are supposed to govern. It was the people of the United States who drove their rulers into the war with Spain."

"That is true," Vard agreed; "and it was a mistake. The people will sometimes err when their sympathy is appealed to and their passion aroused. But the results of that war were, on the whole, good. A people was freed."

"And another enslaved," said Pachmann, with a sneer.

"It was already enslaved," Vard corrected; "but I admit that it was continued in slavery. That was done by the rulers, not by the people. Had the people been permitted to decide, the Philippines would have been free, no less than Cuba. Their independence must, of course, be guaranteed when the United States signs our treaty."

"But you admit, as I understand you," said Pachmann, returning to the main point, "that to abolish explosives will not abolish war."

"I admit that, yes. To abolish explosives is only the first step. The final step will be the abolition of hereditary rule."

"The abolition of kings?"

"The abolition of kings, of emperors, of czars, of princes, of dukes, of all tyrants, great and small, who, by reason of birth, now claim the right to tax or oppress or command even the meanest of their fellow creatures. There must be rulers, yes; but it is for the people themselves to choose them, and then willingly to submit to them."

"But you are at this moment treating with a king," Pachmann pointed out.

"Can you expect him to agree to such a program?"

"The world has outgrown kings," retorted Vard. "In any event, another fifty years will see them all abolished. I but hasten the end a little—the millennium. And he will be happier when he is merely a man like other men."

"Happiness is not the greatest thing in the world," Pachmann objected.

"And I say it is!" cried Vard, with sudden violence. "Not our own happiness—no; but the happiness of our fellow creatures. That is the greatest thing in the world; the thing for which every wise and good man labors!"

There was a moment's silence. The prince shifted uneasily in his chair, and clasped and unclasped his hands. There had never been such talk as this in the royal nursery!

Pachmann's face was cynical, as he lighted a fresh cigar.

"Dreams!" he sneered. "Beautiful dreams! Do you know what it is you are undertaking? You are undertaking to change human nature."

"That is an old cry," retorted Vard scornfully. "And what if I were? Human nature is changing every day! But I am not undertaking to change it—I wish merely to free human nature from the fetters with which tyrants bind it, so that it may grow straight and strong, as God intended."

"I am not acquainted with God's intentions," said Pachmann coldly. "He does not confide in me. But my philosophy, my observation, and my experience teach me that the wise man makes the best of things as they are, accepts the facts of life, and does what he can. He sees that the world is too big for him to overturn, he realizes that there are many things he cannot understand, his intelligence sometimes revolts at what seems to be oppression and injustice. But he puts away from him the fallacy that all men are equal—they are not equal, their very inequality proves it. Some must rule and some be ruled; for some life must be pleasanter and more full of meaning than it is for others; some men must be strong and some weak, just as some women are beautiful

and some ugly. It is not their fault; it is their misfortune, and they suffer for it. Which brings me to the principal objection I have to your proposal. It is this: I believe that we shall find it a mere waste of time to invite the nations of the world to sign a treaty for complete disarmament; they distrust each other, and that distrust has proved too often to be well founded. The long centuries have made them jealous, sullen, watchful. There is only one motive which can make them sign—fear—fear of what may happen if they do not!"

"I have already said," remarked Vard, "that I am ready to apply compulsion, should it be necessary."

"But you are finite," Pachmann objected gently. "You are but an individual, whose life may end at any moment; while, as you yourself have said, this plan of yours will take long years, generations perhaps, to consummate. To perfect it will test the best intellects of the world. Once begun, it must be carried through. Do you think it wise to imperil its success by making it depend so largely on yourself? Besides, what would be easier than for an unwilling nation to suppress you? A pistol shot, a blow with a knife, and the brotherhood of man tumbles to pieces."

"What is it you propose?" asked Vard, who had listened to all this with growing impatience.

"I propose that, instead of so great a task being assumed by an individual, it be assumed by an entire nation, which shall pledge its honor to carry it to success."

"And this nation," said Vard sarcastically, "should, of course, in your opinion, be Germany."

"I admit," replied Pachmann, with dignity, "that I consider Germany best fitted to carry out the plan. I think you will agree with me that, if a single nation is to undertake it, it must be one of the five great nations. In world politics, the others are negligible. Well, let us see. France, a nation of peacocks, excitable, impressionable, easily angered, making much of trifles, jealous of their dignity, a dying nation which

grows smaller and weaker every year. England, also a degenerate nation, soaked in gin, where a hundred thousand men are unemployed, and where no better remedy for pauperism can be found than universal pensions; which only make more paupers. Russia, an ignorant nation, whose ruling class is composed of men without morals and without ideals—thieves, and drunkards, and vain braggarts. There remains America, and at first glance it might seem that here is the nation to be intrusted with the great work. But, after all, it is a nation of moneygrubbers, where wealth is worshiped as no other nation worships rank; a nation without culture, without experience in world politics, without self-control, loudly vain, inept, wasteful, childish—a nation, in other words, at the awkward age between youth and manhood.

"Let us turn now to Germany. I speak only what is within the knowledge of all intelligent men when I say that, in manufacture, in agriculture, in the administration of government, in science, in literature, in music, in general culture, Germany is first among nations. Some may quarrel with her military policy, but none can question her progress or her achievements. All other nations come to Germany to learn. This is not exaggeration; it is calm statement of fact. I firmly believe that to-day, intellectually, morally, materially, Germany is the first nation in the world. And it is altogether fitting that she should be chosen as the leader of the world and arbiter of the affairs of all nations."

Vard had risen from his seat during the discourse, which was delivered with emphasis and conviction, and paced nervously up and down the cabin, his face drawn, a deep line between his brows. And Pachmann watched him curiously. So did the prince watch him, wondering what he would reply. He did not leave them long in doubt.

"In answer to you, Admiral Pachmann," he said, speaking slowly and carefully, as though weighing every word, "I can only say this: I do not dispute Germany's great achievements;

no man can do that. It is probably true that in science, in learning, in general culture, and in efficiency, she is, as you say, first among nations. Her people are a great people—but it is not they whom you represent. You represent a hereditary monarch, the only one in western Europe who still speaks of the divine right of kings—a man who would be an absolute autocrat, if he dared. Supporting him is a powerful circle of hereditary nobles, whose interest it is to increase in every possible way the prestige and power of the throne. At their command, ready to do their bidding, is a magnificent army and a great navy. Did your emperor possess my secret, he could at once declare war against Europe; he could conquer Europe, and every German prince would be a king. My whole purpose would be warped and debased. Instead of universal brotherhood, we should have a single ruling house, imposing its will on millions of conquered peoples. Instead of love, we should have world-wide hate. And I say to you plainly, sir, that, rather than that such a thing should come to pass, I will destroy my invention and leave the world as it is.”

Pachmann had listened intently, nodding his head from time to time, or puckering his brows in dissent.

“Have you yourself no ambition?” he asked. “Is there nothing in the way of honor or position which you desire for yourself or for your daughter?”

An ugly sneer curled the inventor’s lips.

“Bribery—I expected that!” he said. “No, there is nothing—nothing but the consciousness that it was I who ended war!”

“And your refusal of my first proposal is absolute?”

“Absolute. I consider it insulting.”

“You will not modify the terms of your proposal?”

“Not in any essential detail.”

“And if Germany refuses, you go to France?”

“That is my intention.”

“Very well,” and the admiral rose, too. “The situation is, then, quite clear to us; there is no longer any shadow of

uncertainty. It is for us to assent or to refuse. Our answer will be ready for you in a very short time.”

Vard bowed, his face very pale, and stepped to the door. He paused with his hand on the knob.

“Remember one thing,” he said; “it will be better for Germany to lead than to follow; your emperor will find the head of the procession much more to his taste than the tail of it. And it will be for him either the one or the other! Good night!” And he opened the door and was gone.

Pachmann stood with clenched fists and flushed face, staring at the spot where Vard had stood.

“Fool! Fool!” he muttered. “That he should think he could defy and threaten—and still escape! A great fool, is he not, my prince?”

The prince awoke, as from a dream.

“Great, at least!” he said.

CHAPTER XX.

THE PRINCE SEEKS DIVERSION.

In spite of his protestations, and the confident manner he assumed when with the prince, Pachmann was, as a matter of fact, exceedingly disturbed. It was true that for an individual as humble as Ignace Vard to hope to stand against the might of the German empire was absurd in the extreme; but, perhaps, Vard was not alone. Perhaps back of him there was some person or some power at which even Germany would pause.

Two incidents had been distinctly disquieting: the wireless from Lépine and the assault on Schroeder. The thing which filled Pachmann with dismay was not so much these incidents themselves as the degree of knowledge they indicated. Why did Lépine think Vard was on the boat? How had he connected the inventor with the disaster at Toulon? How had the person who assaulted Schroeder known of the conference in the captain’s cabin? How much had he heard of that conference? What use would he make of what he had heard? In a word, did France

suspect what had happened to *La Liberté*, and, if so, how much did she know?

A hundred times Pachmann asked himself these questions, and a hundred times tried to find some answer to them other than the obvious answer. He tried to persuade himself that Lépine had not connected Vard with the Toulon disaster, but was searching for him for some other reason; he tried to make himself believe that the assault on Schroeder was merely the result of a seaman's quarrel; he told himself over and over again that France could *not* suspect, that it was impossible she should suspect. But he could not convince himself. Always he came back to the obvious fact that, if Vard was wanted at all, it could only be for the affair at Toulon, and that the man who had taken Schroeder's place at the door of the captain's cabin could only have done so because he wanted to hear what was passing on the other side of it.

Always, with sinking heart, Pachmann came back to this point; and at such moments he wondered whether, after all, the emperor would not do well to lay aside his personal ambition, to consent to Vard's proposal, and assume the leadership of this great world movement, in all good faith. Surely that would be glory enough! Better, as Vard had said, to lead than to follow; better to stand proudly forth at the head of the movement than to be whipped into place in the rear.

And suppose Vard should manage to escape; suppose he should really get into touch with France! Pachmann, closing his eyes, could see a great fortress leaping into the air; could hear the thunder of the explosion which destroyed a dreadnaught! It was a dangerous game he was playing, and yet, to accede to Vard's proposal, meant the loss of Alsace-Lorraine, meant the eventual abasement of the Hohenzollerns, the rise of socialism. No, he could not consent; he had not the power to consent; he had his instructions, precise and clear, from the emperor himself. At any cost, that power must be Germany's, and hers alone!

At any cost! Pachmann drew a deep breath. He knew now what the cost must be. Well, when the moment came, he should not hesitate!

Sunday morning found Pachmann beside the assistant purser in the library of the second cabin, beginning the inquiry there. It was even more drastic than it had been in the first, and the victims emerged from it heated, angry, and with the fixed determination never again to travel by a German boat. Neither the captain nor the purser could vouch for any of the undistinguished people here, and so each one of them was most thoroughly examined. Even those with passports did not escape. Pachmann examined all such documents minutely, compared the written description point by point with the appearance of the passenger, and asked many questions to satisfy himself that the person presenting it was really the one to whom it belonged. Yet, in spite of all this, passenger after passenger came through the ordeal successfully.

As the list was called alphabetically, it was soon the turn of Monsieur Chevrial. He approached the table with confidence, produced his passport, and sat down to await such questions as might be asked him. Pachmann glanced at the Frenchman, and his eyes narrowed with anger, for this impudent person appeared to be amused at the proceedings! Then he picked up the passport and studied it carefully. It had been issued by the French government two months previously, as a renewal of a former passport, to André Chevrial, wine merchant, of 18 Rue des Chantiers, Paris; whose appearance and physical characteristics were described in detail. Pachmann compared the items of the description point by point with the man who sat smiling so shamelessly before him, answering the purser's questions in an ironical voice. The very fact that the man was so typically French and so plainly amused created in Pachmann's mind a flare of suspicion which dilated his nostrils and narrowed his eyes. But the passport was in perfect order, and Chevrial's answers came without hesitation.

"You are a wine merchant?"

"Yes."

"How long have you been in that business?"

"More years than I care to remember."

"That is not an answer."

"Let us say twenty years, then."

"Always at Paris?"

"The time before that did not count."

"Then you have not been always at Paris?"

"Heavens, no! First at Bordeaux; but for ten years at Paris."

"You are well known there?"

"Ask my neighbors in the Rue des Chantiers; or cross the street to the wine market, and ask any one there if he knows André Chevrial! Well known? But yes!"

"Is this your first visit to America?"

"Oh, no; nor my second. But it is my first trip on a boat of Germany, and will be my last. On the French boats, my compatriots know me. They do not annoy me with all these questions."

It was Pachmann who asked the next one:

"How does it happen that you travel this time by a German boat?"

Chevrial shrugged his shoulders:

"Because there was no French one. It is necessary that I be in New York on Wednesday. There was no other boat that would arrive in time. Had there been, I would have taken it."

"So you do not like German boats?"

"I like nothing German," said Chevrial calmly. "Least of all, this inquisition, which, it seems to me, demands some explanation."

"It is for the immigration bureau," the purser hastened to explain. "The American laws are very strict."

"The laws do not concern me. I am not an immigrant. I am merely one who goes on business, and who returns. My papers are in order, are they not?"

The purser was forced to confess that they were.

"Then," said Chevrial, returning them to his pocket, "if there are any further questions to be answered, I will wait until I get to the pier at New York to

answer them. I shall at least have the pleasure of talking to an American!" And he got up and left the library.

Pachmann was furious; but he had no excuse for holding the fellow, nor for examining his baggage. In search of such excuse, he dispatched a wireless to the agent of his government at Brussels, directing him to secure at once all the information available about André Chevrial, 18 Rue des Chantiers, Paris; and that evening a very polite gentleman called at the house in question. It was a tall, hideous house, with a cabaret on the first floor. To its proprietor the visitor addressed himself. But yes, the proprietor knew Monsieur Chevrial, a merchant of wine, who had honored his house for many years by occupying an apartment on the third floor. His present whereabouts? Ah, the proprietor could not say; Monsieur Chevrial made many journeys in the interests of his business; he was absent at the present time. It was the season of his annual trip to America; perhaps he was now on his way thither. He had left no address; but if monsieur wished to write a letter, it would be sent forward as soon as an address was received.

The visitor declined to write a letter, but left his card—or, at least, a card—to be given to Monsieur Chevrial upon his return. Then he took his leave. And the proprietor stuck the card in the frame of the dirty mirror back of the bar, chuckling to himself.

A report of all which Pachmann duly received by radio next day.

The prince, meanwhile, was finding the voyage wearisome. He was not a difficult person to amuse, and he was very expert in the gentle art of killing time; he had done little else since he emerged from the nursery; but here, on shipboard, he possessed none of the implements with which he usually carried on that slaughter. He could sit in the smoking room with a tall stein before him, he could stroll about the deck and stare at the sea, which he did not care for; but there was no one to talk to. His subjects of conversation were limited, and all of them were associated

more or less with his princely character; here, where, for the first time in his life, he found himself divested of that princely character, he was completely at a loss. The trouble was that he had no sense of humor—he was a German through and through! So he found it impossible to gossip with plebeian unknowns, or engage in card games with irreverent middle-class artisans and drummers. He could not even carry on a flirtation with any of the pretty girls! He had attempted it with one of them; but after a very few minutes she had left him with her chin in the air, and an exclamation which sounded singularly like "Beast!" What is gallantry in a prince is impertinence or worse in a less privileged person!

Remember, our prince was merely a good-natured, thick-headed, young man, who had always been compelled to take himself seriously, whose life had been ordered for him from day to day to its minutest detail; who had never been called upon to use his wits in earnest. There had always been some one to do his thinking for him; there had always been the routine of drill and study to fill a certain portion of every day; and there had always been the fearful delight of escaping from his father's eye and roaming the streets of Berlin in quest of adventure. But here on ship-board, the day was twenty-four empty hours long, and even Pachmann had deserted him, to spend his time asking the passengers interminable questions, whose purpose the prince could not in the least understand.

So, on this Sunday morning, having attended the services in the dining saloon for want of something else to do, and kept awake with great difficulty, having smoked innumerable cigarettes, having snubbed an ill-mannered American whose manner was distinctly fresh, having tramped up and down the decks, and looked into the library to find Pachmann still asking questions, questions, the prince made a sudden daring resolution, walked quickly forward, ascended to the first-class promenade, and looked about for Ignace Vard. With the inventor, at least, he need wear no dis-

guise, and he simply must talk to somebody. Besides, the inventor's talk gave him a good feeling at the heart—the feeling that he might really some day do something worth while! Pachmann would disapprove, of course; but who was Pachmann? A younger son of the inferior nobility! He must remind Pachmann of that, some day, for he seemed to have forgotten it since the emperor had taken him up!

He found the object of his search leaning against the rail, far forward, staring ahead at the path the ship was taking. Vard greeted him with evident pleasure.

"You have come to arrange for the final conference?" he asked.

The prince shook his head.

"I know no more of that than you," he said.

"But I was assured that your decision would be made at once. My plans depend upon your answer. This is Sunday. On Tuesday we reach New York."

"I know nothing," repeated the prince. "I have not spoken with the admiral to-day—indeed, I have scarcely spoken to him for three days. On Friday and Saturday, and again to-day, he has spent every moment in an examination of the passengers."

"Why does he do that?" asked Vard quickly.

"I do not know."

Vard glanced at the prince, and his face softened a little.

"So you have been left to amuse yourself," he said, "and, not succeeding very well, have come to me? Is that it?"

"Yes," said the prince; "I must talk to some one, and I find that I cannot talk with people who do not know who I am. The men offend me, the women I offend."

This time there was genuine friendliness in Vard's face.

"Poor fellow!" he laughed. "Well, I have never acted as court jester, but I'm willing to try. Come along."

He led the way back along the deck and opened a door.

"This is my room," he said. "Come

in. You should feel more at home here than I do, for it is an imperial suite."

The prince assented gravely, entered, and the inventor, his eyes dancing, closed the door.

"Sit down," he said. "You may smoke," and he proceeded to roll himself a cigarette. "This is your first visit to America? Yes? The first thing you will notice is that not many Americans smoke cigarettes. Until quite recently, the cigarette was believed to be in some mysterious way debauching; no one but degenerates were supposed to smoke them. Even yet that is the prevailing opinion outside a few of the large cities."

"Most curious," commented the prince, and blew a smoke ring toward the ceiling.

"Outside of New York, which is fairly cosmopolitan, there is the same prejudice against wine or beer, or any fermented or distilled spirit. No public man, no teacher in a public school or university, no physician, no professional man—no man, in a word, who depends upon public opinion, public approval, for a livelihood—would dare sit at a table on the sidewalk and drink a glass of beer or a liqueur. He might do it once, and escape with the reputation of an eccentric; but to do it twice would be to brand himself as not trustworthy."

"Astonishing!" said the prince. "Do you speak seriously?"

"Very seriously. Some of the States have even enacted laws that no alcoholic beverage of any kind may be sold within their borders."

"But," stammered the prince, staring, "do you call that liberty? No country of Europe would dare enact such a law!"

"No; it is not liberty; it is government by the majority. The wonderful thing, the astonishing thing, the inspiring thing about it is that in this, and in all other questions, the minority accepts its defeat without grumbling, and makes the best of it. That is the great lesson which the United States has for the remainder of the world. And, to preserve itself, it need keep no class in subjection, need draft no man for service in

its armies—for it is a government founded on the consent of the governed."

He was silent a moment, considering, perhaps, how to use most wisely this opportunity.

"Let us apply that principle to the other countries of the world," he went on, at last. "Let us suppose that the people of each country were asked to choose freely for themselves their form of government. How many of the present governments would stand that test? Do you think the government of Germany would?"

"No," said the prince; "I suppose not. Our people are all socialists, so my father says. But they are not fit to govern."

"Whose fault is that? Have you tried to make them fit? Besides, their fitness or unfitness has nothing to do with it. It is their country; let them grow fit by experience. But I believe they *are* fit. How many of your great men have come from humble life?"

"Oh, a great many, I dare say!" answered the prince impatiently. "But a body needs a head. It must be governed by a head, not by a stomach!"

"Ah," said Vard, "but, as a matter of fact, every body *is* governed by its stomach. Not till the stomach is satisfied does the head get a chance. And, to govern wisely, the head must be a part of the body, not something distinct from it. How is it to govern wisely, if it is not always in close touch with the body, aware of its every need? It is only when the head is distinct from the body that it lets the body starve, and wastes its substance on vain and unnecessary things."

"I suppose," said the prince, with a smile, "that you refer to our army and navy."

"To the army and navy of every nation. Could the people choose, how many battleships would Germany build next year?"

The prince shrugged his shoulders helplessly.

"How can I answer such questions? I do not know. But I do know that I

have been born in a certain position, and that I must maintain it."

"Why?" Vard demanded.

"For the sake of my honor, and the honor of my house," answered the prince simply.

"Honor!" cried Vard. "What do princes know of honor? Is it honorable to live on the sweat and suffering of others, and to make them no return? Is it honorable to be supported by the toil of women and children, whose men you have taken for your army? Is it honorable——"

He stopped suddenly, for the door had opened, and a girl came in. She stared first at one man and then at the other, evidently astonished by the few words she had heard. Then she moved to withdraw. But Vard stopped her.

"Don't go, my dear," he said. "Allow me to present you to a prince of the house of Hohenzollern! Prince, this is my daughter, Kasia."

CHAPTER XXI.

ON THE EDUCATION OF PRINCES.

The prince sprang to his feet and bowed low over the hand which Kasia, after an instant's startled hesitation, had extended. Her father watched the scene with an amused face.

"You arrived most opportunely, my dear," he said. "The prince, being bored, as is the way with princes, came to me, asking to be amused. I started out to amuse him by describing certain strange customs of America, which he is about to visit for the first time; but I was soon on my hobby again, and instead of amusing him——"

"You were abusing him!" said Kasia, laughing. "At least, it sounded so to me!"

"Oh, not at all!" the prince hastened to assure her. "I found what he was saying most interesting."

But Vard, with that quick change of mood characteristic of his temperament, had already decided that it was not worth while attempting to rear any seed from this barren soil. The prince's intentions were good enough, but they

would come to nothing—his father would see to that!

"Nevertheless," said Vard, "I am not an amusing companion. I am too much of a preacher, and no one likes to be shouted at. I would suggest, Kasia, that you take his highness for a tour of the deck."

The prince's face brightened wonderfully.

"That would, indeed, be kind!" he said.

Kasia looked at him with a little smile. Perhaps the opportunity of talking familiarly with royalty piqued her, good democrat as she was; besides, he was not a bad-looking fellow. One could see that he was not brilliant, but he at least looked clean and honest.

"If you really wish it," she agreed.

For answer, the prince sprang to the door.

"One moment," Vard interposed. "You will remember, Kasia, that the prince is incognito, and that, under no circumstances, must you betray to any spectator or listener who he is."

"I will remember, father," said Kasia, and followed the prince out upon the deck.

Wherefore it presently came to pass that Dan Webster, staring gloomily down from the after boat deck upon the flitting beauties of the first-class promenade, beheld the lady of his dreams strolling beside a well-set-up young fellow, whose face seemed vaguely familiar, and in whose conversation she was evidently deeply interested—so interested, that she finally climbed with him to a seat on the upper deck; and when they sat down, Dan saw that the young fellow sat very close, indeed. He stared incredulously for a moment longer, and then turned angrily away, to bump violently into Monsieur Chevrial, who was also staring.

"What the——" Dan began, and then stopped himself. What right had this Frenchman to stare? But then, for that matter, what right had he?

Chevrial was the first to recover himself. He glanced at Dan's disturbed countenance, and smiled as he read his thought.

"I was surprised to see a passenger of the second class so calmly enjoying the privileges of the forward deck," he explained. "If any one was to enjoy those privileges, I should have expected it to be you."

"So he is second class! I thought he looked somewhat familiar. I remember, now."

"He is undoubtedly the same young German we have seen so frequently pacing this deck," said Chevrial. "I fancy he is lonely and desires amusement. But, at the same time, I fear that you lack enterprise, Monsieur Webster. That is not like an American."

Dan flushed, and started to stalk away, but Chevrial laid a hand upon his arm.

"No, do not be angry with me," he said. "I beg your pardon. It will please you to know that that young man yonder is one of the very few persons on this boat with whom Miss Vard may talk unconstrainedly. No doubt that is why she appears so glad to see him."

With which cryptic utterance, Monsieur Chevrial went below, and left Dan to bitter meditation.

Kasia, meanwhile, was enjoying herself immensely.

"Now," she said, leaning back in the seat, after a glance around to assure herself that there was no one within hearing, "please tell me what it is like to be a prince. Don't you get frightfully lonesome, sometimes?"

"That was my complaint to-day, when I sought your father."

"Yes—but always, always to stand apart from other men and women, so that they never dare be quite open with you, quite frank with you, always a little in awe of you."

"Not many people I know are in awe of me," said the prince. "Most of them consider me something of a fool—they do not say so, but I can read it in their faces. My father thinks me a total fool, and does not hesitate to say so."

"He must be a terrible man!"

"He is," agreed the prince, with conviction.

Kasia looked at him to see if he was in earnest; then turned away her head for an instant, until she could control her lips.

"How does it happen that you speak English so well?" she asked.

"My father required it. It is the result of many weary hours, I assure you. However," added the prince, "I ought not to complain, since it has secured for me the present hour."

It was the first time Kasia had ever been made the mark for a royal compliment, and she flushed a little in spite of herself.

"It is nice of you to say so!" she murmured. "So you have had your bad times, too?"

"Bad times, Miss Vard! Why, the life that I have led has been a dog's life. There were so many things that I must know—that we all must know—so many things we must not do. I have often gazed from the windows of the palace and envied the boys in the gutter!"

"Not really!"

"Oh, not really, of course. I would not change. What I envied them was their liberty, their freedom to come and go as it pleased them."

"But since you are of age?"

"Even yet, each moment must be accounted for. I am now a lieutenant in the navy, and am supposed to employ each hour profitably. My father is a very great man; there are few things that he does not know; and he expects his sons to know as much. Even of pictures, which bore me; even of music, which distresses me. Everything is arranged. At such a time, I am to be with my ship; again, I am to attend the opera; again, I am to be present at the opening of a museum; again, I must listen to a long address which I do not understand. I may not even choose my own wife. All that is arranged."

"But no doubt," Kasia suggested, amused at his forlorn aspect, "your father will choose more wisely than you would."

"I do not know," said the prince consolately. "I fear that he will consider birth and position of more importance than youth and beauty. Be-

sides, there are some things a man likes to do for himself. My poor sister, now would——”

He stopped, for, under the stimulus of Miss Vard's sympathy, he found himself about to betray a family secret.

“Yes, I can understand that,” said Kasia, with more tenderness than she had yet shown. “You don't mind my talking frankly to you?”

“I love to be talked frankly to,” protested the prince.

This was very far from the truth, only the prince didn't know it. What he really loved was flattery disguised as frankness. In this, he resembled most other human beings.

“Well, then,” said Kasia, “if you don't like it, if you find it intolerable, why don't you cut and run?”

“Cut and run?”

“Yes; go away by yourself, be a free man, and marry the woman you love. For, of course, there is such a woman?”

“Oh, yes;” and the prince thought of the blue-eyed daughter of the shop-keeper in the Friedrichstrasse, just off Unter den Linden; however, he had never thought of marriage in connection with her. “But suppose I should do that,” he added, “how should I live?”

“How do other men live? By work!”

“But that would be a disgrace!”

“Disgrace! It isn't half so disgraceful as to live by the work of other men.”

“Your father said something of the same sort to me. But I fear that neither of you understand. A prince cannot do such things.”

Kasia threw up her hands.

“So we come back to the beginning of the circle!” she cried.

“Besides, my father would not permit it,” added the prince.

“Aren't you of age?”

“Yes—but he is the head of the family. He would have me brought home—even from a desert island—and then I should be confined. Even my elder brother is sometimes confined—separated from his wife, from his children, permitted to see no one.”

“Poor prince!” said Kasia. “So you

are a slave, like the rest of us—rather worse than the rest of us, indeed! Is there *nothing* you can do?”

“Very few things,” said the prince, beginning really to pity himself. “You see, there is always my family to consider—nothing must be done to injure its position or to make it less popular. Even my father very often may not say what he thinks, or do what he wishes.”

“So he is a slave, too!”

“Yes, in a way. And it grows worse and worse. Often, in private, he laments the old days when a king was really a king, who was venerated, and whose word was law. He grows very angry that at each election there are more socialists. He says that the only hope for the country is in a great war; it is for that he prepares.”

“How would a great war help?”

“Oh, in face of the common danger, our people would forget their differences, for they all love their fatherland; they would fight shoulder to shoulder. And then, when it was over, they would all be mad with joy over the victory, and there would be new provinces to add to Germany, and an immense tax levied on our enemy to pay the expenses of the war, so that our own people would not have to bear that burden. It would all be just as it was after the war with France, when every German was filled with patriotism, and when Germany for the first time became one country. Our house would again be well beloved, its authority unquestioned.”

“But suppose you are defeated?”

“We shall not be defeated,” said the prince calmly. “There is no nation in the world which could defeat Germany—except, perhaps, the United States. But we shall not go to war with the United States. England will be our foe, and you will see her tumble to pieces like a house of cards. She is but an empty shell.”

Kasia sat for a moment considering all this. If this was really what was in the kaiser's mind—and she could scarcely doubt it—it was foolish to suppose that he would consent to disarmament.

"What you have told me is not very promising for universal peace," she said, at last.

"There can be no universal peace until we have humiliated England," replied the prince. "That is the belief of all good Germans. The conflict must come soon, and we strain every nerve to prepare for it. I betray no secret when I tell you this. All Europe knows it. England struggles also to prepare, but we are always far ahead. When we are quite ready, we shall strike. Then, after we have won, after we have established Germany as the first nation of Europe, we shall be ready for peace. But we must have one more great victory. The welfare of our house demands it."

As he spoke, his eyes rested on the top of the companionway leading from the lower deck, and he started violently, for a face had appeared there—a face which looked at him sternly, almost threateningly. It was the face of Pachmann. Without a word, it disappeared. The prince turned nervously to his companion.

"Pardon me, Miss Vard," he said, "but I must go. And do not think too seriously of my chatter. I am not admitted to councils of state; I know only what every one knows. We Germans, we have our dreams; but, perhaps, they are only that."

He arose, opened his lips to say something more, then changed his mind, bowed, and hurried away. Kasia stared after him. She had not seen that silent summons. But he did not look back.

An hour later, Pachmann, with a countenance distinctly troubled, sought out Ignace Vard, who was reading in his room.

"The prince has been talking to your daughter," he said.

Vard looked at him in surprise.

"I sent them out together," he explained. "I thought, perhaps, Kasia would amuse him—and be amused."

"Has she told you nothing?"

Again Vard glanced at him.

"No. Has she reason for complaint?"

"I did not mean that. I dare say he behaved decently enough. But he spouted a lot of childish nonsense about German hopes and German ambitions, and I feared your daughter might take him seriously. He is nothing but an ignorant young ass."

Vard laid aside his book and looked Pachmann full in the face.

"The truth comes sometimes from the mouths of fools," he said. "When am I to have my answer?"

"The truth is," answered Pachmann readily, "that I am afraid to give it to you on board this boat. I chose this boat because I believed we should be safe here. But there are spies on board; one of our conferences has been overheard—perhaps both of them," and he told of the assault upon Schroeder. "Then, again, we must not be seen too much together. I might be recognized; and you are already suspected of having caused the destruction of *La Liberté*."

"How can that be?" Vard demanded, in a tone which showed that he was genuinely startled.

For answer, Pachmann took from his pocketbook a paper, unfolded it, and handed it to Vard. It was the wireless from Lépine.

"That was received last Thursday," he said. "I suppose you know who Lépine is. By great good fortune, I intercepted it, and sent an answer denying that you were on board. It was for that reason you were removed to the first class, and your name kept off the passenger list. But how can he have suspected you?"

Vard shook his head slowly. He was a little pale, and the hand which held the message trembled.

"I cannot guess," he said.

"You have told no one?"

"Told!" flashed Vard. "Do you not see that, unless my great plan succeeds, that action will have been an infamous one? To kill three hundred men in order to assure peace to the world—that may be justified—that may even be heroic; but to kill them wantonly, to kill them and then to fail—that would drive me mad!" He looked at Pachmann, his eyes suddenly inflamed. "And let me

tell you this," he added, in a voice of concentrated passion, "if I find that you have deceived me, if I find that you have betrayed me, Germany shall suffer a reprisal that will make you shudder! I swear it!"

Pachmann's eyes were also suffused. In that moment, he literally saw red.

"You threaten!" he cried hoarsely. "You dare to threaten!"

"I warn!" said Vard. "And you will do well to heed the warning! You are playing with fire—take care that it does not consume you!"

Pachmann conquered his emotion by a supreme effort.

"It is foolish to talk in that way," he said. "It is foolish to speak of deception and betrayal. There is no question of either. But we must move cautiously. We must evade these spies. Even you can see that!"

"Here is my last word," said Vard, more calmly. "We shall reach New York on Tuesday. I will await your answer for twenty-four hours after we have landed. If I have not then received it, I shall consider myself free to act as I think best."

A gleam of triumph flashed in Pachmann's eyes.

"I accept your condition," he said, with a little ironical bow, rose, and left the cabin.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE EVENTS OF MONDAY.

Kasia did not see the prince again. That ingenuous young man had spent a most uncomfortable half hour with the doughty admiral, whose language had been both lucid and emphatic, and who had opened the discussion, and spiked the prince's guns at the very start, as it were, by producing the paper sealed with the imperial seal.

"I would call your attention especially to this clause," said Pachmann, and placed his finger upon the words, "*all members of my family.*" "It was not placed there by accident, I assure you. You understand its meaning?"

The prince nodded sullenly, as he handed the paper back.

"Your father," Pachmann continued, replacing it in his pocket, "foresaw that some difficulty such as this might arise. As you know, his confidence in you is not great."

The prince flushed and opened his lips angrily; but closed them again without speaking.

Pachmann smiled unpleasantly.

"I can guess what you wish to say," he said. "You would remind me that you are a Hohenzollern, a prince of the blood, a scion of the house to which I, a petty member of the inferior nobility, owe allegiance. That I do not permit myself to forget. But in this affair, by virtue of this paper, I stand in place of your royal father. He would not hesitate to rebuke you, and neither shall I. What was it you were saying to Miss Vard?"

And the prince, after a moment's inward struggle, repeated the conversation, while Pachmann listened frowningly.

"You have been most indiscreet," he said severely, when the prince had finished. "How much harm you have done I cannot say—but I must hasten to undo it. I do not understand you. You know how important this affair is—you are a good German!—and yet you go about talking in this fashion! It is enough to drive one mad! If your father learned of it, I fear he would think it necessary to punish you with great severity. I shall not report it—but on one condition: you must give me your word to discuss affairs of state with no one, to make no chance acquaintances, and to see this girl or her father only in my presence."

And so deeply grounded was the habit of obedience, so profound his respect even for his father's signature, that the prince promised. Besides, he had no wish to spend a year or more in some second-rate fortress; and he resolved to watch himself most warily, until this annoying business was at an end, and he was back again in Berlin.

So Kasia saw him no more. She had a little struggle with herself before she finally decided that it was her duty to outline the prince's confessions to her

father, and she was deeply relieved when he waved them aside as of no importance.

"Every one knows," he said, "that Germany dreams of nothing but humiliating England; that is no secret—it has been the talk of Europe for ten years past. But it is one of those dreams which never come true—or go by contraries!"

By noon of Monday, Pachmann had completed his scrutiny of the passengers, and sought an interview with the captain.

"I have discovered nothing," he said; "absolutely nothing. At one time, I thought that I had the man, but I caused his story to be investigated, and found that it was true. There remains only one thing to be done. At what hour shall we land?"

"That will depend upon the delay at quarantine. Two of our steerage passengers are ill. We may not be able to dock before evening."

Pachmann considered this for a moment.

"In the first place," he went on, at last, following out his thought, "you must secure for me two landing tickets—one for Vard and one for his daughter. The immigration officer must not see them. There must be no evidence that they ever reached New York."

Hausmann's face clouded.

"That is a very serious offense," he pointed out.

"We must take the risk."

"What will you do about their baggage?"

"I will have it claimed by some one from the consulate."

The captain hesitated yet a moment.

"I will secure the tickets," he agreed finally. "A considerable outlay will be necessary."

"You will be reimbursed. Furthermore," Pachmann added, "I will myself explain to the emperor how greatly you have assisted us."

Captain Hausmann bowed coldly.

"Is there anything else?" he asked.

"You have watched the wireless?"

"Yes."

"It must be watched even more closely. No message in cipher, nor any that is at all questionable, must be sent or delivered. If there are complaints afterward, the failure can be explained as an oversight."

Again Hausmann bowed.

"And, finally," said Pachmann, "I have here a message, which I would ask you to have sent at once."

It was in cipher, and a long one, and it took half an hour to transmit, for the wireless man at the Block Island station was required to repeat it for verification. Then it was hurried on by telegraph to New York, and finally delivered at the German consulate, where the chief of the German secret service, to whom it was addressed, read it with great care.

Miss Vard, meanwhile, was finding the hours long. The prince had furnished a slight divertisement the day before; but to-day there was no such relief in sight, and she found herself singularly restless. This was, in part, a reflection of her father's mood, for she had never known him so nervous and irritable. The lines in his face had deepened, his eyes were brighter than ever, and he waved her impatiently away whenever she ventured to address him. Plainly, a crisis was at hand, and, as she saw how her father was affected, she awaited it with foreboding.

She tried to read, and gave it up, for she could not fix her attention on the page; she sat for a long time looking at the sea, and then turned her eyes away, for its restlessness increased her own; she went for a walk about the deck, but it seemed to her in every pair of eyes turned upon her there was suspicion and aversion. How glad she was that the voyage was almost ended! It had started happily enough, and then, quite suddenly, it had become wearisome and hateful.

It was inevitable that, at this point, her thoughts should fly to Dan. What a nice boy he was! She would see him to-morrow night—she had promised him that! And before that? Would it be too undignified for her to steal up

again to that bench on the after boat-deck—would it—would it precipitate matters? She did not want to do that, and yet—

“Good afternoon,” said a voice, and some one fell into step beside her, and she looked up and saw that it was Dan. For an instant, she fancied it was only the visualization of her own thoughts; then she winked the mists away.

“This is nice of you,” she said. “I was just wishing for—some one. I was dreadfully bored.”

“You were a thousand miles away. I passed you twice, and you didn’t even see me. If it hadn’t been for my newspaper training, I’d have run away to my den.”

“I’m very glad you didn’t. I really wanted to talk to you.”

“Suppose we go up on the boat deck,” said Dan, “where you—”

He stopped.

“Where I what?”

Dan led the way up the ladder without replying; but a gleam of understanding penetrated Miss Vard’s mind when she saw him go straight to the bench where she and the prince had sat.

“It was this way,” Dan explained, sitting down beside her. “I happened to be staring down at the forward promenade, yesterday afternoon, when I saw you walking with a tall young fellow, who seemed exceedingly interested in you. Naturally, I was a little curious, as he happened to be a second-class passenger, like myself—”

“Second class!” broke in Kasia, and stopped herself.

“Did you think him a millionaire?” queried Dan, a little bitterly.

“No,” answered Kasia quietly; “I thought him just what he is—an ingenuous young German, not very brilliant, perhaps, but clean and honest. I passed a very pleasant half hour with him.”

Dan’s face was a little pale, but he looked at her manfully and squared his shoulders.

“I deserved that!” he said. “Thank you, Miss Vard. But it *was* very lonely, last night!”

Kasia’s look softened.

“Yes,” she agreed; “it was.”

“You have felt it, too?” asked Dan, his face lighting up again.

“Certainly I have felt it. I haven’t dared make any friends among the first-class passengers, and a person can’t read *all* the time! One likes to talk occasionally, no matter with whom.”

“Why not slip over to second class to-night,” Dan suggested, “and sit on the bench. The moon is very beautiful.”

But Kasia shook her head, smiling.

“I shall have to admire it alone,” she said. “We must not be seen so much together—it is not wise for us to sit here. Suppose some one, seeing us together, should take it into his mind to search your baggage, and should find that little package—”

“He wouldn’t find it,” Dan broke in. “During the day, I carry it in my pocket. At night, I sleep with it under my pillow.”

Kasia gave him a quick glance.

“That is splendid!” she said quickly. “And you don’t even wish to know what it is?”

“Not unless you wish to tell me. There is one danger, though. If the customs inspector should happen to run across it, he will want to know what it is.”

“Tell him it is an electrical device.”

“And if he opens it?”

“That will do no harm. All he will find is a small metal box, filled with tiny wires coiled about each other.”

Dan breathed more freely.

“That simplifies things,” he said. “From what you said when you gave it to me, I was afraid I might have to knock him down, snatch the package, and make a break for it.”

“No,” and Kasia smiled. “It would appear of value only to some one who knew what it was. The customs inspector doesn’t count.”

“And to-morrow evening, say at eight o’clock, I shall bring it up to you.”

“Very well. I shall expect you. And now you must go.”

Dan rose obediently.

“It will be a long twenty-four hours,” he said. “But I feel more cheerful than

I did. By the way," he added, turning back, "there's one thing I forgot to tell you. If that other young fellow shows up again, you needn't be afraid to talk to him. Chevrial says he's about the only one on the ship you are safe to talk freely with!"

"Chevrial!" she repeated, staring; "Chevrial said that!"

"Yes," and Dan laughed. "He seems to be the wise guy, all right!" and without suspecting her emotion, he turned and left her. But for a long time Kasia sat there, unmoving, trying to understand.

Dan's evening was not so lonely as he had expected, for, as he sat on the bench on the boat deck, staring out across the water, and thinking of the morrow, Chevrial joined him.

"I do not intrude?" the Frenchman asked.

"Not at all. Sit down, won't you?"

Chevrial sat down, and for some moments there was silence.

"Our voyage nears an end, Monsieur Webster," Chevrial said at last. "Tomorrow you will be home again. Perhaps I may see you in New York."

"Where will you stay?"

"I have some friends in the wine trade with whom I usually stay. The little money I pay them is welcome to them, and I am more comfortable than at a hotel. I do not know their exact address—they have moved since I was last here; but they are to meet me at the pier."

"Whenever you have a leisure evening," said Dan, "call up the *Record* office and ask for me, and we will have dinner together."

"Thank you. I shall remember. And I should like you to meet my friends. I do not know if you are a connoisseur of wine, but if you are, they possess a few bottles of a vintage that will delight you."

"I'm far from being a connoisseur," Dan laughed; "but I accept the invitation with thanks."

Chevrial's face was bright.

"And when next you come to Paris," he added, "I hope you will let me know.

There is my card. A letter to that address will always reach me—we have no telephone, alas! There are some things I should delight to show you—things which the average visitor does not see."

"You are very kind," said Dan, taking the card, "and I shall not forget; though I don't expect to get abroad again very soon. You see, I have to collect a reserve fund, first; and the cost of living is high!"

"Whenever it is; and the more soon, the better I shall be pleased."

"How long will you be in New York?"

"A week—ten days, perhaps. Then I go to Boston, and to Montreal, and Quebec, and thence home again. I am glad I shall not have to use a German boat. I do not like German boats—nor anything German, for the matter of that! Which reminds me of a most peculiar circumstance. You may have wondered at my remark with reference to that young man who was strolling with Miss Vard?"

"That she could talk with him without fear? Yes, I have wondered just what you meant by it."

"I may be mistaken—but I should like your judgment. In the library, among the other books, is one which describes the life of the kaiser and his family—it is put there, I suppose, for all good Germans to read. It is illustrated by many photographs. In looking at the photographs, one of them impressed me as curiously familiar; if I should happen to be correct, it would make a most startling article for your newspaper. But I wish you to judge for yourself. You will find the book lying on the table in the library, and the photograph in question is on page ninety-eight. If you will look at it, and then return here, I should consider it a favor."

Considerably astonished, Dan descended to the library, found the book, and turned to page ninety-eight. Yes, there was a photograph of the emperor, with the empress and Princess Victoria; another of the crown prince, with his wife and children; another of the princes—Eitel-Frederick, August, Oscar, Adalbert—

And Dan, looking at it, felt his eyeballs bulge, for he found himself gazing at the face of Kasia Vard's companion.

He told himself he was mistaken; closed his eyes for an instant, and then looked again. There was certainly a marvelous resemblance. If it should really be the same—Dan's head whirled at thought of the story it would make!

He closed the book, at last, climbed slowly back to the boat deck, and sat down again beside Monsieur Chevrial.

"Well?" asked the latter. "What do you think of it?"

"If they are not the same man, they are remarkably alike," said Dan.

"I believe they are the same."

"But it seems too grotesque. Why should a Hohenzollern travel second class, dressed in a shabby walking suit, and without attendants?"

"There is a middle-aged German with him, who is, no doubt, his tutor, or guardian, or jailer—whichever you may please to call it."

"His jailer?"

Chevrial smiled.

"The emperor is a father of the old school, and punishes his sons occasionally by imprisonment or banishment under guard. I fancy that is the case here. Before I left Paris, I heard rumors of indiscretions on the prince's part with a young lady in Berlin, which had made his father very angry. At least, it is worth investigating."

"It certainly is," agreed Dan warmly, and fell silent, pondering how best to prove or disprove this extraordinary story. It was decidedly of the sort the *Record* liked; if he could only verify it, his return to the office would be in the nature of a triumph! But to prove it! Well, there were ways!

A low exclamation from his companion brought him out of his thoughts.

"Behold!" said Chevrial; and, far away to the right, Dan caught the gleam of a light.

"A ship?" he asked.

"No, no; it is the lighthouse on what you call the Island of Fire. It is America welcoming you, my friend."

And Dan, with a queer lump in his throat, took off his cap.

"America!" he repeated, and Kasia Vard's words leaped into his mind. "The land of freedom!"

"Yes," agreed his companion softly; "you do well to be proud of her! She is at least more free than any other!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE LANDING.

When Dan Webster awoke, next morning, his first thought was that something was wrong, and it was a moment before he realized what it was. The screw had stopped. Instead of quivering with the steady, pulselike vibration to which, during the past week, he had grown accustomed, the ship lay dead and motionless. He got on deck as quickly as he could, and found that they were anchored in the shelter of Sandy Hook, with a boat from quarantine alongside. Already the deck was thronged with excited passengers; many of the women, in their eagerness to go ashore, had put on their hats, and veils, and even their gloves. But word got about that there was some sickness in the steerage, and that it would probably be some hours before they could proceed.

Dan took a long look at the familiar land; then he hurried below to breakfast. He had planned his campaign before he went to sleep the previous night, and he was eager to begin it. Breakfast, therefore, did not take him long, and he was soon searching the decks for the man who, possibly, was a son of the kaiser, but, much more probably, merely a young German who made the most of a chance resemblance.

Dan possessed the aplomb which only years of work on a great paper can give a man; he had wormed interviews from many reluctant and exalted personages; he had asked questions which the other man was certain to resent, often quite justly; he had drilled himself to believe that, when he was on the trail, all mankind was fair game, and that any device which would drag the truth from

them was justified—the truth, the truth, that was the end and the justification of newspaper methods! Nevertheless, his heart beat a little faster when, at last, he perceived the object of his search leaning against the rail at the rear of the upper promenade, and gazing out to sea.

"I've got buck fever," he told himself. "It's because I'm out of training." And then he wondered if the prince was thinking of Germany, and of the lady-love from whom he had been torn.

Nobody else, apparently, had any thought for Germany or for the open sea. Every one had crowded to the side rails to stare at the land or at the smudge of smoke which marked Long Island, and the stern of the ship was deserted. Telling himself that he would never have a better chance, and that he must finish with the affair before the ship reporters came aboard, Dan braced himself, approached the solitary and somewhat pathetic figure, removed his cap, and bowed respectfully. The prince, abruptly awakened from his daydreams, looked up with a start, and met Dan's smiling eyes with an astonished stare.

"I see your highness does not remember me," said Dan good-humoredly. "That is not remarkable, but I was conceited enough to think it just possible that you might."

"No," said the prince, finding his tongue; "I fear I do not——" He stopped abruptly. "For whom do you take me?" he demanded.

"Surely I am not mistaken!" and Dan looked at him more closely. Then he burst into a laugh. "No—it is really your highness! I cannot be deceived!"

The prince met his gaze and shook his head, and tried to laugh. But he was not a good liar—his father had long since recognized his unfitness for any diplomatic mission.

"I see it is useless for me to dissemble," he said, in a low tone. "But I am here strictly incognito, and I beg that you will not betray me. Where have we met?"

Dan's heart leaped with exultation. And then a little feeling of shame seized

him. It was too bad to have to betray the fellow—but duty demanded it! Perhaps, however, it could be done in a way that would not be offensive. He opened his lips to explain, when a stocky figure suddenly thrust itself between them, and Dan found himself gazing into a pair of irate gray eyes.

"What is this?" demanded the newcomer, though his voice, too, was carefully lowered. "Who are you, sir?"

Dan felt his good resolutions poze away at the other's brutal manner.

"I am a reporter," he said.

"What is your business?"

"Gathering news."

"Your business here, I mean?"

"I was just interviewing the prince," explained Dan blandly. "The *Record* would be very glad to have his opinion of the Moroccan situation, of the Italian war, of the triple entente, or of anything else he cares to talk about. Perhaps he could find a theme in the destruction of *La Liberté*."

He spoke at random, and was surprised to see how fixedly the other man regarded him, with eyes in which apprehension seemed to have taken the place of anger.

"One moment," said Pachmann, for it was he, and he turned and spoke a few rapid words of German to the prince, who reddened and nodded sullenly. Dan judged from the sound of the admiral's subsequent remarks that he was swearing; but he preserved a pleasant countenance, the more easily since, happening to glance up, he saw Chevrial leaning over the rail of the boat deck just above them, and regarding the scene with an amused smile. At last, having relieved his feelings, the admiral fell silent and pulled absently at the place where his mustache had been.

"When does your paper appear?" Pachmann asked, at last.

"To-morrow morning."

"You would not wish to use the interview before that time?"

"No."

Pachmann breathed a sigh of relief, and his face cleared.

"Then we are prepared to make a bargain with you," he said. "It is most

important that the prince's incognito be strictly preserved until to-night. If you will give me your word of honor to say nothing of this to any one until eight o'clock this evening, I, in return, give you my word of honor that the prince, at that hour, will grant you an interview which I am sure you will find of interest. Do you agree?"

Dan reflected rapidly that he had nothing to lose by such an agreement; that eight o'clock would release him from his promise in ample time to write his story; and the interview *might* really be important.

"Yes," he said; "I agree; but on one condition."

"What is that?" demanded Pachmann impatiently.

"That the interview be exclusive."

"Exclusive?" echoed Pachmann. "I do not understand."

"I mean by that that no one else is to get the interview but me," Dan explained.

A sardonic smile flitted across Pachmann's lips.

"I agree to the condition," he said. "And you on your part agree to say no word to any one; you are not to mention the appointment which I will make with you."

"I understand," said Dan. "But, interview or no interview, I am to be released from the promise at eight o'clock."

"Yes. Very well, then. I accept your word of honor, and I give you mine. At seven o'clock to-night, you will call at the German consulate and ask for Admiral Pachmann. I shall be in waiting to conduct you to the prince."

"I thank you," said Dan, and walked away, treading on air. Then another consideration occurred to him. All this was going to interfere with his evening with Kasia. He must see her and explain that he would be late. But an official stopped him at the gangway and explained that, under quarantine regulations, each class must keep to its own quarters until the boat had docked.

The delay was less than had been feared, for the illness in the steerage

turned out to be well-defined typhoid; so, at the end of two hours, the big ship began to move slowly up the harbor, with the passengers hanging over the rails, for the first glimpse of the great city. There was the green shore of Long Island; and then the hills of Staten Island; and then, there to the left, loomed the Statue of Liberty, her torch held high. Dan took off his cap, his eyes moist; and then, as he glanced at the faces of his neighbors, he saw that they were all gazing raptly at the majestic figure, just as he had been. Most of them, no doubt, had seen it many times before; some of them, perhaps, had committed the sacrilege of climbing up into the head and scribbling their names there; they had glanced at her carelessly enough outward-bound for Europe; but now she had for all of them a new meaning—she typified the spirit of their fatherland, she welcomed them home.

And finally the wonderful sky line of New York towered far ahead, the web-like structure of the Brooklyn Bridge spanning the river to the right; little clouds of steam crowning with white the summits of the towering buildings, and a million windows flashing back the sunlight. There is nothing else in the whole world like it, and the thousand passengers on the upper decks coming home, and the thousand men and women crowded on the lower deck, seeking fortune in a strange land—all alike gazed, and marveled, and were glad.

Then, with half a dozen tugs pushing, and pulling, and straining, and panting, the ship swung in toward her dock, and soon she was near enough for those on board to see the faces of the waiting crowd, and there were cries of greeting and wavings of handkerchiefs, and the shedding of happy tears—for it is good to get home! And at last the great hawsers were flung out and made fast, and the voyage was ended.

At this moment, as at all others, the first-cabin passengers had the precedence, and filed slowly down one gang-plank, their landing tickets in their hands, while at another the stewards

proceeded to yank off the hand baggage. Dan, leaning over the rail, watched the long line of passengers surging slowly forward, and finally he saw Kasia and her father. He would see them on the pier, of course, for it would take them some time to get their baggage through, and he could explain to Kasia about the other engagement. He followed them with his eyes—and then, with a gasp of astonishment, he perceived, just behind them, also moving slowly down the gangplank, the prince and the man who had called himself Admiral Pachmann.

But those men could have nothing to do with Kasia! It was just an accident that they happened to be behind her. And then he grasped the rail and strained forward, scarcely able to believe his eyes. For Pachmann had spoken to Vard, who nodded and walked hurriedly on with him, while Kasia, with a mocking smile, tucked her hand within the prince's arm and fell into step beside him. Along the pier they hastened to the entrance gates, gave up their tickets, passed through, and were lost in the crowd outside.

Dan stood staring after them for yet a moment; then, with the careful step of a man who knows himself to be intoxicated, he climbed painfully to the boat deck, dropped upon a bench there, and took his head in his hands.

There, half an hour later, the steward found him.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said. "Are you ill?"

Dan looked up dazedly.

"No," he said. "Why?"

"The passengers are all off, sir. If you have any luggage, you'd better be having it examined, sir."

"Thank you," said Dan, and got to his feet, descended to the lower deck, and went unsteadily down the gangplank.

The pier was littered with baggage and crowded with distracted men and women watching the inspectors diving remorselessly among their tenderest possessions. Each was absorbed in his own affairs, and none of them noticed Dan's slow progress toward the little office of the chief inspector. After a

short wait, an inspector was told off to look through his baggage, and, with Dan's declaration in his hand, led the way to the letter "W," where his two suit cases were soon found. Dan unlocked them, and stood aside while the inspector knelt and examined their contents. He was through in ten minutes.

"Nothing here," he said, and rose. Then his eyes ran Dan up and down. "I see you have a small parcel in your coat pocket. May I see it?"

Without a word, Dan handed him the parcel. The inspector turned it over and examined the seals.

"What's in it?" he asked.

"A little electrical device," Dan answered.

"Well, I'll have to open it—it might be diamonds, for all I know."

"Go ahead," said Dan, and the inspector broke the seals, unwrapped the paper, and disclosed a small pasteboard box. He lifted the lid, glanced inside, and then looked at Dan.

"What is this? A joke?" he demanded.

"I don't understand," Dan stammered.

"You said it was an electrical device."

"That's what it is."

"Either you're crazy or I am," said the man; "and I don't think it's me," and he thrust the box under Dan's nose.

And Dan's eyes nearly started from his head, for the box contained a cake of soap, cut neatly to fit it, into which had been pressed a number of nickel coins.

CHAPTER XXIV.

PACHMANN SCORES.

Dan Webster never had any definite recollection of how he got to his rooms. Somebody must have carried his bags to a cab and put them and him inside it, and he must have given the cabby the number of the apartment house where his rooms were, for after a certain time he found himself in a cab which had stopped in front of it, with Marshall, the doorman, staring in at him.

"I think he's drunk, that's what I think," said the cabby, who had got

down, suspecting that his services would be needed. "He ought to be put to bed and left to sleep it off."

"I don't understand it," said Marshall. "I never saw him like this before. Paris must surely be an awful place!"

The cabby chuckled, and together they got Dan out and into the elevator; but when the doorman had paid and dismissed the cabby, and tried to follow his advice, he met with unexpected opposition.

"Go away, Marshall, and leave me alone," said Dan. "I heard what that fellow said; but I'm not drunk—though I don't doubt I look it. Just go away and shut the door. I'll thank you another time. There's a good fellow!"

And, in the end, Marshall went doubtfully away.

Dan went to work at himself immediately with mechanical thoroughness. He filled his tub with cold water, undressed, and plunged into it, dipping his head under half a dozen times. Then he rubbed down with the roughest towel he could find, gave himself a vigorous massage from head to feet, took a sharp turn with a pair of dumb-bells, got into fresh clothes, and began to feel more like himself.

"There," he said; "that's better. Now let's see if this thing is real, or only a nightmare."

He went to his coat, got out the paste-board box, placed it on a table, sat down before it, and carefully removed the lid.

No, it was not a nightmare. There was a cake of soap—pink, scented soap—weighted with the nickel coins. Poising the box in his hand, he understood why the coins had been added. Without them, the box would have been too light. He pulled one of the coins out and looked at it. It was a German piece of twenty pfennigs, such as any one on the ship might have used. He put it carefully back, and lay down on his bed to reason the thing out.

How had the substitution been made? How *could* it have been made? Every day the box had been in his pocket; every night it had been beneath his pillow. There was only one explanation—

the change must have been made while he was asleep. Some one had entered the stateroom, slipped out the other box with a cautious hand, and substituted this one. Whoever it was must have been familiar with the weight of the other box, and with the way it was wrapped and sealed. But how was that possible? No one could have seen Miss Vard give it to him; no one could have known that he had it.

And then Dan sat suddenly erect. Chevrial might have known. Chevrial might have seen him slip it into his pocket as he dressed. Yes, Chevrial might have done it. Who was Chevrial? How should a wine merchant know so much about spies and diplomacy and German princes? There had always been about him an air of power, of reserve force, which had impressed Dan. Yes, and an air of mystery—the air of one who knows a great many things he does not choose to tell.

Chevrial was undoubtedly a spy himself.

And, as he found this answer, Dan wondered that it had not occurred to him long before. For it furnished the clew upon which Chevrial's words, and hints, and looks, and warnings were strung together as on a thread!

There could be no doubt about it: Chevrial was a spy, engaged in some desperate plot—no ordinary plot, for a prince and admiral of the German empire were also engaged in it, and Heaven alone knew how many others!

There was one thing to be done at once. He must go to Kasia Vard and confess that he had been outwitted. And he trembled as he thought what the loss of that little box would mean to her! Why had he been so dense, why had he not suspected—

Telling himself that self-accusation would do no good, he finished dressing hurriedly, let himself out, and ran downstairs without waiting to call the elevator. At the front door he met Marshall, whose face brightened at sight of him.

"So you're all right again, sir?" he said. "I'm glad of that!"

"Yes," and Dan slipped a bill into his

hand. "I had a little shock that sort of upset me. Many thanks for looking after me, Marshall. I'll not forget it."

"That's all right, sir. Thank you, sir. Hope you had a good time?"

"Splendid. Come up and see me tomorrow. I brought a little memento for you from that awful place called Paris!" And leaving Marshall staring, he ran down the steps to the street, sought the nearest subway station, and twenty minutes later mounted the steps of the house on West Sixty-fourth Street, whose address Kasia had given him—a quiet house in a quiet neighborhood. His finger was trembling as he touched the bell. How should he ever face her!

A colored boy answered the ring.

"I wish to see Miss Vard at once," said Dan, and produced a card.

"Miss Vard is not here, sir."

"Not here? Has she gone out?"

"No, sir; she's been to Europe, and ain't got back yet."

Dan steadied himself against the wall, for he felt a little dizzy again.

"I know. But she must be back! Her boat docked three or four hours ago."

"We was expectin' her to-day, sir—her and her father; but they ain't got here yet."

Dan looked at the boy for a moment; then he gave him a silver dollar.

"Are you sure?" he asked.

"Yes, sir; I'm sure," and Dan could see that he was telling the truth.

"Have you a phone?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"What's its number?"

The boy told him, and Dan jotted it down.

"Will you give the card to Miss Vard as soon as she arrives?" he asked.

"Yes, sir; I'll do that."

Dan wrote a hasty line on the card, asking Kasia to call him at once, and added his telephone number.

"It's those Germans!" Dan muttered to himself. "They've got her into it, somehow!"

And then, suddenly, he remembered his appointment, and snatched out his watch. It was nearly six o'clock.

"I'll drag it out of them!" he said. "I'll drag it out of them! And if Chevrial's there——"

He stopped. Chevrial and the Germans could not be in collusion—such an alliance was unthinkable. But how else to explain it——

Dan gave it up; but a good dinner at a near-by restaurant restored him something of his self-confidence, if it did not enable him to see any farther into the mystery. After all, this was America. Europe might be honey-combed with intrigue and overrun with spies, but they would find their occupation gone on this side the water! And he himself would explode a bomb in the morning's *Record* that would shake them up a little! So it was a fairly confident and self-controlled young man who mounted the steps of the German consulate at five minutes to seven. A flunky in livery opened the door to his ring.

"I have an appointment with Admiral Pachmann," said Dan, with a sudden cold fear at his heart that he would be laughed at; but instead he was shown at once into a little antechamber.

"Sit here a moment, sir," said the footman, and hastened away, closing the door behind him. But it opened almost at once, and Pachmann himself entered.

Pachmann fairly radiated good humor. All his roughness of the morning had disappeared, and he greeted Dan beamingly.

"I am most glad to see you," he said, in such a tone that Dan almost believed him. "You are prompt—but that, I am given to understand, is an American virtue. However, I am prompt, also. The car is waiting."

"The car?" Dan echoed.

"You will understand," Pachmann explained, "that, since the prince is incognito, it is impossible for him to remain at the consulate—that would at once betray him. I was uncertain, this morning, as to our arrangements, or I should have directed you to the proper address. However, it is but a step," and he opened the door.

Dan followed him along a handsome hall to the carriage entrance, where,

at the foot of the steps, stood a limousine.

"Enter, my dear sir," said Pachmann, and followed him into the car. The door slammed, the driver sprang to his seat, and they were off. In the semi-darkness, Dan fancied he heard a repressed chuckle, and a vague uneasiness stole upon him. But he shook it off. What had he to fear?

"You will remember," said Pachmann finally, "that this interview is not a thing which we desire, but to which we consent because we must. You placed us, this morning, in a very awkward position. You newspaper men of America have a method all your own. The manner in which you entrapped the prince compels my admiration. How did you know that it was he?"

"There was a book on the ship with a history and portraits of the royal family," Dan explained.

"So?" said Pachmann, and there was a note of surprise in his voice, which told Dan definitely that, whatever Chevril's plot might be, this German was not in it. "You have sharp eyes. But the likeness may have been merely a chance one. It must have seemed most strange to you that a prince of the empire should travel alone as a passenger of the second class."

"It did. That was why I approached him as I did."

"It was most clever. We admit it. Ah, here we are."

The car had stopped, and Pachmann opened the door. As Dan alighted, he glanced up and down the street, but did not recognize it. It was a street of close-built apartment houses and private dwellings, like any one of hundreds in New York. Pachmann crossed the pavement, mounted the steps, and touched the bell. The door was opened instantly by a tall servant in livery.

If Dan had expected it to reveal a regal magnificence, he was disappointed. The hall into which he stepped was simply, even meagerly, furnished. Without pausing, Pachmann mounted the stair, and led the way into the front room on the upper floor. It was a large room, lighted only by the glow of a

wood fire. A man was sitting in front of it, and sprang up at their entrance. Pachmann, at the door, switched on the electric.

"My dear prince," he said, "I have brought the young gentleman for the interview which we promised him."

And Dan, as he saw the other's face, breathed a sigh of relief. Yes, it was the prince. For a moment, he had feared that he was being tricked. Pachmann had undoubtedly chuckled!

The prince bowed coldly. His face was very gloomy—in striking contrast to Pachmann's, which was beaming more than ever with good humor.

"I feel that an apology is due your highness," said Dan, "for the way in which I sought to entrap you this morning. Please believe that I was about to promise to do what I could to respect your incognito when this gentleman intervened. In my article for tomorrow I shall try to say nothing that can offend you."

"I thank you," said the prince gravely.

"All this is wasting time," broke in Pachmann impatiently. "Proceed with your questions, my young sir."

"What is the purpose of your highness' visit to America?" asked Dan.

The prince hesitated and glanced at Pachmann.

"Perhaps it would be best for the explanation to come from me," said the latter smoothly, but with a sardonic smile upon his face. "The prince travels in search of health. He is of a most studious disposition—sits up with his books far into the night—becomes so absorbed in them that he forgets to go to bed, even to eat. So the emperor, in fear that he would injure his health—you can see by looking at him he is most delicate—decreed a trip around the world, made incognito in the simplest fashion, during which he was not so much as to look inside a book. This accounts for the fact that never once on the voyage over did you see him with a book in his hand. That is the whole mystery, my young sir."

Dan, glancing at the prince, saw that he was red with anger; but he could not

repress a smile at the absurdity of Pachmann's explanation. The prince was evidently as strong as an ox, and had anything but the appearance of a student.

"You may have heard some idle tales," went on Pachmann, rubbing his hands with pleasure, "of a low affair—of a barmaid, perhaps. Berlin is always full of such gossip, and you American journalists hear it all. But believe me, it is merely gossip; the truth is as I have told you."

The prince had wheeled upon Pachmann, his eyes blazing.

"It is too much!" he cried, in German. "You insult me, and you shall answer for it. I warn you!" and he strode to the door.

"Farewell, my prince!" said Pachmann mockingly, and waited, with a sneer on his lips, until the prince's heavy footsteps died away down the hall. Then he turned back to Dan. "Behold that princes have rages just as other men," he said.

"I don't blame him!" said Dan. "I wonder he didn't knock you down."

"So?" and Pachmann's eyes took an ugly gleam. "I fear the interview is at an end."

"I have another question to ask," said Dan quietly. "Where are Mr. Vard and his daughter?"

Pachmann's eyes narrowed to mere slits, and his face became positively venomous.

"I was expecting that question," he sneered. "What do you know of Vard and his daughter?"

"They are friends of mine. I saw them leave the pier with you. They have not yet reached their apartment. Where are they?"

"I cannot tell you."

"You mean you will not?"

"Put it that way, if it pleases you."

A storm of rage was hammering in Dan's brain.

"I would advise you to tell me," he said tensely.

"You threaten?"

"Yes," and Dan took a step toward the admiral. "I would advise you to tell me."

Pachmann did not stir. He glanced with ironic eyes from Dan's white face to his working fingers. Then he threw back his head and laughed.

"But this is better fortune than I deserve!" he mocked. "I did not know, I did not suspect—even when the girl told me!" Then his mood changed, his lips curled, his eyes flashed fire. "What a fool!" he sneered. "What a fool! You thrust yourself upon us—you walk into our trap—you are wholly in our power—and yet you think to frighten me with your grand air and your twitching hands! Bah! To me you are merely a speck of dust, to be blown aside—so! Now, more than ever! As an ignorant young fool, who knew no better, I might, perhaps, in time have let you go. But now——"

The anger had ebbed from Dan's brain, although his attitude had not relaxed. Staring into Pachmann's leering face, he realized that he must think and act quickly. The first thing was to escape; with a deep breath he braced himself and sprang for the door—to plunge straight into the outstretched arms of a man on guard there.

There was a moment's struggle; then Dan felt his feet kicked from under him, and fell with a crash that shook the house. In an instant two men were sitting on him, holding him down.

Then Pachmann came and looked down at him, his lips twitching with triumph.

"Young fool!" he sneered. "Young fool!" And then, in German, to the two men, "Take him away! In yonder!" and he pointed toward a door at the rear of the hall.

TO BE CONCLUDED.

Concluding chapters will appear in the next issue of the POPULAR, on the news stands June 23rd.

Jimmy of the Tigers

BEING ANOTHER PAGE IN THE LIFE OF A CIRCUS MAN

By Courtney Ryley Cooper

Author of "Waking Up Tennessee," "Coals of Fire," Etc.

FROM far at the rear of the "kid-show" tent there came the click of the roulette and the drone of the croupier; there echoed the sliding sound of the three little shells, and the call of the monte man; there came the rattle of the quarters as they left the hands of eager farmers to jiggle their way to oblivion through the maze of the "drop-case"—and it all was music to the ears of Shifty Bill Thomas, of the Great Consolidated.

It had been many days since Shifty Bill had heard the noises of his gambling apparatus, and the voices of his grafters at their chosen work of taking in the "easy money," for when one is desirous of being the mainspring of such devices and schemes, one must be able to find a sheriff who is willing to be blind, and for weeks this had been hard. Shifty Bill Thomas, of the Great Consolidated, had gone from town to town, he had talked to sheriff after sheriff, he had fingered his bright green and yellow bills before the eyes of more than one officer of the peace—carefully, of course—but without results, until today. And, therefore, having worked so hard to gain what he sought, he was taking pleasure in the fulfillment of his desires. For a long time he stood, watching the machinations of the gentleman with the three little shells and the elusive pea, listening to the drone of the croupier, and smiling to himself. The money was pouring in. Shifty Bill Thomas was happy.

It was then that a form came close

to that of the circus owner. There came the sound of a voice, low-pitched and careful. Shifty turned and looked into the face of the man who was responsible for it all—the county sheriff. That individual was anxious appearing. A little smile of expectancy was on his face. A hand was outstretched.

"Do I get it?" he asked. "Ain't I kept my word?"

Shifty swung his head, then withdrew quickly to a fold in the sidewall. The sheriff followed. There was a quick movement for a pocket, the stripping of bills, and the counting of them. Then the sheriff departed, while Shifty Bill Thomas, his hand rammed deep in his pocket, watched him as he made his way across the circus lot toward town. A moment more, and the circus man sought the rather small-sized man who stood before the "kidshow" and growled.

"Take it from me, Jimmy," he growled. "I love these coppers. They're a fine bunch, not! Now, get me, this ain't any slush stuff, but if I'm going to be a crook, I'm going to be one all the way through, see? Everybody's going to know I'm a crook. But you ain't going to see me handing out no bunk that I'm a guardian of the law and a protector of the innocent, and then sneaking in and skinning the eye-teeth out of my friends, just for some easy money. There's grades in everything, see? There's straight crooks and there's crooked crooks. I'm a straight crook, and I'm proud of it.

But take that old Thistlechin that I just poneyed up to, and—— What's the matter with you?"

Shifty Bill was looking down into the face of Jimmy Davis, of the leaping tigers. He had noticed an expression of worry on the animal man's face.

"Rajah went bad again this afternoon," Davis said slowly. "Wouldn't even come out of his cage. That cat's going to get somebody one of these days unless he's whipped pretty soon."

Shifty's eyes narrowed. "Not getting scared of him, are you?" he asked.

Jimmy grinned. "Not yet," he answered. "It ain't that, Shifty. I've just been thinking—suppose something should happen, that I wouldn't be here some day, and somebody else would try to put those cats through the leaps—where'd they be? Look here." He came closer, and there was an air of anxiety in his tone. "If anything should happen that I wouldn't be on deck for that leap act, hold it out, won't you? Rajah never would stand for anybody else but me, and I'm even having trouble with him now. If anybody else'd ever try to handle him he'd rip open their throat with one plunge. I know! He's laying to kill somebody. I can see it. He's getting sulky. You see, it's this way," the little animal man said hurriedly. "Rajah's right at the point where he doesn't know whether he's master or mastered. If I can be right with him all the time, and just keep fighting him, even if he half kills me while I'm doing it, I'm going to beat him. But if anybody else should step in—it wouldn't work. The game would all be over. That's why I want you to promise me that if I shouldn't be here, or if I should turn up missing for a performance or two, you'll hold out the act."

"Hold out the act?" Shifty's head lowered. "And it our big card? A fine chance for that. What do you want? A lay-off? What's going to keep you from being on hand? Every time I see one of you guys," he ended half angrily, "you're wanting to get off for something or other. I'm getting tired of it. You be here for every performance, or

you ain't going to have any job, see? We'll put Wilson in there."

"I'm liable not to have the chance to be here for every performance," Jimmy Davis went on slowly. "And if you put Wilson in that cage, you're signing his death warrant, that's all."

Shifty Bill Thomas was swinging his head angrily.

"What's going to keep you from being here?"

Jimmy Davis faltered a bit: "I'm liable to get pinched—I——"

But a booming voice had interrupted. Shifty Bill Thomas was red-faced now.

"The same old stall," he broke out. "Every time one of you chaps wants to break away to go shining up to a skirt or something like that, you have to pull that old stuff about getting pinched. I'm getting tired of it. Hear me? You stall around and stall around about Rajah being bad, and all that junk, thinking you're going to get a raise in salary, and then you pull this stuff about getting pinched. I never saw an animal man in my life that didn't have a man-eater up his sleeve somewhere, ready to pull out when he thought it would do the most good. I never——"

"Very well," Jimmy had interrupted, and turned away.

Shifty watched him walk across the lot toward the dressing tent, and there was anger in the circus owner's eyes.

"If they'd pull some decent stall," he mused half savagely, "I wouldn't get so sore. But it's always just the same old stuff—the same old gag, and I'm getting sick of it."

Whereupon, as a balm for his heated feelings, he once more turned within the canvas portals of the side show, to seek the recreation and a change of feelings in the ever-pleasing call of the three-shell man and the whir of the roulette wheel, as it spun the dollars into the possession of the circus.

And gradually the salve of money, as it rolled into the pockets of his grafters, assuaged the soul of Shifty Bill, even to the point of forgetting Jimmy Davis and his efforts to get away from work.

The day grew older. There came the

call from the cook tent for the evening meal, but still Shifty Bill remained in the little tent, where the cappers or "come-on men," those beings who are hired to make business good for gambling games, made their bogus winnings and lured the farmers to try their luck, and inevitably lose; where the croupier still called as his wheel spun slower and slower, and came to a final stop: "High red and even! Here y'are, make your bets, place your money. She spins, boys, she spins!" Where everything meant to Shifty Bill clear profit, where gambling was good, and where the eyes of the sheriff were closed.

The croupier left for supper, and Shifty took his place at the wheel. The chandelier men entered the tent, one by one, and began examining the gasoline torches, which soon would be needed to illuminate the tent. The croupier returned, Shifty left his place, and started toward the entrance of the tent—and stopped at the sight of the program man, hurrying toward him. The face of that person was nervous.

"Seen Jimmy?" he asked.

Shifty lowered his head. "Jimmy Davis? No; what's up?"

"Nothing much, I guess," the program man answered. "Still, you can't never tell. Jimmy blew out of the big top this afternoon right after the main show, and nobody's seen him since. He ain't showed in the cook tent, and he ain't been back to the dressing top."

"Go back to the dressing tent and wait for him," Shifty ordered. "If he ain't there on the call for dressing, post him for a ten-dollar fine. He came around to me this afternoon, stalling like he wanted to get off for something or other. I wouldn't stand for it. Now, I suppose, he's gone on and taken his time off anyway. That's about all I'm going to stand from these ginks that think they're running the show. Hear me? Go back and post him!"

He turned angrily for the cook tent. Then long he sat on the wooden plank before the table, watching the growing twilight and the crowds as they came upon the lot. The yellowish gleam of the chandeliers shone through the

muddy tops of the tents. Gradually the forms of the big wagons about the lot began to blur and lose themselves in the darkness of coming night. The rattle of dishes from without ceased. There sounded the truckling of a wagon and the shouts of men, as they started the work of taking down and packing the cook tent for the journey to the next town. Shifty Bill rose, and walked to the dressing tent. The program man was at the entrance.

"I did what you said," was his greeting. "I've posted him. He ain't showed yet. The director says to put Wilson in for the tiger act. That all right, sir?"

"Go on," said Shifty, and stumped into the tent. He sought a pile of canvas, and plumped upon it. Then, for ten minutes, he scowled at Mitchell, the boss clown, in the act of making up.

Mitchell grinned in the glass. "All to the cheerful to-night, ain't you?" he asked.

Shifty Bill spread his hands with anger. "Who wouldn't be? All I've got to do in this show is to take care of a lot of guys that ain't got no more sense than a bunch of school kids playing hooky. All I hear from morning to night is some guy a-cheeping at me about wanting to get off, or something or other. All you fellows think about is going out and getting boozed, and—and—— Well, you thought you'd come back, did you?" He turned his eyes from the direction of the boss clown, and centered them on a figure which had just entered the tent.

Jimmy Davis did not answer just then. He was reading the notice of his fine, posted on the center pole, and, as he stood there, even Shifty Bill wondered a bit at his appearance. He was pale, and there seemed a drawn appearance about his mouth. Dirt was on his face. His clothing was torn in one or two places. His shoes were muddy. His hands gripped a little as he read the line, and looked hard at the amount of his fine. Then, as he turned, there came a bit of a smile to his face.

"I thought that would happen," he said slowly, as he reached for his tights

and spangles. "I knew you didn't believe me when I talked to you this afternoon. I guess I'll have to pay it—if I can stay out long enough to draw what little pay is coming to me."

"Out?" Shifty looked at him a little queerly. "What's——"

"Shifty"—Jimmy Davis was standing close to him now, talking in low tones—"I've just got one favor to ask of you. I've got to whip Rajah—I've felt it coming. We've been fighting until one or the other of us has got to win out. And from the way he's been acting—the way he did this afternoon, I'm thinking that fight's going to come tonight. That's the reason I came back. If I whip him, and then get away—and lay low and have luck at it, I'll pay that fine. I'll mail it to you from somewhere. If I don't whip him——" He laughed a bit and spread his hands.

Shifty rose and watched the trainer as he hurried out of his clothes and into his tights.

"Came back from where?" he asked, after a long silence.

"Jail," came the answer, with a little smile. "I broke out. I'll make for the sowbelly of the privilege car as soon as I get through; if I get away with it. If you see——"

"Davis! Number Four; into the ring!"

It was the call of the program man at the flags, the entrance to the big tent. Jimmy Davis sprang forward, adjusted the last of his spangles, felt his revolver, seized his whip, and hurried forward. The property men within the big tent were adjusting the last strip of steel caging which surrounded his working space. Others were holding down the long chute which led from the tiger cage. He turned for just a second, and hurried back.

"If you see that sheriff," he whispered, "hold him back until I can make my get-away. Hear me? I'm in bad."

Shifty started forward. It was not a "stall," after all, then. Something was wrong, he knew not what—but whatever it was, it was something in which his help and his sympathy were needed. As for the return of the performer, he

knew well enough in his heart the call, the pull of the sawdust ring, the strength of which was more than enough to make a man do just what Jimmy Davis had done. In his heart, too, he now realized that what Jimmy Davis had said that afternoon concerning Rajah and his rebellion was true.

Aimlessly one hand went upward, and sought the center pole. It gripped and crumpled the notice of the program man and the amount of the fine. Slowly the paper was torn to bits and thrown into the sawdust. Then Shifty Bill Thomas, of the Great Consolidated, hurried forward, to watch Jimmy Davis make his bow and hurry through the door of the big cage.

There was a moment of waiting, in which the little animal trainer walked half nervously about the trampled inclosure, and snapped his short whip about his shoulders. There came the sound of a whistle, shrill, penetrating. The "windjammers," or musicians, as they are known to the world outside the circus, suddenly shifted their brass melody. There sounded a bit of a shout in warning from the menagerie tent adjoining, and then, in the long chute, there showed the lithe forms of two of the leaping tigers. Jimmy Davis was at attention. His feet were wide-spread, his whip lay across his hands. Shifty looked close, then moved forward.

He had seen Jimmy look at the two great cats before him, then motion to a property man, standing near by. Rajah was missing, sulking, as usual, along the chute. There was a moment of muffled orders, a curse or two, and the prodding of a pole through the inclosure of the run, and Rajah had joined his mates, pacing slowly to and fro, at the end of the big cage.

Jimmy Davis smiled a bit, then walked forward.

"Good boy!" he said, and, reaching out a hand, patted the tiger on the head. The animal did not swerve. It did not move its head, nor did it cease from its pacing. Again Jimmy patted it, and then called his order for the animals to take their places. Two of them

obeyed. Rajah merely paced on. Shifty Bill, a strange something which even he could not understand running through him, came closer to the great cage. Gradually Rajah's actions were beginning to tell the truth of Jimmy's statements. The animal was near to rebellion. There was something in the gleam of the eyes, the sharp, staccato movement of the steps, the swishing of the long tail, and the swinging of the head which spoke of animal hatred and catlike stealth. The band was blaring now.

Shifty moved close to the cage now, and called softly:

"Jimmy, what are you going to try to do?"

Jimmy did not turn his head—he was too thorough an animal trainer for that. But he did screw his mouth around, so that the words might reach the ear of his employer without an extra amount of emphasis. He was regarding the pacing tiger calmly, almost nonchalantly.

"I'm going to whip him so that he'll kotow to anybody that wants to handle him," was the reply, "or he'll put me in a wooden kimono, one of the six."

He felt again the revolver at his belt—loaded with its usual blank cartridges—then lifted his whip. He moved forward, oblivious, apparently, of the crowded tiers of seats, of all those who watched, of the anxious eyes of Shifty Bill and the property men. Jimmy Davis, of the leaping tigers, was about to fight a battle. Long had he trained and struggled with the three great cats in the inclosure, he had been patient, he had petted, he had scolded and nursed, with the result that peace had come to two, and rebellion to one. And to-night, while the band blared, and Jimmy Davis thought vaguely of that hour in which he had struggled with the window of a rickety county jail, he was preparing to finish the job of training, one way or the other. Whether he went back to that place from which he escaped or not, made little difference. Only one thing was certain, that his end had come as the tiger man of the Great Consolidated—

and he was in danger of leaving a job half done.

There are animal men who take a pride in their work, who feel as much joy in the subjugation of animal hatred and animal strength as a general feels in the subduing of an opposing army, and Jimmy Davis was one of these. He knew that work with the three great animals before him was over—when the end of the show came that night, he would either flee far from the muddy tents of the Great Consolidated, or he would return to the little jail from which he had come. And Jimmy Davis did not intend to leave without having first taught Rajah, Rajah of the evil mind, the difference between mastery of brain and mastery of strength. He cast one more quick glance toward the stealthy, pacing beast. Then he jumped forward and swung his whip with a revolverlike crack.

"Terry," he called at the most tractable of the three beasts; "Terry, up, boy!"

The tiger rose on its pedestal, spread its paws, and settled again. Jimmy moved on. His voice came again, as he cracked his training whip at the second animal:

"Fanger—come! Up! Up!"

The command was obeyed. Rajah looked, swung his head a bit more, and continued his pacing. Jimmy had taken his eyes from him. Once again he was before Terry.

"Down!" he ordered, and with clumsy gracefulness the animal left its pedestal. He gave the order again, and the second animal joined the first. And still Rajah paced on, unmolested. Again a command. The two tigers were trotting about their trainer, while Rajah, seeming to watch the proceedings out of the corner of his gleaming eyes, still sulked as he walked. Again a sharp command, again—again—Terry and Fanger were leaping over each other at the crack of the whip, trotting in a quick circle, and leaping again. There came the voice of Jimmy Davis higher than ever:

"Up! Over! Up—OVER! RA-JAH!"

The form of the animal man had leaped in front of the sulking brute and cut off his line of pacing. The whip was singing as it cut through the air, singing and stinging as it caught the tiger behind an ear with its lash, and drove him out of his path. Once more came the shout, again the whip descended, and Rajah, the sulky, took a step or two toward his leaping comrades.

And with him, while Shifty Bill watched tensely, and the crash of the band seemed to lose just a bit of its vehemence, went Jimmy Davis. The whip was cutting the air and the animal still—there came a hissing roar as Rajah showed vicious teeth, but Jimmy did not falter. He lowered the whip, and, leaping straight at the animal, he slapped its jaws shut with a pounding blow of his fist on its nostrils. Then, with his open hand, he cuffed it first on one side of the face, then the other.

"Fool with me, will you?" the trainer demanded. "Up! Up! Rajah! Up!"

For just a second, Rajah was bewildered. He half turned, he swung again, he crouched, and made the first leap. There came a sigh of relief from the lips of Shifty Bill, a bit of applause from the packed seats, but Jimmy Davis, white-lipped and grim-faced, did not seem to hear. In an instant he was across the space which had existed between himself and the animal, coaxing, urging, threatening again. Once more he gave the command, and once more Rajah sullenly joined in the performance of his comrades. For the third time the shout echoed from the throat of Jimmy Davis, and then came open rebellion.

Rajah seemed to have paused and turned in the air. Then, as he came to the floor of the trodden inclosure, his mannerisms were different, his head, sunken below his massive shoulders, was no longer swinging. Instead there was coming that hissing sound, that *thr-r-r-r-r* which Jimmy Davis had been fearing and hoping against all night. There was a step or two forward, a bewildered shaking and swerving of the body as the animal trainer

dodged this way and that before the animal—and then the spring.

From the seats, from the band stand, from the blanched lips of Shifty Bill Thomas, the scream seemed to come so suddenly, so unanimously, that it sounded like one great, thundering voice. A great streak of black and yellow had gone suddenly into the air, one great paw had stretched outward, and with its swinging, clawing descent, had caught the breast of Jimmy Davis and laid it gaping and bleeding as the little man rolled to the ground beneath the tiger, and then slowly struggled to his feet again. There came the clanking of steel as animal men struggled with the gate outside. A man half staggered toward them, his voice shouting, his whip swinging over his head.

"Not yet—not yet!" he called over his shoulder. "He hasn't gotten me yet. Unlock the gate, then hold it ready for a break—but don't do it unless he floors me!"

He made a quick dodge forward and under the feet of the animal as it sprang again. Then, with a nimbleness that defied the streaming blood that poured from his shoulder and his breast, he was on his feet again, and headed straight for the recalcitrant tiger. One hand was reaching for the revolver. The other attempted to swing high the whip—but failed. It could only grip the handle loosely. Muscular exercise was gone.

But whether the whip swung or not, Jimmy did not hesitate. Straight to the face of the crouching animal he sprang, and then there spat the red of powder flame. A half recoil by the beast, a loosening of the tense muscles. Again there shot forth the flame of the revolver—again there was the giving of just an inch or so in the position of Rajah. For the third time there came the sound of the blank cartridge, and then the revolver went quickly to its holster while the whip came into use again.

"Up, Rajah. Hear me! Up and over! Up—up—up! Get up there!"

There were other commands, quick, hurried, almost vicious, as they came

from the lips of the bleeding, half-staggering man, but they went no farther than the ears of Shifty Bill, pressed against the steel inclosure. The audience was on its feet, shouting, clapping its hands. The band was blaring. Rajah the dangerous, Rajah the rebellious, had in one quick instant given up his fight, and, like the mammoth cat he was, was allowing himself to be chased around the inclosure by the stinging whip of Jimmy Davis. Shifty stared, then leaped far from the inclosure to the middle platform. He spread his arms, and his great voice boomed.

"Quiet!" he shouted. "Keep quiet!"

Stillness, in an instant—stillness except for that insisting, commanding voice of Jimmy Davis, as he followed the animal here and there, gradually driving it to its position.

"Up, Rajah! Up and over! Up—up—up!"

And the animal obeyed, not once, not twice, but to every command of its trainer. Again and again it made the leaps with the two other animals, which had been brought forth by Jimmy Davis from their half-covering, half-threatening position at the bars. Rajah was beaten. The band blared forth its trumpeting chords of the finale, there came the command from the lips of the trainer, and the animals turned for the long runway to the menagerie tent and their cages. Jimmy opened the steel door of the inclosure and smiled wearily as he felt the arms of the property men grasp him.

"I got him——" he said defiantly, half thankfully, to Shifty Bill. "Guess maybe you'd better get me to the dressing tent and get a doctor. I'm——"

"One waiting." It was the voice of Mitchell, the boss clown. "I beat it for one when I heard the rumpus. Think he's whipped, Jimmy?"

"Sure of it," came the voice of the little animal man. "Wilson can handle him now. I——"

They were at the flags now, and traversing the brief space between the main tent and the dressing room. A man had stepped forward. Shifty Bill looked at him sharply in the half light.

"You the doctor?" he asked. Then, as the other smiled, and his gaze grew better: "No—you're the sheriff, aren't you?"

"Yes," came the answer. There seemed to be a short note about it that gave the premonition of what was to follow. "As soon as we get this fellow fixed up, I guess I've got to take him. I——"

"Take him?" The voice of Shifty Bill suddenly went into a roar. They were in the dressing room now, and the property men were placing Jimmy Davis on a pile of canvas, while the surgeon ripped the tights from the long, straggling wound. "Well, I guess you won't. That man's in no condition for—— What's he done, anyway? Say——" Shifty Bill's head shot forward. "What'd you nab him on? Huh?"

"Embezzlement," the man of the star answered. "It's a——"

"I'll tell you, Shifty——" Jimmy was calling faintly from the canvas. The circus owner hurried to him. "I'm hung up on a loan-shark deal—see? You know how it was with me last winter, with everything happening that a fellow could think of. I just got up against it, and I went in the hole three hundred. I had to get out, and so I signed up something with this geek—see? I didn't know what it was—didn't pay any attention. Then I start paying back. I paid back three hundred, and then some more on top of it. He's still on my neck for more. I paid up another hundred for interest and stuff, and he's still after me. I paid, and paid, and paid—and still I'm not through. Then I got tired of it all. I told him and his notes and things to go to thunder—that I was not going to pay any more. What's that, doc?" he asked.

"Don't move your arms so much," came the command of the surgeon, as he swabbed the wound.

Shifty bent closer. "How about this embezzlement thing?" he asked.

"Well, that's where he had me," came the answer of the little animal man. "When I signed up there, I didn't sign

personal notes, but acknowledgments and receipts for so much of the firm's money—just as if I had been a collector for them, and had given notice of so much collections without turning them in, see? Then, when I didn't pay up—well, he had me on a technical charge of embezzlement. I knew it was coming. I'd gotten a tip on it, and I knew he was tracing me. That's why I got leary this afternoon—leary about Rajah, and Wilson, and everything. And it wasn't an hour before I got pinched. Well, I couldn't stay there and think about everything going on up here, and—and——” His voice trailed off. His eyes went downward to watch the hastening hands of the surgeon. Shifty Bill straightened, and there was a glare in his eyes as he faced the sheriff.

“How much does the thing stand for?” he asked shortly.

The sheriff unfolded the complaint and stared at it.

“Two hundred,” he said, after a moment of reading.

Shifty's eyes narrowed. “I'll pay it,” he said, “every cent. See? Now get out of here.”

But the sheriff did not leave his position.

“There's something else,” he said. “Something that ain't going to be squared. This fellow broke jail this afternoon after I had arrested him, and hurt my reputation and the reputation of the county jail. I don't care how much you square with that fellow in Joplin—that's all right what you do about that, but you ain't going to——”

An arm had seized him, and he was being hurried to the far corner of the dressing tent.

“It don't make any difference, eh?” The voice of Shifty Bill Thomas, of the Great Consolidated, was fierce in its suppression. “It doesn't make any difference—look here, it's about three weeks till election, ain't it? Ain't it? Answer me!”

“What of it?” The tone belied any assurance to the question. Shifty Bill

Thomas shook a fist beneath the chin of his adversary.

“What of 'it?” he half roared. “Just this—that's all. Which would you rather do, be accused of having a fellow break out of your two-by-four jail, or have me for a visitor about election time?”

“You?”

“You heard what I said. Yes, me! And I'll come back here just as sure as there's a sun in the sky, and I'll show you whether you can pull any come-on stuff on me. I've said it before to-day, and I'm going to say it now. I'm a crook, and I'm proud of it, because I'm a square crook. I never took anything from anybody that wasn't trying to take something from me. But you—what're you? Huh? You're the crookedest sort of a crooked crook! You'd take money from a man to keep your eyes shut, and then get your brother into the game and watch him get skinned—Then you'd go away and grin, and count your money. Now what I want to know is this”—and the great arms swung again—“whether you want to go back to your dinky little jail and forget that such a fellow as Jimmy Davis ever broke out of that hogpen of yours, or whether you want me here for the week before election—and so help me, if I do come, say your prayers, that's all!”

“Jimmy,” said Shifty Bill, as he watched the sheriff fade from the tent, “I guess it's going to cost about three hundred beans to handle this little deal. Eh, what?”

“Three hundred?” A look of surprise was mingled with the wince on the trainer's face, as the surgeon plied his needle. “What's the other——”

“Well”—and Shifty squinted at the center pole—“there'll be two hundred to go to that shark. Then”—and he swung his shoulders threateningly, “the three hundred will go to the best lawyer in Joplin to get that two hundred back—and run that Shylock friend of yours so far out of the business, he'll need a *Lusitania* to get back home on! That stitching hurt much?”

Memling Must Have an Alibi

By Rupert Hughes

Author of "The Very Grand Piano Robbery," "Memling's Ten-Story Treasure Chest," Etc.

In his last four stories Rupert Hughes told us of the looting of a storage warehouse by Dirk Memling and Nellie. Among the interesting things found in the warehouse were certain private documents concerning Mrs. Willoughby Worthington. In this story Dirk and Nellie use these documents to force the society woman to harbor them in her handsome home and thus put the police off their track. You couldn't call it blackmail, and Rupert Hughes wittily coins the word "whitemail." The situation is a whimsical one, and you will enjoy the comedy.

OF all the house parties that ever house-partied, Doik," Nellie summed up the situation to Memling, "this is soitably the woist. Mrs. Hostess had to be blackmailed out of the invitation, and Mrs. Guestess and Friend Husband only accepted in pref'runce to goin' to the penitentiary. I'd always hoid that high society folks are bored to death all the time, but I didn't know how doleful they could be. Why, I couldn't be boreder if I was in a solitary cell. It's abs'lutely ghassly, that's all; just ghassly!"

Memling sighed dismally: "The circumstances are not particularly conducive to a jocund *entente*."

Nellie threw him a startled look. "I got the woid 'soicumstances,' but after that I fell off. But I think the soicumstances are such that we all got a right to be full of glee and moith. Here's you, the greatest sculptor in the woild, making the portrait bust of a grande dame—I suppose swells don't call it bust, but boist—anyway, you ought to be happy dabbling in clay again, but you act like you was kneading red-hot mush and it boint your fingers.

"And here's Mrs. Woithington that ought to be proud as a Toik at having her double chin poipetrated to immortal fame by a great sculptor, but she's acting like she was a shoplifter being held and mugged for the rogues' gallery.

"And here's me, that's prayed all my life to get a look-in at high society, and now that I find myself really inside a swell home without committin' boig-lary, I'm wondering if I can keep from screaming and chewing up the foiniture one day more.

"There isn't enough cheerfulness in all three of us to make one stingy smile, and we're so dismal that a groan of distress sounds like an outboist of careless rapcher. This morning, when Mrs. Woithington woke up long enough to say 'Could you tell me the time?' it sounded like Gabriel's trumpet in a graveyard.

"It's the foist time I ever realized how long etoinity would be. I spent a coupla etoinities watching you woik this morning, and I can't stand another this afternoon. I just can't. All we do is sit around and think of our past crimes."

And all three of them had crimes to

think of. Dirk Memling and Nellie had completed the most ambitious and triumphant crime of their careers—the raid on the Continental Storage Warehouse—and they were, for the first time, closely shadowed by the police.

They had found that a storage warehouse is a vast receptacle for many things besides jewelry, cash securities, silver, clothes, automobiles, paintings, pianos—and what not. In the Continental there were flocks of trunks full of letters, and some of the safe-deposit boxes were choked with legal papers.

Memling and Nellie had brought away many of these, not from a vulgar curiosity, but as a possible shield against future necessities.

When Memling divided up the loot with the twelve professional criminals who had aided him to carry it off, he made an honorable partition of all the proceeds—that is, a lion would have called it a fair partition; he took a third of the total for himself, leaving the balance to be split into twelve parts.

In this division he had not included the captured documents, though he considered some of them more valuable than money. In the first place, they could not have been divided without destroying them; and, in the second, since he and Nellie had elected to remain in New York, while the rest scattered to all the points of the compass, he felt that he had a right to the use of these documents for his own defense.

Among the collection, Memling placed chief reliance on what he had found in Police Lieutenant Melick's safe-deposit box—a stack of bills amounting to thirty thousand dollars, and a number of incriminating memoranda showing that the officer had collected the sum through illicit dealings with gamblers.

One of the accomplices had also unearthed in a trunk full of costumes and stage jewelry a bundle of love letters written by the district attorney. They were not written to Mrs. District Attorney. Memling had an idea that these might come in handy in case the police lieutenant or the district attorney grew unpleasantly active.

Nellie, for her part, had slipped into her bosom a document to which Memling had attached no importance. It was simply a certified copy of the decree in the divorce case of a prominent society woman, Mrs. Percy Schermerman, who had named as corespondent a still more prominent woman, Mrs. Willoughby Worthington. The evidence had been sealed, and the yellowed papers had toiled in vain to find out just who the prominent corespondent was.

Instinct told Nellie that certain newspapers would pay a fortune for that document, but she did not intend to stoop to its sale. Still, she felt that it might be of use.

It was not many days after the warehouse robbery before Memling realized that they were being shadowed. They dared not attempt flight. What they needed was an alibi. If somebody swore that they were somewhere else at the time of the robbery, this would indicate that they could not have been at the robbery—provided the somebody else was a credible witness, and there were material proofs to substantiate the affidavit.

Memling knew numbers of people who would have sworn him anywhere; they would have cheerfully tossed off an affidavit that they had lunched with him and Peary at the north pole that afternoon, or passed the evening playing pinochle with him on the planet Mars. But to find an alibi affirmer who was at the same time willing to commit perjury and reputable enough to convince the cynical police was something of a task.

It was Nellie that was inspired. Remembering the copy of the Schermerman decree, with its definite mention of the great name of Mrs. Willoughby Worthington, she realized that Mrs. W. W. would move heaven and earth to keep herself out of the limelight. All that would be needed would be the dramatizing of an alibi to support the perjury.

But the scheme for this also came to Nellie in a shower. Memling was dazed but obedient. They gave their shadow the slip by various doublings,

turnings, taxicab dashes, and the use of subway stations and buildings with various exits. Then they took train to the Long Island home of Mrs. Worthington, where, according to the newspapers, she was spending a few quiet weeks.

Nellie and Memling came down on her fold like Assyrian wolves. Their visit was as unwelcome as it was unexpected.

Mrs. Worthington was disdainful at first, but humble enough when she understood with what weapon Memling and Nellie were armed. It was a long time since her narrow escape from publicity in the Schermerman divorce had scared her back into a reconciliation with her husband. The reappearance of the old ghost filled her with terror. Her first thought was that Nellie would demand hush money, and she inly resolved to pay anything, even to the half of her husband's fortune.

When Nellie announced that the price of silence was merely a little hospitality, and a certain amount of posing for a portrait bust, together with a small amount of perjury, Mrs. Worthington almost fainted with relief.

As she came to herself, she began to fret. The perjury troubled her less than the invitation, for while Mrs. Worthington scattered white lies with a lavish hand, she was as chary of her hospitality as monarchs are of theirs. She felt indeed that one of her invitations to a dinner dance was equivalent to a presentation at court, while an invitation to spend a week-end at her Long Island chateau was equal to the conferring of a title of nobility.

To have two strangers walk into her house and settle there like squatters, compelling her to entertain them or take the consequences, was appalling. To realize that her guests were fugitives from the law, that they were apt to be visited by the police, and that she must connive with them—well, it was paying a high price for an ancient indiscretion.

She had long ago quarreled with Percy Schermerman, and she had never

cared deeply for him. She had flirted with him mainly because she enjoyed the fuming jealousy of his wife. Then the wife had had the insane impulse to sue for divorce, and to name her as a corespondent. It had cost a lot of money and more stratagem to keep the evidence out of the papers.

Such an ordeal for a wild love would have been bitter enough. Such an experience for flirtation's sake was nauseating. The sudden appearance of the two strangers from the underworld, with their uncanny power over her, threw her into a rage against mankind in general, and Percy Schermerman in particular. Yet there was nothing for her to do but submit. She surrendered, and begged Memling and Nellie to be her guests.

II.

Nellie was almost more frightened when she took up her abode under the Worthington roof than if she had been entering a court of justice for trial. She had been born and reared in poverty, and she had grown up into a studio career as a model for artists to whom formalities were as hateful as formulas. She had traveled a bit, and lived for a while in good hotels, but never had she visited an aristocratic home.

She had read novels and stories, and seen plays galore concerning high life, but they were mainly written by authors who knew nothing of their subject, or who evaded the details. According to these writers, life in a mansion was one long dress parade between a double line of liveried servants, through a world in which everybody spoke with painful correctness and elaborate pomposity.

If Mrs. Worthington had lived the life of storybooks, Nellie might have walked through her drawing-room without attracting attention. It was the easy informality and comfort of the home that upset Nellie. Then, just as she adapted herself to this atmosphere, some little snag of convention tripped her up.

She asked Mrs. Worthington what explanation she gave the household of

the unforeseen guests. Mrs. Worthington set her down hard:

"Why should I explain my guests to my servants? So long as they get their outrageous wages it is enough."

It was magnificent, but untrue. The servants betrayed the most feverish interest in Memling and Nellie. Nellie's dialect put her out of the pale of Mrs. Worthington's normal list at once. Memling they could understand, but Nellie—Mrs. Worthington entertained many strange people, eccentric singers, actresses, lions, and lionesses of every sort, and foreigners of various degree, but Nellie—

The keyholes were never so closely attended, and ears were never so alert. But they found out nothing, for Memling and Nellie were secretive by profession. When any exchange of confidence was necessary, Mrs. Worthington led her guests out to the beach, where the resounding surf drowned their words.

The French maid who waited upon Nellie and the Englishman assigned to Memling pumped and questioned with the most persistent adroitness, but learned nothing.

All that Mrs. Worthington told them was that Mr. and Mrs. Memling were to stay several days, and that they had spent the previous Saturday night there. The servants had not known of this, and eyebrows went up, but Mrs. Worthington brought them down again by the frown on her own.

"Remember," she commanded, "if inquiries are made by any one, you are to say, and to swear, that Mr. and Mrs. Memling were here last Saturday, and spent the night here."

Since a large part of a servant's business is telling the employer's lies, this demand caused no mutiny, though it inflamed vain curiosity still further.

Meanwhile Memling was at work. He had telephoned to a dealer in art materials to send at once a modeling stand, a sculptor's tools, and a quantity of clay. While these were coming he was building up an armature to support the clay with pieces of lead pipe and wire obtained in the village.

There followed laborious mussy hours of breaking the sappy clay up into small pellets and kneading them bit by bit into the general mass of the bust. Then he was ready, and he summoned Mrs. Worthington to pose. He was anxious to get the work well under way before the first detective, like the first snowflake, brought on the winter of discontent.

Mrs. Worthington was reluctant to pose, and Memling found her an uninspiring subject. She was oppressed by the knowledge that he knew the great dark secret of her life. He was oppressed by the fact that she knew a black page in his life. It was small wonder that the atmosphere was as gloomy as Nellie pictured it.

But a little later Nellie was longing for the old boredom again in place of the new excitement, for Mrs. Worthington began to take an interest in Memling. At first it was the deft ingenuities of his gifted hands that caught her. Then she made him talk, and his ideas fascinated her. He was a gentleman born and bred, and they met as peers.

After the Schermerman escape she had vowed to herself and her forgiving husband that she would never flirt again. But as the inveterate gambler returns to the wheel after every calamity, so the soul addicted to flirtation reverts to type as soon as the chance recurs.

As soon as Mrs. Worthington realized that Memling was handsome, brilliant, curiously attractive, she decided that he was far too good for the creature he called his wife. With exquisite gradations from insolence to tolerance to politeness to interest to cordiality, she began a flirtation that rendered Memling uncomfortable, and infuriated Nellie.

"We threw an awful scare into that dame at foist," said Nellie, "but she's beginning to poik up sumpum dreadful. She's beginning to float with you."

"Oh, you mustn't misunderstand her," Memling protested. "That's just her way of being courteous."

"Coiteous? I'll coiteous her! That

female would flout with St. Peter at the poily gates. But she'd better toin down the light in those goo-goo lamps of hers, or I'll scratch 'em out and throw 'em in her face."

Memling protested, but Nellie was not to be appeased. She persisted in being present at the sittings. Her eyes followed every move of artist and model.

Her presence reduced Mrs. Worthington to silence, and as Memling hardly dared look at his subject he made little progress. The very atmosphere of the room became so stupid and morose and silent that the boredom drove Nellie for a long walk on the beach. Which was perhaps what Mrs. Worthington planned. For when Nellie returned, she heard Mrs. Worthington chattering like a magpie, and Memling laughing with more than polite interest.

Mrs. Worthington was saying:

"After all, there isn't any figure more picturesque than Claude Duval, or Dick Turpin, do you think so? If one is a gentleman it doesn't matter so much about his profession, does it? I always believe that manners are far more important than morals, don't you? In fact, they are the highest kind of morals—don't you think so? Or do you?"

Nellie retreated from the door in a sick disgust. She tiptoed back to the veranda, stretched herself out on a chaise longue of rattan, and wished to die.

Wild projects thrilled her to break up the sitting, and snatch Memling's susceptible soul from the lair of the siren.

As she fretted, there was a soft step on the walk, and Mr. Willoughby Worthington appeared. He was all in white, and about to go aboard his yacht. His scholarly eye had noted Nellie's beauty. As she lounged, relaxed and pouting, she was particularly attractive. He lifted his yachting cap and invited her to join him while the others worked.

Nellie hated to be away from Dirk under any circumstances. To leave him with that outrageous fisherwoman was dangerous. She shook her head and informed Mr. Worthington that she was "just as much obliged, commodore"—

he was the commodore of his yacht club—"but no, thank you."

The commodore looked disappointed, and insisted. While he was urging her, Nellie was remembering that absence is said to make the heart grow fonder. She wondered if it would not be the best tactics to leave Memling alone with his old "frump of a grande damn"—Nellie thought of her now with an "n." She knew that Memling had a gift for jealousy, and she sometimes felt that she neglected it too much. If he really loved her, he would think more about her if she were out yachting with another man than if she were helplessly sulking in a chair while he sculpted another woman. If he really loved her he would be truer to her in her trusting absence than under her suspicious espionage.

The third time the commodore repeated his invitation, she nodded Yes, and went to the door of the room set apart as a studio, to say:

"Pardong, Doik, but the commodore is oiging me to take a little stroll in his yacht, and I thought I would—wouldn't you or would you?"

Memling turned an anxious face her way, and frowned privately at her.

"I—I'm afraid you—well, of course—but—do you think——"

"All right; good-by!" said Nellie, and she hastened with the commodore to where a small motor boat bobbed and grided the little pier. He called it the *Porpoise*, and it went out to the yacht in a series of looping leaps that justified its name, and gave Nellie cause for intense internal anxiety.

III.

Once aboard the lugger, Nellie was still miserabler.

"It's funny," she burbled, "from the veranda the water looked so smooth and basky, but it's full of holes and ruts, isn't it?"

To the Greeks the stomach was the organ of the affections, and perhaps it was her troubled affections that kept Nellie so ill at ease during the short spin. Perhaps it was jealousy that gave

her complexion so green a pallor. She tried to talk fast enough to forget her distress, but she was afraid to laugh much.

The only comfort she had was in seeing the distant figure of Memling watching the boat from the Worthington lawn. She could tell by his very outline that he was wretchedly anxious, and she rejoiced to think that Mrs. Worthington was gaining small advantage from having him alone.

Once she was assured of Memling's devotion, Nellie found no delight in his torment. She loved him too well. She begged the commodore to drop her at the next stop, and the commodore, who had been trying the same tactics with his own spouse, was glad enough to return.

Nellie put it down to Mrs. Worthington's credit that she, too, had understood, and undergone jealousy during the promenade of the yacht. She could be heard berating the commodore for gadding about with that creature. At the same time Memling was rendering Nellie deliciously happy by storming at her for eloping "with that old roué."

"It's no wise for me to go sailing with an old roué," she answered, "than for you to stay here floiting with an old rouette."

"But I'm not floiting—flirting with her!" Memling raged.

"Oh, no," Nellie flared back, with an excellent concealment of her real joy. "I didn't hear her calling you 'Claude Duval,' and 'Dick Toipentine,' and saying 'manners are better than morals,' and 'don't you or do you?' did I? Oh, no!"

"But Nellie——"

"All I gotta say is, if she don't watch out, I'll take that bust you're makin', and bust it over her head."

Memling cast up his hands in despair. "Well, I give up. It was your idea, and I've tried to carry it out. The man who tried to get anywhere with two women in double harness is bound to get a smash-up. I'll go back to town and let the police take me to the nice quiet penitentiary, where there are no women at all."

The mention of the penitentiary brought Nellie back to earth. The hot flashes of jealousy gave way to a cold sweat of terror. She had almost forgotten that she was in more danger of losing Memling to the law than to this lady, and that the penitentiary would divorce them more effectually than any flirtation.

"We're soitainly a pair of Its," said Nellie. "You'd think we was a coupla millionaires tryin' to kill time instead of a coupla boiglars tryin' to keep from doin' it. We've got our alibi all built up, but when are we going to get a chance to use it? I've been expecting to see a platoon of coppers pop out of every sand dune. But we're desoited completely. It's getting on my noives."

"They don't know where we are," said Memling. "We left no clew. We'd better enjoy our peace while it lasts."

"But I'm afraid our alibi will get stale. If they come after us now, while we're all primed up, maybe we can persuade 'em that we couldn't have been in on the burglary, and maybe they'll drop us. But if we wait they'll catch us when we're not ready."

"That's true," Memling admitted. "We'd better get it over with. I'll go back to the studio and let the shadow pick me up and follow me here."

"Oh, no, you won't," said Nellie. "The coppers would pick you up and slam you in jail. Then the newspapers would headline us, and Mrs. Woithington would toin against us. We gotta do the job right here—and the sooner the quicker."

"But how am I to get the police here? I can't call them up and invite them down for the week-end."

"You telephone the janitor to forward your mail here, and he'll tell the police as fast as he can get to 'em."

"Do you think he would give us away?"

"Give us away? That janitor wouldn't give away one yank at the dumb-waiter rope. But he'll sell his own wife for thoity cents. You can bet the shadow is in touch with him, and if he can touch the shadow, he will, all right, all right."

Memling obeyed Nellie's impulse. The janitor was so happy to hear his voice, and so careful to get the address right that Memling was convinced of the man's eagerness to sell the knowledge to the police.

"They'll be here on the milk train in the morning," said Nellie, "and they'll be disguised as everything on oith except coppers. We'd better spend this evening rehoising our alibi."

There was a sudden zero in their hearts as they realized that they were approaching the great duel of wits with the detectives. Success meant so much; failure meant the end of everything except life—and what was life without liberty and the pursuit of happiness?

IV.

The commodore was fortunately called to a meeting of the house committee of his yacht club, and the evening was devoted to perfecting the alibi.

A complete series of events was constructed and memorized, rehearsed, altered, and rerehearsed. Memling tried to forestall every possible flaw in the story. He played the part of an imaginary detective, and put Mrs. Worthington, Nellie, and himself through grueling cross-examinations.

The consequence was that as fast as he elaborated a satisfactory story, he destroyed its plausibility by some question revealing some unforeseen contradiction. As fast as a story was memorized, it was ordered off the books. Chaos soon reigned supreme.

Mrs. Worthington began to complain of brain fag, and Nellie to grow hysterical. Memling himself felt the invasion of panic.

"It's small wonder that crime is difficult," he mused aloud, "for the criminal has to take things as they come. A playwright can imagine his own people and his own plot, and then, after he has worked over it for years, and after a company has rehearsed it for weeks—when it is played it may be found so full of contradictions that the lowest brow in the gallery won't accept it. And

yet some people blame criminals for lack of imagination and intelligence."

Mrs. Worthington was worn to peevishness, and she observed contemptuously:

"They show their lack of intelligence in attempting the crime in the first place. And as for imagination, if they had any they would realize that they are bound to be caught."

"Not necessarily," said Memling, "for the people who are set to catch them are sometimes even less intelligent and even less imaginative. And the coarsest work sometimes goes undetected, the plainest clues overlooked. Do you know that about two-thirds of the crimes are never traced, and three-fourths of the stolen goods never recovered?"

"Still I insist," Mrs. Worthington snapped, "that anybody who attempts a crime is a fool!"

Memling met her discourtesy with a helpless shrug. But Nellie was furious.

"Not forgetting that there's crimes and crimes," she said; "as I observed once before, there's other commandments besides the one against stealing. It's a crime to dally with the seventh, and dames that steal other dames' husbands lack imagination and intelligence, too, sometimes; and sometimes they get caught, too. Sometimes the clues toin up in the most unexpected places. Now, there's the unknown thoid party in the Schoimerman case——"

Mrs. Worthington wilted. "I surrender!" she sighed. "Go on with the rehearsal."

When the commodore came back from the meeting of what the club called the "souse committee," the three conspirators had just put the finishing touches to the final story that seemed best fitted to stand the strain of examination.

Seeing their jaded look, the commodore queried a trifle foggily:

"Wash been doing all evening—playing brizzh?"

"Blindman's buff," said Nellie dolefully.

V.

The next morning opened with a warning of battle, as Nellie had feared. The maid Berthe, who brought the coffee and rolls to the Memling bedroom, announced that they had already had a visitor.

"What sort of a visitor, Boit?" said Nellie. "A gentleman?"

"Non, madame, not a zhontlymon; zhoost a man."

"How was he dressed—in uniform?"

"Non, madame, he is not a soldat—zhoost a man—beeg man wit' two shoulders enormous. He carried a hat to his head, a suit of beesnees, a—I do not know what."

"His feet—how were his feet?"

"Very grand, madame, and very flat."

Nellie turned to Memling: "I knew it! They can disguise anything except their feet." She turned to Berthe: "And what did he have to say for himself, Boit?"

"Nossing for himself, madame. Me, I do not go to the door, but I hear heem ask the second man much question—when are you come here, how long you stay, and I do not know what."

"What did the second baseman say?"

"He say you are come feerst for Saturday a week ago, and then you are come back for veesit and make the bust of madame."

Nellie sighed with relief. "Doik, you'll have to slip that second baseman a little extra pin money. He remembered what he was taught. Say, Boit, did the flattie go away? Did the man go away?"

"*Mais oui*, madame."

"God bless our home!" said Nellie.

"But he will come back when you are up."

And then Berthe bustled away, leaving the couple to renewed alarm. The detective had not been convinced by the servant's lie!

When they were bathed and dressed and downstairs, it was nearly noon, and Mrs. Worthington had not appeared. Nellie insisted on having her routed out for a dress rehearsal. The hostess pro-

ceeded to have an acute attack of stage fright; she threatened to turn her guests over to the police on her own testimony; she threatened to vanish, and leave them to their own resources. But their counterthreat of exposing her complicity in the Schermerman scandal always brought her back to terms. Mr. Worthington, having long ago decided to give and take forgiveness for his wife's and his own wanderings from the straight and narrow path of discretion, had also gallantly determined to protect her from the world. He added his powerful influence to the cause.

Everybody waited impatiently for the officer to return, but he did not appear. At length Memling made out a burly figure on a bench on the lawn near the beach. He made out other figures lounging about the different exits from the place. It was evident that during the night a cordon had been drawn around the Worthington estate. They were under siege.

Believing that the best defense is attack, Memling determined to make a sally. After an examination through the commodore's marine glasses, he decided that the man on the front beach was Lieutenant Melick himself in plain clothes. He decided to beard the lion before the lion sprang at him. Nellie protested frantically, but Memling answered that if they were to be taken it would happen inside the house or out.

He lighted a cigar, and, setting his cap jauntily on his head, sauntered out toward the burly figure, which rose burlily to meet him with a policeman's hoarse inquiry:

"Ain't your name Memling?"

"I have that melancholy honor."

"Well, I've come for you."

"Have you indeed? That's flattery! Do you want a portrait bust of yourself, your wife——"

"I've got orders to arrest you."

"Is my work so bad?"

"Purty coarse, the last bit."

"You saw it, then—you mean the statue of the dryad."

"Statue nothin'. I mean the Continental Storage Warehouse."

"But I never did any work for that building. Oh, yes, that's the place that was robbed! I read something about it. Had they a statue of mine there? Have they caught the robbers?"

"We've caught one."

"Congratulations! And is he in jail?"

"Not yet. I'm goin' to take him there now. Come along quiet."

"Meaning me?"

"Meanin' you."

Memling made a polite effort to control his laughter. "You policemen are wonderful. How did you find me out?"

"Oh, we don't tell all we know."

"And perhaps you don't know all you tell. When was the warehouse robbed?"

"Last Sat'day week."

"Why, let me see—I was—I was—Saturday, you say? Yes, I was here that day, and spent the night here."

"Ah, go on! We had you shaddered all last week in New York."

"Had you, indeed? I hope I behaved myself, or did I? Yes, I went back from here to make my arrangements to come out here to work. I've been here several days, and the bust is coming along swimmingly."

"Oh, swim out!"

"You don't believe me?"

"Nagh!"

"Would you believe the bust?"

"Nagh!"

"Would you believe Mr. or Mrs. Worthington and the servants?"

"That depends. Can I talk to 'em?"

"I don't know. Mrs. Worthington is rather careful whom she meets."

"I guess not, seein' she's harborin' youse two."

"Come see the bust, anyway."

The officer waddled alongside, and Memling chose the opportunity to upset the man's odious complacency. But he did not confess that he recognized him as Melick.

"Do you know your face is very familiar to me," said Memling graciously, and received an ungracious answer: "Us cops' mugs gets familiar to crooks."

"Undoubtedly; but I've seen your

picture in the paper—only the other day, wasn't it?"

The officer flushed. His picture had been published in connection with the gambling upheaval. He was spoken of and illustrated as the pickpocket's friend, the grafter extraordinary, and the next suspect to be called before the grand jury for indictment.

Memling had gained the first point. He had reminded the strong arm of the law that it was liable to the law. He knew perfectly well that the published portrait was Melick's, but he said:

"I can't remember your name, officer, but I never forget a face. I can't remember whether or not you were praised or blamed, but your face I can't forget."

Melick passed his handkerchief around his collar. It was a warmish day, and he had a bull neck.

"Melick is my name," he growled.

"Mellen?" said Memling. "That's right; I remember now. Inspector Mellen, isn't it?"

"Not yet," Melick grunted.

"But it surely will be soon," Memling beamed. "I don't know much about police affairs, but with so many policemen going to Sing Sing promotions must be very rapid, and you look to me like an ambitious man. You leave no stomach unturned—I mean no stone unturned. Fancy, now, you're being so thorough as to visit the home of so prominent a man as Commodore Worthington and accuse a starving sculptor of having carried off a whole storage warehouse. I'm flattered. You know even Samson only carried off the gates of Gaza, while I pocketed an entire building."

Melick was as angry as a bull nagged by a gnat. He shook his horns wrathfully. Memling led him to the door, and the old butler admitted them.

"Will you tell Mr. and Mrs. Worthington," said Memling, "that Captain Mellen is calling?"

Melick was too sullen to correct him, but he beckoned the old man out on the veranda, where he questioned him as to the dates of Memling's visit. The old butler corroborated Memling's

statement with the perfect technique of a lifetime of vicarious falsehood.

Melick's assurance was further shaken at this. He was ushered into the sumptuous living room, and placed in a delicate chair, which promised to crumble underneath his weight at the least motion. This added to his discomfort. Then Mr. and Mrs. Worthington came in. They were as nervous as if they were themselves the criminals. But the lieutenant was more uneasy. He made the fatal mistake of apologizing first. He who apologized to Mrs. Worthington was lost. She immediately became haughty and insolent, as only she could be.

Melick regretted to trouble them, but there had been a big job pulled off, and he was after the crook. Nellie slipped into the room, and dropped into a chair, to be greeted by a searching gaze from Melick, which she met with a look of angelic innocence.

The commodore blustered and stormed at the invasion of his sacred home. He demanded the evidence, but Melick declined it. He mentioned the date of the robbery, and Memling interposed:

"The droll thing about it is that I happened to be here on that date."

"That's true!" the commodore growled. "He came down to see about making a bust of my wife."

"So he pretended to me," said Melick.

"Pretended!" the commodore roared. "Do you mean to insinuate——"

"I ain't insinuat' nothin'," Melick muttered. "Lemme see that bust."

They led him to the room where Memling had worked. The sculptor lifted the wet cloths from the clay, and Mrs. Worthington stood by it. Rough as the work was, the likeness was evident, though Melick could not enjoy the artistic power of it. Mrs. Worthington, however, looked at it with a new appreciation of its possibilities. It was like looking into a mirror. And she loved her mirror.

Memling tore a handful of wet clay from the base of the bust, and began to work it over in his hands while Mel-

ick attempted the rôle of prosecuting attorney:

"When did he begin the thing?"

"Saturday," said Mrs. Worthington.

"Last Saturday?" She nodded.

"But the rob'ry was Sat'd'y week."

"I came down to arrange——" Memling began, but Melick cut him off. "Let her talk."

"He came down to arrange the sittings a week before—didn't you?" said Mrs. Worthington. Memling nodded.

"How did he come down? By train, boat, trolley?"

"By train, I think—or did you motor down?"

"By——" Memling began.

"Let her do the talking!" Melick growled. "What train did he come on?"

"I never remember such things," said Mrs. Worthington. "It was early in the afternoon, I think."

"I came by the two-thirty-eight," said Memling, remembering the train he arrived on the Friday before.

Melick pulled out a train schedule, and pushed a forefinger like an eclair along it. "That train don't run Sat'days," he grinned triumphantly.

"Quite true," said Memling; "that was the train I came back on. I forget the time of the other."

"Oh, you do, do you?"

"Yes; I'm not a time-table, you know—I'm only a——"

"Well, how did you come to the house?"

"I picked up a cab at the station."

"Would you remember the man?"

"Yes. No, I—let me see."

Mrs. Worthington intervened. "I sent my car down for you—don't you remember?"

"Of course you did."

"Where's the cheffure?"

The commodore, who knew the trains by heart, summoned the butler.

"Go ask Bawson if I didn't send him to the station a week ago last Saturday to meet Mr. Memling on the two-twenty-six."

"The two-twenty-six, yes, sir."

Melick interposed: "Bring him here to me!" The chauffeur was fetched,

and testified that he had indeed gone to meet the two-twenty-six. He remembered it so well because the limousine had split a shoe, and he had to take the runabout.

Melick let him go. He was baffled by the confirmation at every hand, yet the exactness of the memories rendered him suspicious. He turned to Mrs. Worthington.

"Who told you this man Memling was a good sculpture?" he demanded.

"Oh, everybody knows Mr. Memling's work."

"I don't. Who told you about him specially?"

"Mrs. Harry Creighton, I think, advised me to——"

"Where can I see Mrs. Creighton?"

"In Paris, I think. She sailed Saturday."

Melick pondered: "O' course, I ain't doubting you, but how do I know Memling done that bust? How do I know he's a artist?"

Memling held in front of him the lump of clay he had been thumbing. It was now a little portrait of the lieutenant—a hasty improvisation, yet so strangely like that the others laughed, and Melick flushed. He liked Memling none the better for either the caricature or the proof of his ability.

He thrashed about with other questions in awkward determination to find a contradiction. When Mrs. Worthington slipped, Memling corrected her, till he insisted that Memling and Nellie be sent from the room.

Memling and Nellie withdrew in a manner of amused contempt, but once away from the baleful presence of Melick, they gazed at each other in an access of terror. They waited outside like collaborating playwrights on a first night, wondering what the fateful verdict was to be, and helpless to correct or revise.

They could not know what questions were being asked, what answers given, or what opinions formed. They could not interpose or prompt. They could only wait.

But Melick was in better hands than theirs. He could not treat the Worth-

ingtons as crooks. He could not imagine a reason for their harboring criminals. The divorce scandal never occurred to him in his wildest gropings for a theory. He was soon on the defensive, trying to justify his own presence at a gentleman's home accusing a gentle artist of a daring burglary. Once he was on the retreat, Mrs. Worthington shriveled him with sarcasm, and the commodore crumpled him with indignation.

His next appearance before Memling was when he backed out, apologetic, from the presence of the Worthingtons, who had snubbed presumptuous people all their lives till they were champions.

Melick mumbled his regrets to Memling, too, but there was an ugly look in his eye. His evidence against Memling was feeble and disconnected, and not ready for the eye of a jury, and yet there were links in it that confirmed his instinct.

There was a subdued rejoicing over his exit. But Memling saw that the cordon was not withdrawn. Strange men loitered about the gates; they were dressed like civilians, but their carriage was that of policemen on fixed post.

"We're not out of the woods yet," Memling sighed.

"And we're going to stay in 'em," Nellie announced. "If we step outside, we'll be nabbed and hurried off to New York for the thoid degree."

At Mrs. Worthington's request, Memling resumed work on the bust, but his mind was working over other problems. His fingers, however, were so practiced in their art that while one part of his brain was laboring over the problem of escape, the other was fashioning Mrs. Worthington's image into a thing of art and beauty, with which she fell more and more in love.

All that day the cordon remained. And the next morning the same figures were visible like hungry wolves on the prowl about a sheepfold.

VI.

"Doik, we gotta do sumpum to shake off that Melick nut," said Nellie. "We can't stay here forever. I think I'd

rather be in the pen than spend a life sentence here watching Mrs. Worthington pouring the love light from her eyes on you, and dodging the old commodore's impoitinent advances to me."

"If I only had those documents of Melick's here, I could scare him to death. I wasn't as wise as I thought I was when I put them in the Continental Warehouse. For now I can't get them without going to town, and, once I leave this castle, they'll never let me come back."

"There's the commodore's yacht," said Nellie.

"An inspiration!" said Memling. "But I can't get out to it without running the gantlet."

"Let me think!" said Nellie. And he let her think.

She came up from the depths of meditation with a new scheme.

"It sounds loony," she said. "But it's worth trying." So they tried it.

The Worthingtons agreed to it. The commodore welcomed any effort that might relieve him of the burden of his guests. His skipper, coming ashore for instructions, was ordered to take out with him a suit case of Memling's clothes and bring one of the sailors back.

When he returned, the Jacky was instructed to slip off his jacket and flaring breeches and go to bed. Memling dressed himself as a sailor, and went out with the skipper to the launch. The commodore, Mrs. Worthington, and Nellie made themselves conspicuous on the veranda.

Memling reached the pier without being held up, and the motor boat hastened him to the yacht. The anchor came up with a rush, and the vessel turned her nose to New York. Memling retired to a stateroom and emerged in his own clothes. The yacht dropped him in a dinghy at an unfrequented slip, and he made his way to his club, found in his letter box the self-addressed envelope containing the safe-deposit keys, and took a taxicab to the warehouse.

There he asked for his safe-deposit box, and retired to one of the little

cells. He copied the memoranda which proved Melick's association with gamblers, and his blackmailing methods toward the very outlaws he was hired to suppress. Then he took from the bundle of Melick's money a thousand-dollar bill, and with deep reluctance decided to return it to him.

Then he wrote with a laborious left hand the following:

Loot. Mellic.

DERE SIR: i take my pen in han to inform you you better drop the storag warehous mater and turn yure atenshun to fixing up yure oan case i got away with yure do and yure papers if you doan believe it here is a copy of part of yure papers i will male the origernal to the districk aturny if you munky any more around this case then you wil go to the pen like what you want me to do so to show you i got you were the hare is short i send you one of yure thousand dolar bills if you are a good boy i wil send you another sum day if you dont take a frens advise you wil get no more mony and a trip up the river to you Now were. Yours truely,
YURE FREN X.

Memling addressed the envelope in the same scrawl, marked it "pursonel," inclosed the thousand dollars with a sigh, and pocketed it. He addressed another envelope to himself at the club, to take the keys back to a safe place where they could not be found if he were searched.

Then he copied quickly three of the district attorney's love letters, and, placing the copies inside the lining of his waistcoat, restored the box to the vault, slipped the keys into the envelope, summoned a taxicab, and ordered the driver to take him to a saloon near a pier downtown.

At an obscure corner on the lower East Side, he stopped the cab a moment while he dropped the letters into a post box.

When the cab had left him at the saloon, he bought a few atrocious cigars, loitered about as if waiting for some one, and vanished at the side door. At the slip he found the dinghy waiting, and he was promptly put aboard the yacht.

On the way back to the Worthingtons' he felt in a mood to enjoy the sunset triumphing in splendor along the

sky and the bay. The Statue of Liberty held up her torch as if to show him the way to freedom.

He put on the sailor's clothes again. His own suit case, repacked, was dumped into a hamper of vegetables, with which he descended into the motor boat. Once at the pier he assumed his most sailorish gait, and toted his hamper round to the kitchen door.

As soon as it was possible to restore the costume to the imprisoned Jacky, that sailor issued from the kitchen, and went back to the yacht. None of the idle sentinels suspected that the uniform had housed two men that day.

Nellie had suffered agonies of terror for Memling. She overwhelmed him with devotion when he was safe in her arms again, and he told her of his adventures as if they were the chronicles of Sindbad.

"If you're Sindbad," she said, "old Melick is In-bad. Watch him back out."

The next morning the cordon was still decorating the environs. But at noon it was mysteriously removed.

VII.

Memling and Nellie began to enjoy the luxury of the Worthington home.

The bust progressed but slowly. Memling was willing to take his time about it now. Sometimes, like another Penelope, he undid at night what he had woven the day before.

Days went by, and formed into weeks. The warehouse robbery was not mentioned in the news. Then those who had lost their treasure began a new agitation. There were letters in the papers, and Melick's name began to be used in terms of reproach.

One morning the district attorney announced that owing to Melick's dereliction he would himself take up the matter.

The next day the ambitious gentleman received in his mail a letter inclosing a letter. The handwriting was

crude. He read the inclosed first. He was bewildered and amused by the silly, lovesick treacle of it. He read the letter attached to it. It informed him with distorted syntax and spelling that the inclosure was a copy of one of his own letters found in a trunk in the storage warehouse. The trunk belonged to an actress famous for the number and fervor of her love affairs on and off the stage.

The district attorney turned again to his letter. It had a sadly different look in the cold perspective of time. It began:

Oh, my wonderful, my only soul's own soul—

The letter on his desk warned him that the writer of it held a large bundle of these "billy dooz," and that the sample was the mildest of the lot. The writer advised the district attorney to mind his own business, and leave the warehouse case alone. Otherwise the letters would be sent to Lieutenant Melick, the newspapers, and to others who might enjoy them.

In the next day's papers the district attorney announced, in a feverish interview, that, having discovered important clues, he was to devote all his time to stamping out graft among the aldermen.

And thus, by the old strategy of meeting fire with fire, Memling escaped disaster—at least for the time being.

Refreshed by the sense of liberty, he attacked the bust with ardor, and finished it with genius in full flight. Mrs. Worthington was so rejoiced at the success of it that she sent for the best bronze founders in America, and ordered it cast in perennial form. Memling thought that some day he might put it into marble himself. And Mr. Worthington offered to send him to Italy for the purpose. Nellie volunteered to go along.

Mr. Worthington would gladly have sent him to a yet warmer region. And Nellie would have insisted on going along—even there.

There will be more stories about Memling in later issues of the POPULAR.

The Fight of the Fire Control

By Edwin Balmer

Author of "The Battle Below the Water," "The Third Arm," Etc.

How a great duel between battleships was won by a man with a pair of glasses and twenty feet of wire, high in the air, and five miles from the guns which he directed

SHIPS in column!" the signal flags flew from the mast of the *New York*, the American flagship.

The wireless, crackling out in the cabin behind the bridge and below it, confirmed the flags. "Battle order number four!" the wireless waves flashed, while the fresh pennants hoisted to the peak were breaking out to the breeze.

From the halyards of the mighty superdreadnaught *Wyoming*, eight hundred yards ahead over the pale, green surface of the Caribbean Sea, the answering pennant fluttered its acknowledgment against the sky. Eight hundred yards ahead of the *Wyoming*, the sister-superdreadnaught *Texas* also acknowledged and repeated the signal for the ships still farther forward in the column—the *Oklahoma*, *Nevada*, and *Pennsylvania*.

Directly astern the flagship, the *Utah* already had acknowledged the signal; behind it, in battle position at intervals of eight hundred yards, followed the remaining five battleships of the American fleet—the *Georgia*, *Florida*, and the *Michigan*, the *Arkansas*, and the *North Dakota*! So the twelve most powerful battleships of the navy steamed in column, all cleared for action, all watching the twelve ships of the enemy's column slowly converging closer and closer, all waiting—with turrets turned, and guns trained, and every man at battle station—for the final battle signal.

For twelve ships of the enemy's fleet—the same in power, in armor, and in

guns—had survived, undamaged, the attacks of the destroyers, the submarines, the aerial craft. At twenty thousand yards to the east—for so the range finders now gave the distance between the fleets—the American officers could not clearly distinguish the order in which the ships of the same type steamed in the opposing column. It was clear only that, as in the American fleet, the newest and most powerful of the superdreadnaughts led, with the flagship steaming sixth, to be in command in the center.

As in the American line, the enemy's battleships had shaken off their attendant cruisers, colliers, supply and repair ships. Beyond the line of the dreadnaughts, and behind it, the auxiliaries steamed far off by themselves. A dozen destroyers and a few swift scout ships of each side darted back and forth between the battleships; but they hazarded no attack; they kept well out of range of the enemy's guns. Under water, somewhere, the submarines of either side might lurk; high above the smoke haze of each fleet, and above the mast tops, monoplanes flew with their scouts. But both sides already had spent the strength of their subordinate attacks. With equal damage done—four ships of each fleet either sunk or dropped from the battle line—both columns closed for the finally decisive blows of dreadnaught against dreadnaught, turret against turret, gun against gun!

A light breeze blew up from the south and the equator—scarcely a breeze, indeed, only a doldrum zephyr. It added to the wind of the moving ships only enough to bear away a little more swiftly the smoke from the funnels—enough, if it blew during the next hour, to clear the powder haze a little sooner from the guns; but it could not stir the warm surface of the sea. The only waves washing across it came from the cutwaters and the churning screws of the ships which had steamed ahead.

Steadily the American ships steered toward the south, and a little to the east; as steadily, the enemy's ships in column steered south, and a little west. Before both fleets—but still beyond the horizon—lay Venezuela, to possess which the enemy had come, to protect which the American fleet offered battle.

Directly overhead, so high now at noon that it gave no advantage to the ships in either column, the glaring, equatorial sun blazed down, heating the armor and the bared decks, and raising from the sea surface the thin, transparent film of water vapor which confused with refractions the calculation of the fire-control officers determining the decreasing range from every American ship. But, to the same degree, it must trouble the enemy also. So the conditions of the great battle—the first great engagement between fleets of modern ships of war of equal power—remained equal.

The American admiral, scanning the enemy's column through his glass, recognized it.

"No opportunity to-day to maneuver with Nelson's or Togo's tactics to gain superior concentration of fire, is there?" he said grimly to the captain of the *New York*, on the bridge beside him. "They seem to have at least as much speed as we have; there's no part of their column upon which we can bring a superiority to bear before that part can be supported."

"But neither is there a part of our column upon which they can concentrate, sir."

The admiral lowered his glasses. "No; if I can't put my ships across the

head of their column, at least they can't cross us. So we must fight evenly, ship to ship; superiority in individual handling of ships and ingenuity in battle emergencies must decide this battle."

He glanced an instant overhead to where, from the forward mast to the tall steel mast aft, the antennæ of the wireless installation stretched; from it, his glance descended to the lee of the bridge, away from the enemy's ships. There, protected by the superstructure from gun fire from the port beam, stretched three shorter wires joined and secured as wireless antennæ. Farther astern, another set of these short wires, secured independently, showed. The admiral gazed at them with a question, and then away from them to where the swift cruiser *Salem*, carrying a wide-winged biplane on its forecastle deck, and another astern, steamed a thousand yards off the *New York's* beam, and nearer to the enemy's fleet.

"It would be strange to have twenty feet of spare wire per ship win the battle, wouldn't it?" he appealed to the captain. "But if we win decisively, I think that's what will do it!" His gaze still rested upon the *Salem*.

Beside the biplane on the *Salem's* forecastle deck, poised on a launching runway, an aviator in hood and close-fitting suit examined and tested wires and levers. Up and down the deck from the biplane to the bridge, where the *Salem's* lieutenant commander stood, young Lieutenant Sterret paced impatiently.

"What do you make the range now?" he asked the commander again.

"Eighteen thousand yards."

"That means almost nineteen for our fleet."

The younger officer glanced keenly up and down the long column of American ships stretching two miles and a half forward, more than three miles astern. He looked to the enemy's ships steaming in a similar six-mile column ten miles off to the east, and looked back to the American ships, and longingly up to the fire-control stations on the tops of the *New York's* masts. His normal battle station was in such a mast top of

a dreadnaught. As chief fire-control officer in the foretop, his part in battle was the vital part of "spotting" the strike of the shells fired from his ship's turret guns.

The lieutenant commander on the *Salem's* bridge appreciated the appeal of such a battle station to the younger officer beside him.

"Wishing you were up there now?" he nodded to the flagship's foretop.

Sterret shook his head. "They gave me the chance; but, well, maybe I'm going to be only a spectator in this fight, but then, maybe——" He broke off.

"Seventeen thousand yards!" the officer at the range finder announced the decreasing distance.

Sterret strode forward to the biplane on its launchingway over the forecastle. He bent and felt under the lower plane where the trailing antennæ of a light wireless apparatus were coiled to be dropped when the machine was in flight.

"Sixteen thousand yards!" the range was announced, and now, "Fifteen!"

At the head of the column, the leading ships were coming close to battle range. Flags flew from the *New York*, ordering the accompanying cruisers and destroyers back of the battle line. As the *Salem* steered astern of the flagship, and, at the order, took position so far to the lee that no chance ricocheting shot from the enemy might strike it, Sterret saw that the destroyers accompanying the other column also were scurrying to cover. A few of the American aëroplanes still flew back and forth overhead; a few of the enemy's still attempted sallies. But their light bombs, even when dropped with effective aim, now caused not even confusion on board the battleships. With the tops of the funnels fendered, the little bombs fell all but harmless on the great armored ships. The men upon the dreadnaughts, waiting half naked at their battle stations, were steeled now to the shock of the fourteen-inch shells so soon to strike.

At the head of the American column, the *Pennsylvania*, leading, had come into range of the ship at the head of

the enemy's column—the superdreadnaught *Zeus*. A single gun from the forward turret of the *Pennsylvania* flashed with fire, and then hid itself in a yellow haze of powder gas. Simultaneously a spurt of spray, splashing up just astern the *Pennsylvania*, told at the same instant—or the instant sooner, for the haze already was clearing from the *Zeus'* forward turret—the enemy had fired their shot to try the range. And now, as Sterret's eyes still rested on the *Zeus*, a splash of spray whitened the sea before it—how far before it or how far on either side, Sterret could not see from the deck of the *Salem*; but the men in the fire-control tops of the *Pennsylvania* saw. The salvo of the *Pennsylvania*; twelve fourteen-inch guns erupted—the whole broadside fired together!

The second ship in the American line—the *Nevada*—now saluted the *Poseidon*, second of the enemy, with a spurt of spray alongside, and then the roar of all its guns. And now the *Oklahoma*, engaging the *Xerxes*, thundered into the action; the *Texas* and *Wyoming* joined; the two flagships—the *New York* and the *Vulcan*, fought abreast; broadside to broadside their guns battered and bellowed, the haze of the powder gas and smoke clouding up and concealing the fluttering flags. But without need for signal now, the battle jumped from ship to ship down the column, till every hull in the battle line seethed with its powder smoke, and shivered and shook from the shock of its own salvos, and blazed and staggered with the strike and explosion of the enemy's shells.

Sterret, standing on tiptoes, with his glasses pressed to his eyes, searched with cold-sweating, terrible tenseness for the effect of these detonations on the decks of the American ships. Swiftly glancing as the smoke of each salvo cleared from the turrets, he shouted to the aviator at place at the biplane's engine before him; and the clatter of the motor explosions at his ears added to the thunder of the guns.

"To the head of the column!" he bawled to the pilot, as he took his seat.

"The *Nevada* is getting it awfully. To the head of the column opposite the *Nevada!*"

The compressed-air cylinder, to give speed for the throwing of the biplane forward into the air, catapulted them up; with the propeller whirring madly, the plane caught the air and drove forward. Sterret, bracing himself in his seat beside the pilot, glanced below as the biplane rose to see that all was clear, and released the coil into which the wireless antennæ were wound. Weighted, the wires dropped and, stretched at full length, trailed below and behind as the aeroplane shot forward. The motor, now muffled, ceased the pounding clatter of its exhaust. From below, with more thundering detonation as the biplane rose, roared the broadsides of the smoke-seething ships. Sterret, searching them out with his glasses, dropped the binoculars and let them hang by their strap about his neck. With both hands he fixed over his ears the padded microphone receivers of the light wireless apparatus before him. With one hand, then, he reached forward and touched the sending key on the strut before him; with the other he held his glasses to his eyes and looked down at the line of the American ships.

Almost directly below him now, he saw the *Nevada* smothered with the smoke of its own salvos, staggered with the shock of the *Poseidon's* bursting shells. The turrets and the armored positions, as he saw them during the seconds when the powder haze was blown away, seemed still undamaged. The guns were firing at the interval for each salvo, evenly, regularly. But all above the turrets was shattered by the *Poseidon's* shells; the foremast was fallen and crumpled in a heap of wreckage over the crushed and riddled funnels; the bridge and the superstructure behind it was shot away; the aftermast still stood—or, at least, the lower half of it. But the top, where the fire-control officers had been stationed, was sheared off; ragged supports stuck up; the after fire-control station, as well as the forward, was gone.

"Turn toward the *Poseidon!*" Ster-

ret bawled to the pilot at his side. "Turn, so I can see the *Poseidon!*" And the biplane, circling, showed him the second ship of the enemy's column, miles abeam the *Nevada*, smothered also in smoke as its guns fired; but, when that smoke blew off, Sterret could see that the enemy's ship had ceased to suffer.

In the first moments of battle, clearly the shells of the *Nevada* had struck with terrible effect; one turret of the *Poseidon* was entirely out of action; a great gap showed toward the bow where the shells of one of the *Nevada's* broadsides must have struck almost together; but now the *Poseidon*, though fighting but four turrets to the *Nevada's* five, fought them deliberately, coolly, with triumphant certainty, with pitiless precision. The forward mast of the *Poseidon* was down; but from the after fire-control top, the enemy's officers were directing the strike of the shells, beating and battering into the *Nevada's* vitals, while the shells from the American guns splashed two hundred yards beyond the *Poseidon*, and a point astern it into the sea!

Sterret's fingers trembled on the wireless sending key.

"*Nevada!*" he abbreviated swiftly his call. "Down two hundred, one right!" he vibrated off the correction for the guns.

With the battleship's masts gone, the main wireless antennæ, of course, were down; but with the two emergency strings of wires connected with the fire-control station behind the armor, there was at least a chance for one string to have been left undamaged, and for the *Nevada* to hear. The salvo now firing would tell him. Its cloud concealed the *Nevada*; the shells were flying below him; he turned to watch them. Again he saw fountains of white spray spurt up from the sea; the shells again had missed; but they were nearer. The battleship had heard his correction!

"*Nevada!*" Down fifty! One-half right!" he sent his second signal to guide the gunners. Another cloud of smoke shut out the American ship; the detonation of the *Poseidon's* shells

striking on the *Nevada's* deck echoed up after the roar of the salvo; but now the American shells in turn struck again on the *Poseidon!*

He signaled it. The smother of the next salvo from the *Nevada* shut out the American ship.

"Borton, bring me nearer the *Poseidon*," Sterret called to the pilot. With his wireless signals he could govern the guns of the *Nevada* from five miles away as well as from one; and, if he flew more nearly over the *Poseidon*, he could more closely spot the strike of the American shells.

He came so close that he clearly saw the whole broadside from the *Nevada's* turrets crash into the sides of the *Poseidon*. Now a salvo missed; the shells fell short; they detonated only as they ricocheted up from the sea and struck the enemy's armor.

Instantly Sterret's fingers commanded: "*Nevada*; up fifty!" And instantly again came the terrible concussion of the *Nevada's* shells bursting aboard the enemy; another instant of cool, precise direction, and a mighty shock which the biplane felt, high up above the *Poseidon*, puffed the air up and lifted the flying machine, then dropped it a dozen feet through a vacuum, and puffed it up again as the planes caught the second blast from the explosion below.

The forward magazine of the *Poseidon*, reached by the last broadside of the *Nevada*, had blown up. The after turrets, firing their last shells in final defiance, clouded the stern also with smoke. Now, as the smoke blew off, that stern was lifting; the shattered forward part, flooded by the inrushing sea, was sinking. Farther and farther up the stern lifted, till the rudder and screws showed to the men in the aëroplane overhead.

"*Nevada*; cease firing. Enemy is sinking!" Sterret flashed mechanically. Already the American fire had ceased. The water about the sinking *Poseidon* was spotted with figures swimming away from the ship. More dotted it each instant. Now, with a rush, and great suck and draw of the water about

it, the battleship slipped farther and farther down. A final great gurgle, a splash, a burst of bubbles, a rush of steam, a seething, swirling, white whirlpool of water; and the superdreadnaught *Poseidon* was gone. As Sterret stared down from far overhead, while the aëroplane bore him away, he saw only swimming specks, bits of wreckage, a last burst of bubbles.

He gazed, fascinated, at his little sending key and the short string of thin wires trailing below the fragile biplane. By him up there high in the air, and five miles from the guns he directed, that duel between the two dreadnaughts had been won—one man, a pair of glasses, and twenty feet of wire had made the vanquished victor, and overcome an advantage of armor and guns.

He gazed about at the rest of the battle. At the head of the American column, the powerful *Pennsylvania* was continuing its duel with the enemy's equally powerful *Zeus*; down the long columns of ships, the other ten smothered themselves with the smoke of their broadsides. The only gap in the enemy's line below the biplane was the gap made by the sinking of the *Poseidon*; no gap yet appeared in the American column—only the *Nevada*, steaming second, showed itself clearly, unclouded to him—without masts, without funnels or superstructure, but still with even keel, with turrets apparently undamaged, with engines speeding. To reënter the action, it lacked only an adversary.

The *Pennsylvania* was at least holding its own against the *Zeus*; if anything, it was outfighting the enemy. Its masts still stood, its broadsides fired, quickly, evenly at the interval for the salvo; its engines kept it abreast the *Zeus*. It needed no help. Just astern the *Nevada*, the *Oklahoma* also fought at least on equal terms. Gun for gun it matched the *Xerxes*; but the *Oklahoma's* masts still stood, the *Xerxes'* were tottering; soon its fire control must fail. Clearly the enemy had no scheme of emergency fire control. No aëroplane hovered between the *Xerxes* and the *Oklahoma*. The American ship

was in no danger. But the next ship of the American column—the *Texas*, opposed to the more powerful *Sargon*—showed signs of the greater distress.

The forward mast still stood upon the *Texas*; it was not failure of fire control, but less gun power—ten guns against twelve at the outset of the duel—which was beating the *Texas*. Sterret, flying back between the fighting columns, could see that the shells of the six guns which still were in action were striking the *Sargon*; but the enemy still was fighting twelve guns against them.

The officers of the *Nevada*, too, saw it. Already, either from the captain's decision, or orders from the flagship, the *Nevada* was dropping back. The *Pennsylvania*, beam to beam with the *Zeus*, steamed on and fought its duel far ahead. A gap, where the *Nevada* had been, opened in the American column to match the gap left by the *Poseidon*. The *Nevada*, as it dropped back, fired at the *Xerxes*. Sterret, watching the effect of the fire, signaled his correction of the aim so that a few broadsides struck the *Xerxes*. But the *Nevada* now dropped behind the *Oklahoma*; left the *Xerxes* to it, and turned its own guns on the *Sargon*.

None too soon. Since Sterret had observed the *Sargon* the few minutes before, the enemy's ship had all but overwhelmed the weakening *Texas* with its terrible salvos, silencing still another turret of the American ship, so that four guns only now fought back from the *Texas*. And the remaining fire-control mast of the *Texas* bent and bent farther and farther till, suddenly, with the men from the top leaping from it into the sea, the mast fell and crumpled into the wreckage on the deck. The *Sargon* fired one more broadside into the vessel, then the enemy turned their guns to the *Nevada*, which, now within range, had commenced to fire.

Confidently and with the assurance of triumph, it seemed to Sterret, the *Sargon* fired its first trial shot at the *Nevada*, and then thundered out its broadside. With masts and funnels gone, the *Nevada* must appear as a battleship beaten already in any fight at great

range. If the officers of the *Sargon* had seen the victory of this mastless wreck over the *Poseidon*, they had not understood it. They could see the first shells from the *Nevada* splash far ahead of them, and over into the sea; at the long range, and without masts, the *Nevada* should not, except by accident, aim much better. But:

"Down three hundred; two left!" Sterret saw the miss and flashed the order for the gunners. High above the battle, and hardly a mile away from the *Sargon*, he could spot the effect of the fire closely, certainly. "T-x," he flashed to the *Texas*, now, after its four guns had fired to aid the rescuing *Nevada*. "T-x. Up one hundred; one right!"

The *Nevada* boomed its broadsides. The *Sargon* smothered itself in its own powder smoke. The *Texas*, firing again, burst its shells aboard the *Sargon* as the *Nevada's* broadsides, too, were striking. And it seemed to Sterret now, as the *Sargon* erupted its next salvo, that the sound of the guns was ragged with the gunners' surprise. Instantly the shock of the *Nevada's* shells again assailed the enemy; ten seconds later, the *Texas* again hit. So twelve guns to twelve—for two of the *Nevada's* ten were not firing—the ships fought.

Sterret, watching for both American ships, and flashing to each the effect of each salvo, had no time to glance toward the rest of the battle. With need to keep his eyes fixed constantly on the *Sargon* to spot the fall of the shells, he could not even look to see the effect of the enemy's fire on the *Nevada*, nearest. He understood hazily from the shouts of Borton that, in general, the battle of the other ships down the column seemed equal. And he knew from the terrible precision with which the twelve guns he was directing were firing, that the *Sargon* could not last much longer, if these guns could keep up their fire, and he could continue to control them.

The enemy seemed not yet to realize what he was doing. Even the officers of the *Poseidon* did not sense it while he, hovering over them, was sinking

their ship. The enemy's aëroplanes merely dashed back and forth on futile bomb-dropping sallies and scouting service. They gave chase to the American aëroplanes flying out on the same errands; but so far, at least, they had neglected the biplanes which were destroying their battleships. Because Sterret's machine and the others bearing the other fire-control officers to aid the ships farther down the American column did not try to drop bombs or attempt any direct attack of their own, the enemy had disregarded them. But now, as Sterret's machine, hovering over the *Sargon* as it had hovered over the *Poseidon*, was bringing upon it the fire of apparently helpless ships, the enemy seemed to begin to suspect.

Borton, at Sterret's side, suddenly yelled a warning. He swung his plane and circled up, careless of whether or not he shut the *Sargon* from the sight of fire-control officer. Sterret, unable to see the fall of the American shells, ceased to signal. As Borton yelled again to him, he pulled his rifle from its holster.

A monoplane was rushing at him; the man in it, beside the pilot, was firing his rifle. Sterret heard the bullets cutting the fabric over his head; he saw one cutting a strut beside him. He raised his rifle and swiftly fired back. But the monoplane came on, and, behind it, another. The rifleman in the first was reloading; Sterret reached for his clip of cartridges, also to reload. Below him, his glance caught the *Sargon*. He saw splashes all about—the great white spurts of spray sent up from the sea by a fourteen-inch shell striking the water. So the gunners of the far-off *Nevada* and *Texas*, no longer able to see from his eyes their shots strike, were beginning to miss again! For every cartridge Sterret fired from his rifle, a fourteen-inch shell was being wasted by his ships below, and those ships were being laid helpless before the *Sargon's* guns. Yet, to save those ships, he must save himself.

The rifleman in the first monoplane was firing at him again, and the plane had come very close. The rifle shots

were cutting through the wing fabric, singing off the wires or the metal of some support below him. A swift, stinging pain burned in his leg, and told Sterret he himself had been hit. He saw Borton bleeding, the red smeared all over his cheek. But the man kept the biplane steady, and Sterret, waiting for the monoplane to come closer, now that the other man's rifle was empty again, fired coolly; and the attacking machine tipped as it came on. Sterret saw the pilot fall forward, his weight on the levers; he saw the rifleman, reaching to support the other, drop his rifle and seize the control levers from the dead man's hands. But the plane already had tipped too far. It dived on and down toward the sea, passed beneath the American biplane, and dropped out of sight.

Sterret, reloading, looked for the second monoplane, which had been following; but now another American machine, sent to Sterret's aid, was dashing toward the other monoplane, and beating it back.

Hastily, Sterret searched for the *Sargon* on the water below him. He found it, and saw it still surrounded by the spurts of spray sent up by American shells wasted in the sea. He saw the *Sargon* firing confidently again at the *Nevada*, and beating it. Four guns only now were being fought from the *Nevada*; four from the *Texas*; and the fire of all eight was wild, useless.

"T-x; up one hundred; two right!" he called again and again for further elevation and right deflection. But now, though his fingers trembled constantly at his signaling, the American ships still spent their shells in the sea.

"Can all their antennæ be shot away?" Sterret cried aloud. "Can't they hear?"

In that moment of his helplessness to aid his ships below, the strangeness—the incredible quality—of his aid came to him and made him question his usefulness. Was it possible that he, in that aëroplane five miles from the American ships, and flying far above the battle, was, indeed, controlling those American guns—raising them, lowering

them, swinging them to right or left, so that their shells struck home? How could it be that upon him, five miles from the guns, the battle could turn? Couldn't it have been coincidence that, when he had begun sending his directions before, the gunners had begun to find their mark? Now he was signaling again; and he gained no effect. He was sending his corrections constantly, but the guns still fired into the sea.

"Something's the matter with your spark; it isn't the same!" Borton shouted to him.

Sterret, testing it, worked over it feverishly. "The wire to the antennæ is cut!" he cried. He tried to reach down to it and all but fell from the plane.

"You can't fix it here; I'll take you down for it!" The pilot pulled him back, circling to descend.

He shut off the motor and volplaned. In the sudden silence of the soaring machine, the roar of the battle boomed and resounded with echoing thunder. They soared down to a height above the sea at which the shells from the fighting ships, traveling on their seven-mile trajectory, were rifling past. Then they had dropped below the path of the shells; the biplane's pontoons skimmed, and came to rest on the sea. Sterret, stepping down on them, and swimming under the machine, caught the connections of the antennæ and twisted them together. He scrambled back to his seat. The biplane, circling up past the shells, showed Sterret the ships.

One turret only now fought from the *Nevada*; the *Sargon* having battered it to all but helplessness, was swinging its guns back to the *Texas*, which still was firing its four futile shots in return. Sterret swiftly estimated the distance of their splash and signaled. He would know in an instant now whether he really had aimed those guns. The *Nevada* had fired again; he watched for the strike of the shells, and saw that they hit! The *Texas* had fired before the *Nevada's* shells had struck; and now its shells also hammered on the *Sargon*. He flashed the result of the firing to the two ships, and again and again their shells hammered.

And the *Sargon* could stand little more hammering. Off at the head of the column, the giant *Pennsylvania* and the *Zeus* seemed to have shattered each other to helplessness without either striking its flag, each awaiting the result of the rest of the battle, unable further to influence that result. But, nearer, the *Oklahoma* now had entirely silenced the *Xerxes*; the American ship, with two turrets still able to fight, was swinging back to bear any needed aid to the *Texas* and the *Nevada*. Farther down the column, where other American fire-control officers had flown between the ships to govern the American guns when needed, the result of the battle showed the same.

The ship fighting the *North Dakota* at the very end of the American column no longer was in sight; it had sunk; two others already had struck their colors; the enemy's flagship alone—the *Vulcan*—still fought. But American ships from the rear of the column steamed to aid the *New York* as the *Oklahoma* was steering to reënforce against the *Sargon*. So, hopelessly overwhelmed, at the same instant the last of the enemy's ships ceased firing. The American gun fire ceased. The commander of the *Zeus*, acknowledging the general rout, showed a white flag to the *Pennsylvania*; the enemy's admiral, from the *Vulcan*, signaled the surrender.

Sterret's biplane slid gently to the sea and skimmed along it, down the narrowing lane between the battleships, as the victors closed to aid the beaten ships.

The sun still glared down from almost directly overhead. It was not an hour later than when the first gun was fired. Now, of the enemy's twelve great battleships, two already were on the sea bottom; two more seemed soon to follow; the other eight were riddled, rent, and battered hulks, listing as they lay on the water; smoke no longer puffed from their grimy gun barrels; but smoke seeped up from all; all were afire somewhere, or smoldering.

The American ships—save that all twelve were still floating—showed lit-

tle better off; but on all but two of them guns could still be served. So the cruisers and the auxiliaries of the enemy's fleet, which had waited off to the east, turned and scurried away to make their escape, with the American cruisers and destroyers racing after them. But, whether these were captured or not, the battle for the Caribbean coasts was over.

Supply ships, hospital ships, and the slower auxiliaries which, on the enemy's side, could not flee, and which, on the American side, could not give chase, crowded up to the beaten battleships; boats plied from them and from the American battleships, bearing wounded and prisoners from sinking or burning ships. Other boats rowed to the spots where ships already had gone down, to pick up survivors.

Sterret, with the other officers in biplanes, sped back over the path of the battle to discover more of these swimming men, and call the boats to them. Still skimming the surface, with the trailing antennæ of his wireless skipping on the water, he came back to the flagship.

The *New York* had stopped close to the *Vulcan*; the admiral and the officers from the *Vulcan* were stepping on board the American flagship.

The American admiral, standing on the edge of the deck to receive them, looked past them to the biplanes.

"The flagships of the future!" He raised his voice as he spoke to the men surrendering, so that the officers in the biplanes could hear. "Indeed, the flagships of to-day! It was by those that this battle was won!"

JAMES HOPPER has written for us a very striking story of the Philippines. It will appear in the July Month-end POPULAR, on sale two weeks hence, June 23rd.



MOSS, MORSE, AND REMORSE

LEAVING aside the fact that Frank P. Morse is a marvelous press agent, and has an imagination which keeps him bumping his impressionable head against the starry dome of heaven, he is a crude performer. All of which is proved thus:

When Henry Miller and Miss Ruth Chatterton were playing in Boston, Mr. Morse, who was their press agent, incurred the admiration, love, and affection of one of the leading florists of the town by slipping him at judicious intervals and in profuse quantities passes to the show. As a result of this, Miss Chatterton received one night a box of flowers so big that it broke the back of the man who tried to carry it into her dressing room. The blossoms were done up in moss, and were of every known variety. They attracted the attention of the whole company.

"Where did you get the flowers?" asked Miller.

"From Mr. Morse," replied Miss Chatterton.

"Ah!" said Miller—and that was all he said.

The following night the same thing was enacted.

On the third night a still larger box of flowers was carried into the leading woman's dressing room. When it had been opened, Miss Chatterton began to unroll the tissue paper. She did it so well that she unwound approximately a mile and a half of it. There were no flowers, but, at the bottom of the empty box, was a card bearing the following inscription in Mr. Miller's handwriting, just to show that he was on to Morse's empty homage:

"For Miss Chatterton, from Mr. Morse's florist."

Alias Bowles and the Far West

By Dane Coolidge

Author of "Hidden Water," "Pecos Dalhart: Rustler," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

Dixie May Lee, of the Money Bug Ranch, Chula Vista, Arizona, after spending a tiresome winter in New York "finishing," finds herself glad to be headed for home again. On the train she renews acquaintance with a young chap whom she had met in the recent social whirl. Uncertain of his name, she calls him "Mr. Bowles," and he accepts this cognomen though it irritates her. He informs her that her tales of the Far West have inspired this trip of his, and that he is bound for Los Angeles. Dixie, contemptuous of this "suede New Yorker," loads him up with wild stories of ranch life. When she bids him farewell at Albuquerque, the Western girl is fairly choking with laughter at Bowles' gullibility. But her gayety changes to sudden gravity at finding him upon Chula Vista station. It means that he has deliberately followed her. Dixie May promptly gives him his congé. But Alias Bowles is not to be dismayed. After a week's training in Chula Vista he rides over to the Money Bug Ranch and applies for a job as cowboy. The father of Dixie receives him curtly, and tells him that he cannot take him on under any circumstance. Unabashed, Alias Bowles insists, persists, until Henry Lee is nettled and engages him on the promise that he will prove himself by riding a notorious man-killing horse. Though this agreement is not carried out, Alias Bowles suffers much under the hazing given him by his cowboy companions, who are led by Hardy Atkins, chief broncho twister. Dixie May pointedly ignores Bowles; the new life is hard and unsympathetic; still he sticks and is game. Gradually, however, Alias Bowles wins favor with Dixie and makes a comrade of Brigham Clark, one of the cow-punchers. Mrs. Lee evinces great interest in the new hand but grows suspicious of his secrecy in concealing his identity. Dixie sets herself out to plague him. But all these things are secondary to the discharge of Hardy Atkins and his cohorts through leaving their posts and getting drunk at the critical moment of shipping cattle. Clark and Bowles had not joined the gang in their jollification so they are kept on by Mr. Lee. Naturally the hatred of the culprits centers upon greenhorn Bowles.

CHAPTER XVI—(Continued).

SUPPER that evening offered no appeal to the drink-shaken carousers, but they stayed for it all the same, hoping against hope that the boss would come back and give them another chance. But they knew him too well to think it; Henry Lee would let his whole calf crop grow up to be mavericks before he would take back his word. Still, they waited; and along toward sundown, as luck would have it, he came out; and with him, riding like a queen on her spirited horse, came Dixie May. She looked them over coldly, returning short answers to their shamefaced greetings, and saving her smile for the cook.

"Good evening, Mr. Mosby," she said, pouring out a little coffee for politeness' sake. "And so these boys had

to go on a drunk and get fired, did they? Well, you won't have so many to cook for now—that'll be one consolation."

"Yes, Miss Dix," agreed the cook, "but mighty little, believe me! One cowboy is jest about as ornery an' no 'count as the other—and whisky gits 'em all. They're all alike; I been cookin' for 'em fer thirty years off an' on, and they ain't one of 'em is worth the powder to blow 'im to—excuse me, Miss Dix. But, as I was sayin', take 'em as they come, and keep 'em out of town, and these boys is pretty fair—pretty fair; I'm sorry to see 'em go."

At this kindly word of intercession, a new light came into the eyes of the unemployed; but Dixie Lee had come on a mission, and it was not her policy to yield in a minute.

"Well, I'm not!" she declared. "If

you'd listened to the amount of foolishness that I've suffered from these boys, Mr. Mosby; if you'd heard 'em say how they were going to save their wages and buy a little bunch of cows—and tell about the quarter section of land they had their eye on—and swear they'd never take another drink of whisky as long as they lived—I believe you'd be glad to get rid of 'em!"

She turned and ran her eye over the crowd, and both the just and the unjust quailed before her.

"And so you were drunk, were you, Mr. Atkins?" She fixed her gaze upon the deposed straw boss; and Hardy Atkins shot a look at her which was both confession and appeal.

"And you, John?" she continued severely.

"Yes, ma'am," spoke up Red John, upon whom the severity of her manner was lost. "I was drunk, all right."

"Well, you don't need to be proud of it," she said cuttingly. "It's no distinction in this bunch. Brig, were you drunk, too?"

"No, ma'am," responded Brigham promptly.

"Oh, what's the use of talking?" scoffed Dixie, glancing at his swollen face and bloodshot eyes.

"All the same, I wasn't!" denied Brigham boldly. "I reckon you'd look kind of bug-eyed if you'd been standin' guard all night."

"Well, what's the matter with your face, then?" she demanded. "Did the ground rise up and hit you?"

"No; but an old cow did over in the shippin' chute." And Brigham drew himself up and grinned defiantly. It was not often that he had a chance to assume this high moral pose, and he decided to make the most of it.

"That's right," interposed Henry Lee, who so far had let his daughter do all the talking. "Brig and Bowles stood guard all night, and brought up the remuda in the morning. I won't forget that, Brig," he added significantly. "I'm looking for men I can trust."

"Well, good for you, Brig!" commented Dixie May, smiling with sudden approval; and at that the other suitors

fell into a black rage of jealousy and distrust. There was silence for a while, and then Red John spoke up.

"Mr. Lee," he said, "I know I was drunk last night—my own fault, of course—but here's the proposition: You got to take on somebody to do yore work; what's the use of hirin' these town bums when you can git yore old hands back? That's the way we stand, and I hope you'll give us a chance."

This was a long speech for Red, and he wiped the sweat from his brow as he waited for the answer. The rest of the unemployed rumbled their acquiescence to the statement, and watched for some sign of weakening; but Henry Lee did not change his frown.

"I'm looking for men I can trust," he said at last. "These boys here stayed in camp, and were on hand to help with the shipping. Maybe some of them ain't quite as good cowboys as you are, but I can depend on them not to turn my remuda loose the first night, and leave 'em alone, and I'm going to make them top hands. You fellows get the top mounts and forty-five a month," he added, glancing briefly at Brig and the faithful few, most of whom were nesters' boys, and married men working for a stake; "and I want some more just like you."

"But how about us?" inquired Red John, after a silence. "I'll take on for a green hand myse'f—forty dollars—and ride bronks, too. And I know that upper range like a book."

"Sure!" murmured the rest; and once more they waited for Henry Lee.

He sat for a while studying on the matter, and then he exchanged glances with his daughter.

"If he takes you back, are you going to run it over these other hands, and make a lot of trouble?" she asked shrewdly. "Because if you are——"

A chorus of indignant denials answered this unjust accusation, and Dixie Lee's face became clear.

"Then I'd take 'em back," she said.

"No, I won't do it," rapped out Henry Lee. "But I'll tell you what I will do," he went on, as the gang lopped

down despondently. "You boys have got your time checks. All right; you go uptown and cash them in, and if you can pay your saloon debts and get out of town sober I'll take you on. But if any man takes a drink, or brings out a bottle, he'll never ride for Henry Lee again; I've lost enough horses through drunken punchers. Brig, I'll leave you in charge of the outfit."

He swung up on his horse as he spoke, and Dixie rode away after him, followed by the admiring gaze of all hands and the cook. Henry Lee was a good boss, but the average Texas cow-puncher is not weak-kneed enough to court the favor of any man. Once he is fired, he takes his money and spends it philosophically; but in this case Dixie May had intervened, and rather than lose their chance with her the whole gang had taken lessons in humility.

"She's all right," observed Red John, wagging his head and smiling as he watched her off. "She wraps him around her little finger."

"Wonder how she come to be down here?" inquired a new hand; and Jack answered him, with a laugh.

"Ridin' herd on the old man, of course," he said.

"Sure!" grumbled Hardy Atkins. "The old lady is up there, too. That's the one thing I got ag'inst Henry Lee—he's been a booze fighter, and quit. That's what makes him so dog-goned onreasonable!"

"They say John B. Gough and Sam Jones was reformed drunks, too," commented Poker Bill sagely; but there was one member present who did not take even a philosophical interest in the discussion. It was Brigham Clark, the new straw boss. Through a chain of circumstances a little hard to trace, he had refrained from his customary periodical, and, behold, of a sudden he was elevated above all his fellows, and placed in a position of authority.

"Well," he broke in sharply, "it's git-tin' dark; who's goin' to relieve that horse wrangler? Bill? Buck? Well, I'll put you on the first guard, anyhow; only way to save you from yorese'ves."

"Aw, listen to the big, fat stiff!" commented Buck Buchanan, who felt the need of a nap; but Brig paid no attention to his remarks.

"You boys bring them into the pen for a drink," he ordered, with pompous circumstance, "and hold them out on yon flat. Who wants to stand second guard? Jim? Hank?" He craned his neck about as Hardy Atkins had done the night before, and Hardy, who had been thinking about other things, sat up with a sudden scowl.

"Whar's that feller that refused a drink this evenin'?" demanded Brig, imitating with roguish accuracy the broad Texas accent of his predecessor. "He's the boy fer second guard—good and reliable—comes from Texas, too. Mr. Atkins, I'll ask you and yore cotton-picker friend, Red John, to kindly stand second guard. Bud and Bill third, and Sam and Slim fourth. I'm boss now, and I don't stand no guard."

CHAPTER XVII.

BRIGHAM'S SQUIRREL STORY.

The upper range of the Money Bug was a country by itself. To reach it they rode due north from Chula Vista, following an old road that had been fenced so many times that Gloomy Gus became discouraged. Twisting and turning, driving around through new-made lanes, or jerking a world of staples and laying the wire on the ground, he toiled on in the wake of the outfit, which was rounding up spare corners of the unfenced range. Behind him came the horse wrangler and his helper, doing their best to keep the remuda out of the barbed wire, and jerking up more fence with their ropes than Gus laid down with his nail puller. Certainly in that wide, windmill-dotted valley the open range was a thing of the past. It was only thirty feet to water, and the nesters were settling everywhere.

"One more day like that," observed Gloomy Gus, as he threw together a late supper, "and I quit!"

"Me, too!" chimed in the wrangler; and the punchers felt much the same.

"A few more years like this last," remarked Henry Lee, gazing gloomily out across his former estate, "and we'll all quit. But, thank God, they can't farm the Black Mesa."

On the second day they turned east, crossing the boggy river, and mounting up on a great plateau, and then Bowles saw why Henry Lee's remark was true. The Black Mesa was high and level, with a wealth of coarse grass on the flats, and wooded hills behind; but hills and flats alike were covered with a layer of loose rocks that made the land a wilderness. Even the wagon road on which they traveled was a mere rut across the rock patch, and from a distance it looked like a ruined stone wall where the rocks had been thrown to both sides. And the rocks were black—a scorched, volcanic black, with square corners and uneroded edges that gashed at the horses' ankles. Deep-cut cañons wound tortuously across the level mesa, their existence unsuspected until the rider stopped at their brink; and hidden in their sullen depths the scant supply of water was lost to all but the birds.

Yet to the cowboys the landscape was cheering, for there was bunch grass between the rocks, and not a house in sight. It is hard to please everybody in this world, but cowboys are easily pleased. All they want is a good horse and plenty of swing room, and a landscape gardener couldn't make it better. To Bowles the lower valley had been a wild and unsettled country, but he found that even the Black Mesa was tame to these seasoned nomads.

"Jest wait till I take you to the White Mountains," said Brig, as he rode by his side. "This country has all been fed off till they's nothin' much left but the rocks—no game nor nothin'. But the Sierra Blancas are different; that's them over that far ridge."

He pointed at a filmy point of white half lost between the blue of the pine-clad mountains and the blue of the sky beyond; and Bowles' heart leaped up at the sight. At last he was in the Far West—that strange, elusive country of which so many speak, and which

is yet so hard to find—and the untrod wilderness lay before him. The Sierra Blancas, home of the deer and the bear and the wolf and the savage Apache Indians! Even in his age and time, there was still a wilderness to conquer and the terrors of the old frontier to stir the blood.

"How far is it?" he inquired, his eyes questing out the way; and when Brig told him, he reached over and clutched his hand. "Brig," he cried, "I want to go there! I'd like to go right now."

He looked across at his partner, but Brigham did not answer, and Bowles knew what was in his mind.

"Of course, now that you're made foreman——" he began, but Brig smiled a cynical smile.

"Don't you let that worry you none," he growled. "The way these Texicans is takin' on, I don't reckon I'll last very long. Hardy Atkins is the leader of this bunch, and he's bound to git his job back; I'm jest holdin' on fer spite."

"But how can he get it back?" protested Bowles. "Mr. Lee told me you were one of the best cowmen he ever knew, and you certainly know the range all right——"

"Yes, but that ain't it," put in Brig. "Here's the proposition: Henry Lee is gittin' old; he can't be his own wagon boss forever, and he's lookin' round fer a man. The man that gits the job will git more than that—he'll marry Dixie Lee."

"Oh, nonsense!" cried Bowles. "Why should he?"

"Don't know why," answered Brigham doggedly. "Only that's the way it always goes—and Hardy, he wants Dixie."

"But surely after the way he conducted himself down at Chula Vista it——"

"Oh, that's nothin'," asserted Brigham.

"You think she would marry him?" "Don't know," grumbled Brig. "She's got us all aguessin'. All I know is, I won't last long as straw boss. You wait till we git up in the mountains, where old Henry can't git no more

hands, and then watch the fur begin to fly. Didn't they all eat dirt to git took back fer green hands? Didn't you see 'em talkin' it over? All they got to do now is to git *us* fired, and then *they'll* be the top hands. Huh! That's easy!"

The second in command would say no more, but a few days gave token of the coming storm. As they pulled in at the upper ranch, where cowboys and "station men" did duty all the year, the stray men from other outfits threw in with them again, and increased their number to a scant twenty. Bar Seven was there, after a return to his own headquarters, and several of the other men; but the men who dwelt in the hills were of a different breed, with hair long and beards scrubby, and overalls greasy from lonely cooking; and they looked at Bowles askance.

"Who's that feller?" they asked; and the answer was always the same if they asked it of a Texan.

"Oh, that's a young English dude," they said. "He's got his eye on Dixie."

Strange how these men of the frontier were so quick to read his heart; Alias Bowles had talked with Dixie Lee only twice in a month, but they had read him like a book. Or perhaps it was just plain jealousy, since they, too, had their eyes on Dixie—jealousy and a sneaking knowledge that he had a chance to win. They cast appraising glances at his expensive saddle, his silver-mounted spurs, and eleven-dollar Stetson, and hated him for his prosperity; they watched him work in the corral, and scoffed at him for his horsemanship; and when he talked they listened to his broad "a's," his soft "r's," and his purling "er's" with wonder and contempt. Not that they listened very much, for they took pains to break in on him as grown folks do when a child is speaking; but they curled their lips at his coming, and exchanged glances behind his back, and finally, as the work progressed, their hostility began to take form.

For three days the outfit lay at headquarters while fresh horses were caught and shod; and here Hardy Atkins and his followers suffered the humiliation

of losing their mounts. As top hands, they had taken the pick of the remuda, the fleetest runners, the gentlest night horses, the best-reined cutting horses; but now in the reapportionment they found themselves reduced to "skates and bronks." Three days of shoeing the skates, and especially the bronks, did not tend to sweeten their tempers any, and as they moved up to Warm Springs and began to rake the range the spirit of rebellion broke loose.

Warm Springs lies at the bottom of a gash in the face of the mesa, and the cow trails lead to it for miles. Above there is no water, below it is shut in by the rim of the cañon, and the cattle file down the long trail day and night. Consequently the near-by grass is fed down to the roots, and the remuda had to be held up on the high mesa. All day the horse wrangler grazed his charges in distant swales, bringing them in for water and the horse changing morning and noon; and at night the cowboys watched them beneath the cold stars—that is, when they kept awake.

On the second morning three horses were missing, the next day two more, and on the next eight horses more were gone, and several men were practically afoot.

"Who let those horses get away?" demanded Henry Lee, as he rounded up his night herders by the corral.

"Not me!" said the members of the first squad.

"We never stopped ridin'," said the second guard.

"They was gone when we come on," said the third guard.

And the fourth guard swore they were innocent.

"Well, somebody's been asleep—that's all I know!" said Henry Lee; and he sent off two mountain men on their best mounts to trail the runaways down and bring them back. Then he listened to the mutual recriminations of the night herders, and guessed shrewdly at who was at fault. For when the night herders get to quarreling among themselves, waking each other up ahead of time, and sleeping on one

hand till it slips and wakes them up, that is a sure sign, and precursor of greater troubles to come, and it calls for an iron hand. Even as he was listening, a row broke out in the round corral, where the cowboys were roping their mounts.

"Turn that hawse loose!" roared Brigham, suddenly mounting up on the fence.

"I will not!" retorted the voice of Hardy Atkins from within.

"He belongs to my mount!" protested Brigham, with appropriate oaths.

"I don't care whose mount he belongs to," snarled the ex-straw boss, dragging the horse out by the neck. "You top hands mash your ear all night, and let my hawses drift, and then expect me to walk. You bet yore boots that don't go! I'll take the best I can find. You can't put me afoot!"

"I'll put you on yore back," rumbled Brigham, dropping truculently down from his perch, "if you try to git gay with me. You may be from Bitter Crick, Texas, but you got to whip me before you break into my mount!"

"Well, he's got the Money Bug brand on 'im," sulked Atkins, "that's all I know. And as long as they's a hawse left in the remuda——"

"Here, here!" said Henry Lee, walking in on the squabble. "What's all this about? What are you doing with Brig's hawse, Hardy? Why don't you ride your own?"

"Well, these nester kids and Mormons went to sleep on guard, and let my top hawses pull; now I got nothin' but bronks to ride."

"Well, ride 'em, then!" commanded Henry Lee severely. "And another thing, Mr. Atkins—next time you've got a grievance, come to me; don't try to correct it yourself."

He regarded his former straw boss with narrowing eyes, and Atkins roped out a bronk; but in the evening he took the first occasion to pick a quarrel with Brigham. They were gathered about the fire in the scant hour between branding and first guard, and Brigham was telling a story. As was his cus-

tom, Henry Lee had pitched his tent on one side, for he never mixed with his men, and Brig had the stage to himself.

"Well, you fellers talk about gittin' lost," he was saying; "you ought to be up in that Malapai country. We had a land sharp along—claimed to know the world by sections—and he——"

"Aw, what do you know about the Malapai country?" broke in Atkins rudely. "You cain't even lead a circle on the Black Mesa and git back to camp the same day. My hawse give out this mornin' tryin' to——"

"Say," interposed Brigham peaceably, "you know what the boss said this mornin'—if you got any grievance, tell it to him. I'm tellin' these gentlemen a story."

"A dam' lie would come nearer to it!" sneered Hardy, curling his lips with spleen; and at the word Brigham rose swiftly to his feet.

"If you're lookin' fer trouble, Mr. Atkins," he said, taking off his hat and laying it carefully to one side, "you don't need to go no farther. And if you *ain't*," he cried, suddenly advancing, with blood in his eye, "you take back what you said, or I'll slap yore face off!"

The astounding ease with which he got a rise out of his adversary seemed to take all the fight out of Hardy Atkins, and he mumbled some vague words of apology; but Brigham was hard to mollify.

"Well, that's all right," he grumbled. "It ain't my fault if you go on a drunk and lose yore job; and it ain't my fault if the boss makes me straw; but don't you try to crowd me, Hardy Atkins, or I'll make you match yore words. The man never lived that can call me a liar and git away with it, and I'll thank you to let me alone."

He went back, and sat down by the fire, puffing and panting with the violence of his emotions; but as he gazed thoughtfully into the fire, and no one interrupted his mood, he fell into a cynical philosophy.

"Mighty funny about these Teehannos," he said, glancing around at the

respectful company. "They say back in Texas when a man gits where he can count fifty they set him to teachin' school; and when he can count up to a hundred he gits onto himse'f and leaves the cussed country. Ordinary folks kin only count to twenty—ten fingers and ten toes, like an Injun. It's sure a fine country to emigrate from."

He looked about with a superior smile, and Buck Buchanan took up the cudgels for Texas.

"They tell me, Brig," he said, "that them Mormons down on the river cain't talk no mo'—jest kinder git along by signs and a kind of sheep blat they have."

"Nope," answered Brigham; "they is sech people, but they don't live along the Heely. Them fellers you're thinkin' of is in the goat business; they don't say *baaa*, like a sheep; they go *maaaa*, like a goat. I've heard tell of them, too. It seems they don't wear no pants; nothin' but skirts. They live on them goat ranches back in western Texas."

He paused, and looked around for appreciation, but only the nester kids smiled.

"I was drivin' a bunch of strays down through that Mormon country one time," explained Buck Buchanan; "that's where I got the idee. That's a great country, ain't it, Brig? Lots of houses, too. I remember I stopped one time at a street crossin', and they was houses on all four corners. They was a lot of kids playin' around, and I asked one of 'em whose houses they were, and he says 'My father's.'"

"How comes yore father to have so many houses?" I says. "Does he rent 'em?"

"No, sir," the kid says. "He lives in 'em. Don't you know him? He's the bishop."

A roar of laughter followed this brutal innuendo, but Brigham was not set back. His mind had become accustomed to all such jests.

"Aw, you're jealous," he grunted, and let the Gentiles rage until, as the talk ran on, he gradually assumed the lead.

"That's one thing you'll never find around a Mormon town," he began, still speaking with philosophical calm, "you'll never find no Texican. Of course, a Mormon has to work, and that bars most of 'em at the start; but I dunno—seems like the first settlers took a prejudice ag'inst 'em. I remember my old man tellin' how it come that way—'course they must be mistaken, but the Mormons think a Texan ain't got no sense.

"It seems the Mormons was the first folks to settle along the Heely, and my grandpaw was one of the leaders; he killed a lot of Injuns, believe me. But one day when he was gittin' kinder old and feeblelike he got a notion in his head that he wanted a squirrel skin, and so he called in my father, and said:

"Son, you take yore rifle, and go out and git me a gray squirrel; and be careful not to shoot 'im in the head, because I want the brains to tan the skin with."

"So my father he went up in the pines, and hunted around; but the only squirrel he could find was stickin' his head over the limb, and, rather than not git nothin', he shot him anyhow. Well, he brought him back to the old man, and he said to 'im:

"I'm mighty sorry, dad; the squirrels was awful scarce, and, rather than not git any, I had to shoot this one through the head."

"Oh, that's all right," the old man says. "You got a nice skin anyway, and I reckon we can fix it somehow. I tell you what you do—they's a bunch of Texans camped down by the lower water; you go down and kill one of them, and mebbe we can use *his* brains."

Brigham paused, and looked around with squinched-up, twinkling eyes; and at last Buck Buchanan broke the dramatic silence.

"Well," he demanded roughly, "what's the joke?"

"Well, sir," ran on Brig, "you wouldn't hardly believe it, but my old man had to kill six of them Texicans to git brains enough to tan that squirrel

skin! That's why they won't take 'em into the church."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ROUGHRIDERS.

Brigham Clark's squirrel-skin story was not calculated to build up the *entente cordial* with Texas, but Brigham was no trimmer. The only kind of fighting he knew was to stand up and strike from the shoulder, and a few cracks about Mormon marital customs had not tended to lighten the blow. Numerically he was outnumbered by the Texans, but when it came to a contest of wits he did not need any help. He went off to bed now, laughing, and to all of Bowles' chidings he turned an unheeding ear.

"Let 'em roar," he said. "It's no skin off my nose. Them fellers has been cavin' round and givin' off head long enough—I sure capped 'em in on that, all right. Well, let 'em rough-house me if they want to—they's two can play at that game. I never seen the Texan yet that looked bad to me—and if they git too gay the boss will fire the whole caboodle. I ain't lookin' fer trouble, but no bunch of ignorant Texicans can run it over *me!* Umph-umm!"

So the feud went on, and when Dixie rode into camp with the mail she smelled war in the very air. The men walked past each other with the wary glances of fighting dogs, and even her little comedy at the delivering of the letters failed to visibly lighten the gloom. A private interview with the cook, who carefully kept out of the ruction and gave neither side comfort nor succor, revealed the fact that the situation was serious; and with the success of the round-up at stake, Dixie May was quick to act. When her father returned to his dog tent at supper time he found her war bag inside, and with a mount of horses cut out for her, Dixie Lee took on for a cowboy.

They were up on the cedar ridges of the mountains now, driving down wild steers from the upper pastures, and a woman was as good as a man. Dixie

was better than most, for she had ridden those rough mesas before, and could drift off a ridge like a blacktail. Her desperate rivalry in the chase fired the hearts of the most malingering, and more than one mossheaded old outlaw found himself outgeneraled and flogged into the herd. And a steer is a steer these days—he is worth as much as a horse.

Every morning as the punchers set out on the long circle Dixie May picked out a man to dare, and several prairie-bred Texans failed to follow her over the rocks. Mounted on the best horses in the remuda, knowing the ways of wild cattle and the lay of the land ahead, she took after the first puff of dust she saw, and followed it till she smelled smoke. If her steer turned back she ran him down and roped him, and if her escort did not show up that time, she hog-tied her catch and went on. It was a wild, free life, and she threw herself into it recklessly, glorying in the unholy joy of beating them 'at their own game. She rode with Brigham and Hardy Atkins; uncouth mountain men and rawboned nester kids; and finally, when the time was ripe, she picked on Bowles.

Alias Bowles was mounted on his top horse, Wa-ha-lote, and he rode proudly along behind Brigham, for in the rough and tumble of cross-country running he was holding his own with the best.

A bunch of wild cattle sprang up suddenly from their hiding place on a far point; for a moment they stood staring, their ears silhouetted against the sky, and the keen eyes of the straw boss read their earmarks like a book.

"There's two Money Bug steers in that bunch," he said. "Head 'em off, Bowles, and drive 'em down the cañon!"

Then Bowles leaned forward in his saddle and raced them for the high ground. He headed them, and they doubled to beat him back. Once more he headed them off, while the outfit went on with its circle, and just as they stopped to look him over again he saw a horse coming down on his right. It was Dixie, mounted on her favorite

roan, and she motioned him to swing around on the left. Then the riding began all over again, for the steers were wild as bucks, and they knew every trail on the bench, but the shod horses were too fast for them on the rocks, and as their hoofs began to get hot from the friction, they turned and dashed for the rim.

From the high ridge where the circle was led to the bottom cañon where the hold-up herd lay, the land fell away in three benches, each a little narrower, each a little steeper at the jump-off—and Bowles and Dixie Lee went over the first pitch hot-foot on the heels of their quarry. They raced back and forth on the second terrace, trying to head the cattle down a natural trail; but now a wild, self-destroying panic came upon them, and they took off over the rough ground.

"I'll dare you to follow me!" cried Dixie, turning her eager roan after them; and helter-skelter over the rough rocks, swinging and ducking under trees and jumping over bowlders and bushes, she went spurring after the cattle. Behind her came Bowles, his eyes big with excitement, staring at her madcap riding with the fear of death in his heart. Down over the rough jump-off they went, the dust and smoke from friction-burned hoofs striking hot in their faces as they rode, and by the grace of God somehow they reached the bench below.

"Don't ride over there!" he entreated, as the cattle scampered on toward the last pitch, but Dixie laughed at him, loud and shrill.

"Will you take a dare?" she taunted, raising her quirt to strike, and before Bowles could say a word Wa-ha-lote grabbed the bit and went after her like a rocket. Whatever his master thought, it was outside of Wa-ha-lote's simple code to let any horse give him his dust. Wild with terror and excitement, the big steers made straight for the jump-off, which was high and steep; over they went, with Dixie after them, and then, like a bolt from behind, Wa-ha-lote leaped over the rampart and went plowing down the slope. Twice he jumped

as he came to dikes of rock, and Bowles stayed with him like a hurdler; then, with a lightning scramble over the loose stones, he took the trail from the roan and went pounding down the hill.

Tree limbs reached down to brush Bowles off, sharp stubs threatened momentarily to snag his legs, and bowlders to dash his brains out if he fell, but the lion-hearted Wa-ha-lote had asserted his mastery, and Bowles could only hang on. At the bottom of the slide they crashed through a dead-limbed cedar, sending the bone-dry sticks flying in every direction, and when Alias Bowles swung up into the saddle, he was thundering across the flat, and the steers were at his bits. Vague wisps of smoke, white, and smelling like a blacksmith shop, leaped up as the harried brutes skated over the rocks, and Bowles knew that his battle was won. Once in the soft sand of the creek bed they would never turn back to the heights, for their feet were worn to the quick. But it had been a hard race—even Wa-ha-lote was slowing down, and Dixie Lee was nowhere in sight.

A sudden doubt assailed Bowles, and he tugged sharply at the bit; he pulled down to a walk, and looked behind; then, as he saw no sign, he stopped short and let the cattle go. For a tense minute he listened while Wa-ha-lote puffed like a steamboat; then, with a grave look on his face, he turned and rode back up the hill.

"Oh, Miss Lee!" he shouted. "Dixie!"

And a thin answer came from the slope above.

"Catch my horse!" it said. "He's down in the gulch!"

Bowles stared about and caught sight of the red roan's hide as he stood behind some trees; then, with his rope about its neck, he went spurring up the hill.

Dixie Lee was lying very awkwardly among the rocks at the foot of a scrubby juniper, and at the first glance Bowles knew she was hurt. Not only was her hat gone and her stout skirt ripped and torn, but her face was very pale, and her lips drawn tight together.

"Horse fell with me," she said, greeting him with a fleeting smile, "hurt my knee right bad. First time I've known him to do that—say, help me out of these rocks."

Very tenderly Alias Bowles reached down and raised her to her feet; then, with one arm about his neck, she tried to hobble away, but at the second hop she paused.

"Nope—hurts too bad," she said; "put me down."

But Bowles did nothing of the kind. He took her up in his strong young arms, and carried her down the hill. He even wished it was farther, but she spied a bed of leaves under a cedar, and ordered him to put her there. Then she looked up at him curiously, and for a while lay very still.

"What you got there?" she inquired, as he came back holding his hat, and Bowles showed her a crownful of water that he had brought from a pool in the gulch.

"Ah!" sighed Dixie, and drank out of it without scruple, long and deep. "Say, that's good," she said; "now pour some on my hands—they're all scratched up." He did that, too, and loaned her his neck handkerchief to sop up the last of the wet.

"Well, it's a wonder you wouldn't ask a few questions," she observed at length, bathing her grimy face with the handkerchief. "'How'd it happen?' or 'How're you feeling?' or something like that!"

She smiled naturally at him now, fluffing out her dark hair that hung like an Indian's in heavy braids, and Bowles' face lighted up, and then flushed a rosy red.

"I see you are feeling better," he said, sitting down off to one side, and decorously regarding his wet hat, "so how did it happen?"

"Well," began Dixie, ruefully inspecting her torn hands, "all I can remember is feeling my horse going down and jerking my feet out of the stirrups—then I fetched up in that juniper. I scabbled out the minute I struck—afraid old Rufus would fall on me—

and that's where I hurt my knee—I bumped it against a rock."

She felt the injured limb over carefully, and shook her head.

"I'm afraid I can't travel on that for a while," she said. "So get me your coat to put under it, and prop it up, and we'll talk about something pleasant. It'll be all right, I reckon, after I rest a while, but that fall certainly jarred me up."

"Say," she observed, as Bowles came back with his coat, "that was pretty good, wasn't it, what I was telling you the other day—about nursing you back to health and strength? Looks like you're the nurse, the way it turns out. But you're going to make a good one," she went on, as he tucked the coat under her knee; "I can see that. Now most people, when you get a hurt, or a fall, or something, they come rushing up to where you're making faces, and ask a lot of foolish questions—'Are you hurt?' and 'Did you fall?' and all that, until you want to kill 'em. But you haven't hardly said a word."

"No," said Bowles, blushing and looking away. "I'm awfully sorry you fell—hope I didn't make you. Is there anything more I can do?"

"Oh, that's all right," she assured him. "We all take a fall once in a while. I feel kind of weak and trifling right now—but don't go! No, I want you here for company!"

Alias Bowles had risen up on a pretext of looking after the horses, but Dixie Lee was firm.

"No, you stay," she said, as he explained that she might wish to be alone. "You're out West now, Bowles, and you remember what Hardy Atkins told you—'if a lady asks you to take a letter, *take it!*' Of course, that was none of Hardy's business, but that's the rule out here, and I want you to come back and sit down. No, not away over there—I want you right up close!"

Bowles came back as readily as a dog, but he did not sit very close. For some reason unknown to himself he assumed that she would be embarrassed, not only by their isolated position, but by the intimacies which had arisen between them.

Moved by a strong and humane purpose, he had gathered her up in his arms and carried her down the hill; but hardly had he felt her arm about his neck, her breath against his cheek, and her heart against his breast, when the dimensions of his world had suddenly narrowed down, and there was only Dixie Lee and him. And now he was still dazed and breathless, afraid of himself, and not trusting in his strength—and yet he would do anything to please her.

"Come on over here," she coaxed, patting the leaves by her side, and Bowles came as near as he dared. "Now tell me some stories," she said, settling back and closing her eyes. "Ah, this will be fine—tell me something interesting, so I can forget that knee. It sure aches—when I think about it—but I believe there's something in mind cure. Go ahead and talk. Where'd you learn to ride so well?"

"Oh, that?" beamed Bowles. "Do you think I can ride? Well, I'm not so bad, over the rocks, you know. I used to ride to the hounds. We chased foxes through the woods, leaping stone walls, and five-bar gates, and all that, and really, I used to enjoy it. Nothing like cow-punching, of course, but great sport all the same. I remember once we were out at Clarendon——"

He fell into the details of a fox hunt—the first time he had spoken of his past life—and Dixie was careful not to interrupt him. Then he told of his life in the military school, where they taught boys the cavalryman's craft, and Dixie lay quiet and listened. If her knee hurt she did not know it, for she was piecing out his career. School, college, country club, one after the other he alluded to them, but even in his boyish enthusiasm he was careful to mention no names; and as he wandered on with his stories Dixie Lee wondered who he was. Certainly no inconsiderable man in his own country, and yet here he was, an ordinary hired hand, punching cows for forty-five a month. But why? And if he had followed her to the end of the world to win her heart, why did he not talk of love to her, now that they were

there together? And when he had taken her in his arms, when he had carried her under the tree, and pulled off her boot, and tucked his coat under her knee, why had there been no caress, no look, no unnecessary attentions to show that he really cared? Dixie May opened her eyes and gazed out at him through half-closed lashes, and somehow she liked him better—he seemed to be different from the rest.

"Mr. Bowles," she said at last, "you're an awfully interesting man, but there are some things I can't understand. There's something mysterious about you. I know you must be all right, because I met you at Mrs. Melvine's, but at the same time you're hiding out like an ordinary horse-stealing Texican. What are you up to, anyway?"

"Why, I thought you knew all about that," explained Alias Bowles, the old baffling smile coming back into his eyes. "Don't you remember, I told you about it on the train?"

"Yes, I remember, all right," answered Dixie. "But you didn't tell me very much—and then you told me different at Chula Vista. I thought I had a line on you once, but you're too deep for me. What's this I hear about a girl?"

"A girl?" repeated Bowles, with questioning gravity. "Why, what do you mean? What did you hear?"

"A girl back in New York," continued Dixie, glancing at him shrewdly as she hazarded a guess—and as she gazed he flushed and looked away.

"Whatever you have heard," he said at last, "I have nothing to be ashamed of—would you like me to get you some water?"

"Aw, Mr. Bowles," cried Dixie reproachfully, "are you trying to sidestep me on this?"

"No, indeed!" replied Bowles, settling back with masterful calm. "What is it you have heard—and what would you like to know?"

He paused and regarded her expectantly, and Dixie saw that she was called. A shadow passed over her face; a shadow of annoyance, and of suspi-

cion, perhaps, as well; but she felt the rebuke of his frankness and pursued her inquiry no further.

"Well, perhaps you are right," she said, as if answering an unspoken reproof. "It was nothing to your discredit, Mr. Bowles; and I am sure it is none of my business. I guess I'm kind of spoiled out here—I get to joshing with these cowboys until I don't know anything else. I believe I would like that drink."

Bowles leaped up promptly at the word and came back with his new hat full of water. He held it for her to drink, and as she finished and looked up, she saw that his eyes were troubled.

"Oh, dear!" she cried impulsively, "have I made you any trouble? You've been so good to me here—what have I gone and done now?"

"Oh, it's not you at all," he assured her, and then his voice broke, and he faltered: "But have you really heard from New York?"

"Why, no, Mr. Bowles," soothed Dixie, laying her hand on his arm. "Not a word—I don't know anything about you—I was only making it up."

"Oh!" said Bowles, and drew his arm away. He looked out at the horses for a moment, poured the water out of his hat, and turned back, his old smiling self.

"How is your knee now?" he asked kindly. "Do you think you can ride? I suppose we ought to be going pretty soon."

Dixie glanced over at him, and her heart sank—she had observed these sudden changes in Bowles before, and even his boyish smile could not lighten the veiled rebuke. When Bowles had thoughts that were antisocial he was always unusually kind, and his way of expressing disapproval was to tactfully change the subject. And now he was talking of going! Dixie scowled and felt of her knee, and rose stiffly to her feet.

"Well, if you're in such a hurry," she sulked, but Bowles was at her side in an instant.

"Oh, my dear Miss Lee!" he cried, catching her as she poised for a limp.

"Please don't do that! Let me carry you when the time comes, but we will rest as long as you please."

He passed a compelling arm about her, and lowered her gently to her place; then he sat down beside her, and breathed hard as he set her free.

"Really," he murmured, "we don't seem to understand each other very well, Miss Lee!"

"That's because neither one of us is telling the truth!" observed Dixie, with a certain bitterness. They sat for a moment in silence, and then she turned about and looked him squarely in the eye.

"Mr. Bowles," she said, in measured tones, "who are you, anyway?"

"Who—me?" parried Bowles, lapsing into the vernacular. "Why, you know me! I'm Bowles, the gentleman you met at Mrs. Melvine's."

"There! You see?" commented Dixie. "You're afraid to tell your own name, and I'm——"

"Yes?" questioned Bowles.

"Well, I don't know what I'm afraid of," she went on bluntly, "but I've got *something* on my mind."

"Why, surely," began Bowles apprehensively, "I—I hope I haven't given offense in any way. You were hurt, you know—and I was a little excited—and——"

"Oh, that's all right," said Dixie heartily. "You're a perfect gentleman—I always knew that. But you haven't had much to do with women, have you, Mr. Bowles?"

Her voice trailed off a little at the close, and Bowles looked up at her, mystified. He thought quickly, wondering where she was leading him, and decided to tell the truth.

"Why, no, Miss Lee," he stammered, "I suppose not. I hope I haven't——"

"Oh, no, no!" cried Dixie. "I don't mean that. I was just thinking—well, I mustn't take advantage of you then."

She favored him with one of her sudden, tantalizing smiles, and his brain whirled as he looked away.

"No," he muttered, taking a deep breath, "it wouldn't be fair, you know."

"Well, go and cinch up my horse

then," she said, "and I'll make an exception of you."

He looked up at her suddenly, startled by the way she spoke, and went to do her will.

"Now," he announced, when the horse was ready, "shall I help you while you mount?"

"Why, yes," she said, "if you think it's safe?"

And then he gathered her into his arms.

"I'll be careful," he said. But the devil tempted him—and Dixie forgot and smiled.

"Never mind," she whispered, as he lifted her to the saddle; "that was to pay you for being nurse."

CHAPTER XIX.

A COMMON BRAWL.

There is a madness which comes to certain people at certain times, and makes them forget the whole world. In such a moment Alias Bowles had stolen a kiss—for the first time in his life—and Dixie Lee had forgiven him. He had stolen it quickly, and she had forgiven him quickly, and then they had ridden on together without daring so much as a glance. That kiss had meant a great deal to both of them, and they needed time to think. So they rode down to the hold-up herd in silence, and parted without a word.

Dixie went on to camp, to rest and care for her hurts; and Bowles, with a sad and preoccupied smile, stayed by to help with the herd. But the jealous eyes of hate are quick to read such smiles, and as Bowles rode along on the swing he was suddenly startled out of his dreams. Hardy Atkins went out of his way to ride past him, and as he spurred his horse in against his stirrup he hissed:

"You leave my girl alone, you blankety-blank!" and went muttering on his way.

This roused Bowles from his reverie, and he began to think. If Hardy Atkins had noticed a change there were others who would do the same. How Atkins

had guessed or what the clew had been, he could not tell, but, having been carefully brought up, Bowles knew exactly what he ought to do. Before the first rumor had run its course it was his duty as a gentleman to go to Henry Lee and make a report of the facts; then, if any exaggerated statements came to his ears later, Mr. Lee would know that his conduct had been honorable, and that green-eyed envy was raising its hateful head. So, without more ado, he rode up to the point of the herd, and saluted the austere boss.

"Mr. Lee," he said, as that gentleman turned upon him sharply, "I am sorry, but Miss Lee had a very bad fall this morning, and she has gone ahead to camp."

"Yes, I saw her," returned the boss. "What about it?"

"Well—I was afraid she might not mention it to you, or minimize her hurts, but, as a matter of fact, she fell on a steep hill, and if it hadn't been for a juniper tree she might have been seriously injured. As it is, her knee gave her quite a lot of trouble, and I had to help her to mount."

"Oh!" commented Henry Lee, and glanced at him again. "Well, what is it?" he inquired, as Bowles still rode at his side.

"Excuse me," stammered Alias Bowles, holding resolutely to his task, "I thought, perhaps, you might want to ride ahead and help her off her horse."

For a moment the boss looked him over, then he grunted, and bowed quite formally.

"Yes, thank you, Mr. Bowles," he said. "Will you call Hardy to take my place?"

He waited until Hardy Atkins had started, and then put spurs to his horse, and when the cowboys reached camp he was busy about the tent.

The next day Dixie did not ride out on the round-up, and when they came back she was gone. "Back to the home ranch," the cook reported, and he added that she was not very lame; but the cow-punchers glared at Bowles as if he had crippled her for life. And not only

that, but as if he had done it on purpose.

"These blankety-blank tenderfeet," commented Hardy Atkins, by the fire, "they can make an outfit more trouble than a bunch of Apache Indians. I cain't stand 'em—it's onlucky to have 'em around."

"I'd rather be short-handed, any time," observed Buck Buchanan sagely.

"Now, there's Dix," continued Hardy, with a vindictive glance at Bowles, "worth any two men in the outfit—ride anywhere—goes out with this hyer tenderfoot, and comes within an ace of gittin' killed. She raced with me, rode with Red and Slim, and left the straw a mile—the Hinglishman comes in behind her, crowds her outer the trail, and if it hadn't been fer that juniper she'd 'a' landed in them rocks."

Alias Bowles looked up scornfully from his place and said nothing, but Brigham appeared for the defense.

"Aw, what do *you* know about it?" he growled. "You wasn't there. Who told you he crowded her out of the trail?"

"Well, he says so himse'f!" protested Atkins, pointing an accusing finger at Bowles. "Didn't he come into camp and tell all about it? I believe that he was tryin' to do it so he could git a chance to——"

"Mr. Atkins," said Alias Bowles, rising to his feet, and speaking tremulously, "I shall have to ask——"

But that was as far as he got. With a tigerlike spring the ex-twister was upon him, and before he could raise his hands he struck him full in the face.

"You will talk about my gal, will ye?" he shouted, as Bowles went down at the blow. "Stand up hyer, you white-livered Hinglishman; I'll learn you to butt in on my game!"

"Here! What're you tryin' to do?" demanded Brigham, leaping up hastily and confronting his old-time enemy. "You touch that boy again, and I'll slap yore dirty face off!"

"Well, he's been gittin' too important around hyer!" cried Atkins noisily. "And he's been talkin' about my gal—I won't take that from no man."

"Huh!" sneered Brigham, drawing closer and clenching his hands. "You're mighty quick to hit a man when he ain't lookin'—why don't you take a man of yore size now and hit me?"

"I ain't got no quarrel with you," raved Hardy Atkins. "That's the feller I'm after—he's been talkin' about my gal."

"He has not," replied Brigham deliberately. "He never talked about no gal, and I'll whip the man that says so—are you bad hurt, pardner?"

He knelt by the side of the prostrate Bowles, who opened his eyes and stared. Then he looked about him and raised one hand to his cheek, which was bruised and beginning to swell.

"I'll learn you to cut me out!" taunted Hardy Atkins, shaking his fist, and doing a war dance. "I'll make you hard to ketch if you try to butt in on me!"

"Aw, shut up!" snarled Brigham, lifting his partner up. "You're brave when a man ain't lookin', ain't ye? Here, ketch hold of me, pardner, and I'll take you to yore bed."

Bowles dropped down on his blankets, still nursing his aching head, but in the morning he rose up with a purposeful look in his eye. He was a long way from New York and the higher life now, and that one treacherous blow had roused his fighting blood. For the courage which prompts a man to strike in the dark he had little if any respect, and he went straight over to Hardy Atkins the moment he saw him alone.

"Mr. Atkins," he said, "you hit me when I wasn't looking last night. Next time you won't find me so easy—but be so good as to leave Miss Lee's name out of this."

"Oho!" taunted the cow-puncher, straightening up and regarding him with a grin. "So you want some more, hey? That crack on the jaw didn't satisfy you. What's the matter with yore face this mawnin'?"

"Never you mind about my face," returned Bowles. "If you are so low as to be proud of a trick like that you are a coward, and no gentleman, and—put up your hands!"

He squared off as he spoke, falling back upon his right foot, and presenting a long, menacing left, but Hardy Atkins only laughed and loosened his pistol.

"Aw, go on away," he said. "D'ye think I want to *box* with you? No, if you git into a fight with me you're liable to stop 'most anythin'—I'll hit you over the coco with *this!*"

He laid his hand on the heavy Colt's which he always wore in his chaps, and gazed upon him insolently.

"You can't run no blazer over me, Mr. Willie-boy," he went on, as Bowles put down his hands. "You're out West now, where everythin' goes. If you'd happen to whip me in a fist fight I'd git my gun and shoot you, so keep yore mouth shut unless you want to go the limit. And while we're talkin'," he drawled, "I think you might as well drift—it's goin' to be mighty onhealthy around hyer if I ketch you with Dixie again."

"I asked you to leave her name out of this," suggested Alias Bowles, trying bravely to keep his voice from getting thin. "If you've got a quarrel with me, well and good, but certainly no gentleman——"

"Aw, go on away from me," sneered Hardy Atkins, waving him wearily aside. "You seem to think you're the only gentleman in the outfit. Go chase yoreself; you make me tired!"

The sight of grinning faces about the corral recalled Bowles to the presence of an audience and, choking with anger and chagrin, he went off to saddle his horse. Ever since his arrival Hardy Atkins had ignored him, glancing at him furtively, or gazing past him with supercilious scorn. Now for the first time they had met as man to man, and in that brief minute the ex-twister had shown his true colors. He was a man of treachery and violence, and proud of it. He did not pretend to fair play, nor subscribe to the rules of the game. He did not even claim to be a gentleman! There was the crux, and Alias Bowles labored in his mind to find the key. How could he compete—either in love or war—with a man who was not a gentleman?

It was Brigham who gave the answer, and to him it was perfectly simple.

"Well," he said, as they rode back together from the circle, "he's warned you out of camp—what ye goin' to do about it?"

"Why, what can I do?" faltered Bowles, whose soul was darkened with troubles.

"Fight or git out," replied Brigham briefly.

"But he won't fight fair!" cried Bowles. "He hits me when I'm not looking—then when I offer to fight him with my hands he threatens me with a pistol. What can a man do?"

"Threaten 'im with yourn!" returned Brigham. "He won't shoot—he's one of the worst four-flushers in Arizona! He's jest runnin' it over you because he thinks you're a tenderfoot."

"How do you know he won't shoot?" inquired Bowles, to whom the whole proposition was in the nature of an enigma. "What does he carry that pistol for, then?"

"Jest to look ba-ad," sneered Brigham, "and throw a big scare into strangers. I ain't got no six-shooter, and he don't run it over me, does he? He's afraid to shoot, that's what's the matter—he knows very well the Rangers would be on his neck before he could cross the line. Don't you let these Texicans buffalo you, boy—the only time they're dangerous is when they're on a drunk."

"Then you mean," began Alias Bowles hopefully, "if I'd struck him this morning he wouldn't have used his gun?"

"Well," admitted Brig, "he might've drawed it—and if you'd whipped him he might've taken a shot at you. But you got a gun, too, ain't you?"

"Ye-es," acknowledged Bowles, "but I don't want to kill a man. I wouldn't like to shoot him with it."

"Well, then, fer Gawd's sake, *take it off!*" roared Brigham. "If he'd shot you this mornin' he could 'a' got off fer self-defense! Turn it over to the boss, and tell him you don't want no trouble—then if Hardy shoots you he'll swing fer it!"

"But how about me?"

"You're twice as likely to git shot, anyway," persisted Brig, "with a gun on you. If you got to pack a gun, leave it in yore bed, where you can git it if you want it; but if the other feller sees you're heeled, and he's got a gun, it makes him nervous, and if you make a sudden move he plugs you. But if you ain't armed he don't dare to—they're awful strict out here, and these Rangers are the limit. Hardy won't shoot—you ain't afraid of 'im, are you?"

"No-o," said Bowles, "not if he'd fight fair."

"D'ye think you could whip 'im?" demanded Brigham eagerly.

"I can try."

"That's the talk!" cheered Brigham, leaning over to whack him on the back. "Stand up to 'im! He's nothin' but a big bluff!"

"I don't know about that," grumbled Bowles, with the affair of the morning still fresh in mind; "I'm afraid he'll hit me with his gun."

"Well, here, we'll fix that," said Brig, hastily stripping the heavy quirt from his wrist. "You turn yore pistol over to the boss, and take this loaded quirt—then if Hardy offers to club you with his gun, you knock his eye out with *this!*"

He made a vicious pass into the air with the bludgeonlike handle, holding the quirt by the lash, and passed it over to Bowles.

"Now you're heeled!" he said approvingly. "That's worse'n a gun, any time, and you kin hit 'im as hard as you please. Jest hang that on yore wrist, where it'll be handy, and turn that cussed six-shooter in."

The matter was still a little mixed in Bowles' mind, and he felt that he was treading upon new and dangerous ground, but his evil passions were still afoot, and he longed gloomily for his revenge. So when they got into camp that evening, he went over to Henry Lee's tent, with Brigham to act as his witness.

"Mr. Lee," he said, speaking according to instructions, "I've had a little difficulty with one of the boys, and I'd like

to turn in my gun. I don't want to have any trouble."

"All right, Mr. Bowles," answered the boss very quietly. "Just throw it on my bed. What's the matter, Brig?"

"Oh, nothin' much," replied Brigham. "You saw it yorese'f—last night."

"Um," assented Henry Lee, glancing for a moment at Bowles' skinned cheek. "Well, we don't want to have any racket now, boys—not while we've got these wild cattle on our hands—and I'm much obliged. Hope you don't have any more trouble, Mr. Bowles."

He bowed them out of the tent without any more words, and they proceeded back to the camp. A significant smile went the rounds as Bowles came back from the tent, but in the morning he went to the corral as usual.

"I thought you'd got yore time," ventured Buck Buchanan, as Bowles began to saddle up, and as the word passed around that he had not Hardy Atkins rode over to inquire.

"What's this I hear?" he said. "I thought you was goin' to quit."

"Then you were mistaken, Mr. Atkins," answered Bowles politely. "I am not."

"Then what did you see the boss fer? Makin' some kick about me?"

"Your name was not mentioned, Mr. Atkins," replied Bowles, still politely. "I simply turned over my gun to Mr. Lee, and told him I'd had some trouble."

"Well, it's nothin' to what you *will* have!" scowled the ex-twister hatefully. "I can tell you that. And I give you till night to pull. If you don't——"

He paused with meaning emphasis, and turned his horse to go, but Henry Lee had been watching him from a distance, and now he came spurring in.

"Hardy," he said, "I'll have to ask you to leave Bowles strictly alone. He's turned his gun in to me, and is tending to his own business, so don't let me speak to you again. D'ye understand?"

"Yes, sir!" mumbled the cow-puncher, fumbling sullenly with his saddle strings; but his mind was not turned from his purpose, as Alias Bowles found out that same night.

They were swinging around toward the south and west, raking the last barren ridges before they started the day herd for home; and in the evening they camped in the open, and threw their beds down anywhere. After a hasty supper by the fire Alias Bowles spread out his blankets, coiled up his bed rope, and rode forth to stand the first guard. For Bowles was a top hand now, whatever his enemy might say, and he had his choice of guards. It was very dark when he came in at ten-thirty, and he was too sleepy to notice the change, but after he had slipped under his tarpaulin he felt something through the bed. It was his bed rope, stretched carelessly across the middle, from side to side, and he grumbled for a moment to himself as he squirmed down where it would not hurt him. Then he went to sleep.

After a man has ridden hard all day, and stood his guard at night, a little thing like a rope under his bed is not likely to disturb his dreams—the way the pea did the soft-sleeping True Princess—but with this particular rope it was different. Hardy Atkins had stretched it there with malice aforethought; and when, later in the night, he saddled his snorting night horse, and prepared to ride out to the herd, he tied the two ends into a loop and silently stepped away with the slack. Then he took a turn around the horn, put spurs to his horse, and went plunging out into the night.

A sudden yank almost snapped Bowles in two in the middle; he woke up, clutching, to find himself side-swiping the earth; then an agonizing series of bumps and jolts followed, and he fetched up against a juniper with a jar that rattled his teeth. There was a strain, a snap, and, as the rope parted, he heard a titter, and a horse went galloping on. It was a practical joke—Bowles realized that the moment he woke up—but the terror of that first grim nightmare wrenched his soul to the very depths. He came to, cursing and fighting, still bound by the loop of the lariat, and half buried in the wreck of the juniper. Then he jerked

himself loose and sprang up, staring about in the darkness for some enemy that he could kill. The titter of the galloping horseman gave the answer, and he knew it was Hardy Atkins. Hardy had given him till nightfall to quit camp or look out for trouble. This was the trouble.

Bowles spread out his bed as best he could, and slept where he lay till dawn. Then he went to Henry Lee and said he would like his gun. His hands were bloody and torn from contact with the brush, and there was a fresh welt above one eye that gave him a sinister leer. There was no doubt about it—Alias Bowles was mad—and after a cursory glance the boss saw he was out for blood.

“Just a moment, Mr. Bowles,” he said, advancing to the fire. “Boys,” he continued, addressing the smirking hands who stood there, “I make it a rule on my round-ups that nobody carries a gun. That includes you, too, Mr. Bowles,” he added meaningly. “Mosby, get me a gunny sack.”

With the gunny sack under one arm, the wagon boss went his rounds, and when he had finished his trip the sack was full of guns.

“I’ll just keep these till we get back to the ranch,” he observed. “And,” he added, “the next man that picks on Bowles will have to walk to town. Hardy, was you in on this?”

“No, sir!” replied Atkins stoutly. “I don’t know a thing about it.”

“Well, be mighty careful what you do,” charged Henry Lee severely. “Brig, throw that herd on the trail—we might as well hit for the ranch.”

CHAPTER XX.

THE DEATH OF RED JOHN.

When Alias Bowles rode back to the Money Bug Ranch he was a hard-looking citizen. His aunt, the hypothetical Mrs. Earl-Bowles, would scarcely have recognized him; Mrs. Lee started visibly at sight of his battered face; and Dixie smiled knowingly as she glanced at his half-closed eye.

"Aha, Mr. Man," she said, "it looks like you'd been into a juniper, too!"

"Well, something like that," acknowledged Bowles, gazing loverlike into her eyes; and from that he led the conversation into other channels less intimately associated with common brawls. For though Bowles had given way to his evil passions, and had even gone so far as to call for his gun in order to beard his rival, he did not wish it known to his lady. As he contemplated her grace in a plain white dress, and the witchery of her faintest smile, it seemed, indeed, a profanation of the sacred Temple of Love to so much as allude to a fight. Undoubtedly in the wooings of the stone age the males had competed with clubs, but certainly for no woman like this. Love, as Bowles had learned it from the poets, was above such sordid scenes; and as he had learned it from her—when she had chastened his soul with a kiss—ah, now he could sing with old Ben Jonson and the deathless Greeks:

"Drink to me only with thine eyes
And I will drink with mine,
Or leave a kiss within the cup
And I'll not ask for wine!"

Here was the shrine at which he worshiped, and he wished no carnal thought to enter in. So he spoke to her softly and went his way, lest some one should read his heart and break the spell with jeering.

The dust of a day's hard driving was on his face; there was a red weal over one eye and a bruise on his bearded cheek, but he was a lover still. Dixie knew it by his eyes, that glowed and kindled; by his voice, whose every word veiled a hidden caress, and she greeted the others coldly from thinking of this one who had come. Then she dissembled and went down among them, but her ways were changed, and she only smiled at their jests.

"Hey, Dix," challenged Hardy Atkins, at last, thrusting a grimy hand down into his chap pocket, "look what I got fer ye!"

He drew out a money-order ring that he had won in a mountain poker game, and flashed the stone in the sun.

"It's a genuwine, eighteen-carat diamond," he announced. "Come over hyer and let's see which finger it fits. If it fits yore third finger, you know what——"

"Well, I like your nerve," observed Dixie Lee, smiling tolerantly with Gloomy Gus. "'Come over hyer!' eh? It's a wonder you wouldn't come over here—but I don't want your old ring, so don't come."

"Why, what's the matter?" asked Hardy Atkins, who loved to do his courting in public, "you ain't goin' back on me, are you, Dix?"

"Well, if I went very far back on *your* trail," answered Dixie, "I reckon I'd find where you *got* that ring. What's the matter? Wouldn't she have it? Or did that other girl give it back?"

She turned away with a curl on her lips, and when he saw that she meant it, Hardy Atkins was filled with chagrin. From a man now, that would be a good joke; but from Dixie—well, somebody must have blabbed! He turned a darkly inquiring eye upon Alias Bowles, and looked no further; but Henry Lee had spoken, and all that rough work was barred. Still, there were ways and ways, and after thinking over all the dubious tricks of the cow camp, he called in his faithful friends, and they went into executive session.

"Now, hyer," expounded the extwister, as they got together over the butchering of a beef, "the way to bump that there Hinglishman off is to make a monkey of 'im—skeer 'im up, and laugh 'im out of camp. He's so stuck on himse'f he cain't stand to be showed up—what's the matter with a fake killin'? Here's lots of blood."

He cupped up a handful of blood from the viscera of the newly killed beef, and his side partners chuckled at the thought.

"Let me do the shootin', and I'll throw in with ye," rumbled Buck Buchanan.

"I'll hold the door on 'im," volunteered Poker Bill.

"Well, who's goin' to play dead?" grinned Red John. "Me? All right, git some flour to put on my face, and

watch me make the fall—I done that once back on the Pecos.”

So they laid their plans very mysteriously, and when the big poker game began that night, there was no one else in on the plot. Buck had the pistol he had killed the beef with tucked away in the slack of his belt; Red John had changed to a light shirt, the better to show the blood; and Hardy Atkins was a make-up man, with bottled blood and a pinch of flour in his pocket to use when the lights went out.

The game was straight draw poker, and the prize a private horse. Ten dollars apiece was the price of a chance, and it was freeze-out at four bits a chip. That served to draw the whole crowd, and as the contest narrowed down to Buck Buchanan and Red John, the table was lined three deep.

“How many?” asked Buck, picking up the deck.

“Gimme one!” said Red, and when he got it he looked brave and turned down his hand, the way all good poker players do when they have tried to fill a flush and failed.

“I bet ye ten!” challenged Red.

“Go you—and ten more!” came back Buck.

“Raise ye twenty!”

“What ye got?” demanded Buck, shoving his beans to the center, and then, with a sudden roar, he leaped up and seized the stakes. “Keep yore hands off that discyard!” he bellowed, hammering furiously on the table. “You lie, you——”

Whack! came Red John’s hand across his face, and Buchanan grabbed for his gun. Then, as the crowd scattered wildly, he thrust out his pistol and shot a great flash of powder between Red John’s arm and his ribs.

“Uh!” grunted Red, and went over backward, chair and all. Then Hardy Atkins blew out the lamp, and the riot went on in the dark. Alias Bowles was only one of ten frantic punchers who struggled to get out of the door; Brigham Clark was one of as many more who burrowed beneath the beds; and when Hardy Atkins lit the lamp and threw the dim light on Red John’s wan

face, he was just in time to save his audience. True, the older punchers had been in fake fights before, but they had been in real ones, too—where the bullets flew wide of the mark—and this had seemed mighty real. In fact, if one were to criticize such a finished production, it was a little too real for the purpose, for the conduct of Alias Bowles was in no wise different from the rest. There had been a little too much secrecy, and not quite enough teamwork about the play, but Poker Bill was still at his post, and the victim was caught in the crowd.

“Oh, Red, Red!” moaned Hardy Atkins, kneeling down and tearing aside Red John’s coat. “Are you hurt bad, Red?”

The red splotch on his shirt gave the answer, and the room was silent as death. Then Poker Bill began to whisper and push; delighted grins were passed and stilled; and, moving in a mass, with Alias Bowles up near the front, the crowd closed in on the corpse.

“He’s dead!” rumbled Buck Buchanan, making a fierce gesture with his pistol. “I don’t make no mistakes. You boys saw him cheat,” he went on, approaching nearer to the crowd. “And he slapped me first! You saw that, didn’t you, Bowles?”

“Oh, hush up!” cried Hardy Atkins, tragically shaking his fallen friend; and then, as he worked up to the big scene where Red John was to come to life and run amuck after Alias Bowles, the door was kicked open, and Gloomy Gus strode in.

“What’s the matter with you fellers?” he demanded, his voice trembling with indignation and the thought of his broken sleep, and then, at sight of Red, he stopped.

“He’s dead,” said Hardy Atkins, trying hard to give Gus the wink—but the cook was staring at the corpse. Perhaps, being roused from a sound sleep, his senses were not quite as acute as usual; perhaps the play acting was too good; be that as it may, his rage was changed to pity, and he took the center of the stage.

“Ah, poor Red,” he quavered, going

closer, and gazing down upon him; "shot through the heart. He's dead, boys; they's no use workin' on 'im—I've seen many a man like that before."

"Well, let's try, anyway!" urged Atkins, in a desperate endeavor to get rid of him. "Go git some water, Gus! Haven't you got any whisky?"

"Oh, he's dead," mourned the cook; "they's no use troublin' him—it's all over with poor old Red. You'll never hear *him* laugh no more."

A faint twitch came over the set features of the corpse at this, and Hardy Atkins leaped desperately to shield his face.

"He was a good-hearted boy," continued Gloomy Gus, still intent upon his eulogy—and then Red broke down. First he began to twitch, then a snort escaped him, and he shook with inextinguishable laughter. A look went around the room, Brigham Clark punched Bowles with his elbow and pulled him back, and then Gus glanced down at the corpse. His peroration ceased right there, and disgust, chagrin, and anger chased themselves across his face like winds across a lake; then, with a wicked oath, he snatched the gun away from Buck, and struggled to get it cocked.

"You young limb!" he raved, menacing Red John with the pistol, and fighting to break clear of Buck, "you'll play a trick on me, will ye—an old man, and punched cows before you was born! Let go of that gun, Mr. Buchanan; I'll show the blankety-blank——" And so he raged, while the conspirators labored to soothe him, and Brig dragged Bowles outside.

CHAPTER XXI.

A CALL.

There is a regrettable but very well-defined tendency in human nature which prompts the author of a miss-fire revenge to take it out on the dog. Certainly there was no more innocent party to the inveigling of Gloomy Gus than Alias Bowles, and yet, for some reason, Hardy Atkins and his comrades in

crime chose to gaze upon him with a frown. After laboring far into the night they had finally persuaded the cook that it was all a mistake; that no insult was intended to his years; and that it would be contrary to those high principles of Southern chivalry of which he had always been such an illustrious exponent to report the fake fight to the boss. Then they had busied themselves in the early morning with chopping wood, and packing water, and similar ingratiating tasks, with the result that when Henry Lee came down after breakfast, there was no complaint from anybody. But when he had let it pass, and started off for Chula Vista, it was cloudy in the south for Bowles.

But your true lover, with the wine of ecstasy in his veins, and haunting feminine glimpses to catch his eye, is not likely to be scanning the horizon for a cloud the size of a man's hand. Bowles' troubles began that evening when, after an arduous day in the saddle, he returned to his own social sphere. For two months and more Alias Bowles had been a cow hand. He had slept on the ground, he had eaten in the dirt, and when luck had gone against him he had learned to swear. But now, as he was riding past the gate, Mrs. Lee, in a charming house gown, had waylaid him with a smile; he paused for a friendly word, and his breeding had prompted him to linger while she chatted; then she had invited him to dinner—not supper—and he had forgotten his lowly part. Forgotten, also, was the warning of Hardy Atkins, now so sullen in his defeat, and everything else except the lure of dainty living and the memory of a smile. So, after a hasty shave and a change to cleaner clothes, he stepped out boldly from the ranks, and walked up to the big white house.

The chill and gusty days of early spring had passed, and the soft warmth of May had brought out all the flowers. Along the gallery the honeysuckle and Cherokee climbers were fragrant with the first blossoms of summer, and Bowles was glad to tarry beneath them when Mrs. Lee met him hospitably at the stoop. In the Far West the Tor-

tugas were passing through the daily miracle of sunset, and the hush of evening had settled upon all the land.

"Ah, Mrs. Lee," sighed Alias Bowles, as he contemplated with a poet's eye the beauties of nature, "now I understand how you can live here for thirty years and never go back to New York. Such illumination—such color! And from the hill here it is so much more glorious! Really, in spite of the loneliness, I almost envy you those thirty years!"

"Yes," admitted Mrs. Lee, leading him to a rawhide chair beneath the honeysuckle, "it is beautiful. I like it—in a way—but still, I can never forget New York. It offers so much, you know, of music, and art, and society—and yet, well, Henry needed me, and so I stayed. But I have tried to give my daughter what advantages I could. I have a sister, you know, living in New York—Mrs. Elwood Tupper—perhaps you know her?"

"Why, the name seems familiar," returned Bowles glibly.

"Yes, she's my sister," resumed Mrs. Lee, after glancing at him curiously. "Dixie was with her all last winter—I thought, perhaps, you might have met her there?"

Once more she gazed at him in that same inquiring way, and Bowles wondered if she had heard anything, but he was quick to elude the point.

"Hmm," he mused, "Tupper! No, I hardly think so. When I return, though, I shall be glad to look her up—perhaps I can convey some message from you. Your daughter must find it rather close and confining in the city, after her fine, free life in the open. Really, Mrs. Lee, I never knew what living was until I came out here! Of course, I'm very new yet——"

"Yes," agreed Mrs. Lee, who knew a few social sleights herself. "Dixie did complain of the confinement, but she—— *Oh, Dixie!*"

"Yes, mother," replied a dutiful voice from within.

"Come out on the gallery—Mr. Bowles is here. But she met some very nice people there—some of the real old

families, you know—and I thought——er——"

The door opened at this point, and Bowles leaped to his feet in astonishment. It was a different Dixie that appeared before him—the same bewitching creature who had dazzled his eyes at the Wordsworth Club, and she wore the very same gown. And what a wonderful transformation it seemed to make in her—she was so quiet and demure now, and she greeted him in quite the proper manner.

"I was just telling Mr. Bowles, Dixie," continued Mrs. Lee, still holding to her fixed idea, "that you went out quite a little in New York—and perhaps you might have met back there."

For a moment the two eyed each other shrewdly, each guessing how much the other had said, and then Bowles opened up the way.

"Why, really, Miss Lee," he exclaimed, still gazing at her with admiring eyes, "you do look familiar in that dress! Perhaps we have met in a crush, like ships that pass in the night? May I ask at what function you wore this charming gown?"

"Yes, indeed, Mr. Bowles," returned Dixie May; "but, rather than run over the whole list and recall a winter's agony, let's take it for granted that we met. It's a fine, large place to come away from, isn't it—dear old New York? Wasn't the slush on those sidewalks something elegant? And that steam heat! My! It never gets as hot as that out here. Yes, indeed, mother, I'm sure Mr. Bowles and I have met before, but," she added, and here her voice changed, "since he's traveling incognito, changing his name as a garment, and not getting any letters from home, perhaps it's just as well not to dwell upon the matter."

"Why, Dixie, child!" protested Mrs. Lee. "What in the world do you mean?"

"Nothing at all, mother, except that he is our guest. Shall we go in now to dinner?"

They went in, and throughout the rest of the evening Bowles was guiltily

conscious of a startled mother's eyes, which regarded him with anxious scrutiny at first, and then became very resolute and stern. Mrs. Lee had solved her problem, whatever it was, and settled upon her duty. Bowles felt a social chill creep into the air as he rose to go, and he braced himself for some ultimatum, but his hostess did not speak her thoughts. There was no further allusion to New York, or his alias, or the fact that he had acted a lie. All those things were taken for granted, and he left with a balked feeling, as if he had failed of some purpose. Her very silence clutched at his heart, and her passive hand touch as they parted. Dixie, too, seemed to share in the general aloofness. She had said good night without any friendly grip of the fingers, looking at him very straight, as if to fathom his deceit.

Bowles lay awake that night, and thought it out, and he saw where he had made his mistake. From the first his manner had been evasive almost to medacity, and, both with Dixie and her mother, he had made a mystery of his past. Now the time for explanations was gone, and he was reaping his just reward. He should have taken Dixie into his confidence when they were alone beneath the cedars; he should have answered that question of hers when she asked it—but now it was too late.

"Mr. Bowles," she had said, "who are you, anyway?"

And when he had avoided her, she had never asked again. And now, through the same damnable ineptitude, he had estranged her mother, and lost his welcome at the big house. All the explanations in the world would not square him now, for one deceit follows another, and his second word was no better than his first. He could see with half an eye that Mrs. Lee distrusted him. He must seem to her candid mind no less than a polite adventurer, a ne'er-do-well young profligate from the East, with intentions as dark as his past. Nor could he bring himself to blame her, for the inference was logical—if a man conceals his identity, and

denies his acquaintances and friends, surely there must be something shameful that he is at such pains to hide.

But the way out? That was what kept Bowles awake. Certainly, if he was a gentleman, he would stay away from the house. Nor would it be wholly honorable to waylay Dixie May and explain. And, besides, there was nothing to explain. He had references, of course, but if he gave them his aunt would discover his whereabouts—and then there was Christabel!

The memory of those prearranged meetings swept over him, and he shuddered where he lay. Dear, pretty, patient Christabel, what if she should sense this woman-made conspiracy, and lose that friendly smile? What if she should blush as he had blushed at each chance tête-à-tête, gazing nervously into his eyes to guess if he would yield? And to wonder if that was love! Ah no, he could never do that! Rather than inflict such torture upon her he would flee to the depths of the wilderness and hide until she was married. But his safety lay only in flight, for his aunt was a resolute woman, with tears and sighs at her command, if all else failed. Yes, he must run away—that was the way out.

And it would solve all his problems at once. There would be no lame explanations to make at the house, no cheap jealousies with Hardy Atkins, no breaking of his cherished dream of seeing the West. He would move on into the White Mountains, and explore their fastnesses with Brigham. Or, lacking Brigham, he would plunge into that wilderness alone.

The harsh clangor of Gloomy Gus' dishpan cut short his fitful sleep, and he rolled out of bed with his mind made up to quit. At breakfast he said nothing, bolting his food with the rest of them, and followed on to the horse corral for a private word with Brig. But right there fate played him a scurvy trick, and disrupted all his schemes, for as he stepped around behind the corral, Hardy Atkins strode in upon him and made signs to certain of his friends.

"Now lookee here, Mr. Man," he said, and he said it quietly for once, "you been four-flushin' around hyer long enough, and we give you warnin' to git. We got yore record, and we know what you're after, so don't hand us out any bull. Yore name ain't Bowles, and you're aimin' at Dix, but she's got too many good friends. Now we've let you off easy, so far, but Gawd he'p you if we come ag'in. Ain't that so, boys?"

"You bet it is!" answered three or four, and the rest of them looked their disdain. But an unreasoning anger swept over Bowles at the very first word, and he returned the sneer with interest.

"Mr. Atkins," he said, "you have threatened me before, but I am not afraid of you. You cannot frighten me away."

"Oh, I cain't, cain't I?" jeered Hardy Atkins, while his friends rumbled threats from behind. "Well, poco pronto, you're liable to change yore mind. You come into this country on a Hinglish trot, and we thought you was a sport, but now that we know better, you got to make good or git. Ain't that so, boys?"

"You bet it is!" roared the bunch, and Atkins hitched up his chaps.

"All right," he said. "You got a job with this outfit by claimin' that you could ride. *Now*—you're so brave—either you ride that Dunbar hawse the way you said, or we kick you out of camp! You can take yore choice."

"Very well," said Bowles; "I'll ride the horse."

"Yes, you will!" sneered the gang in a chorus, but Bowles did not heed their words.

"Any time you put the saddle on him," he said, "I'll ride him."

At this they stood irresolute, unable to make him out. On the morning that he had ridden Wa-ha-lote he was a tenderfoot, not knowing one horse from another, but now he had seen the worst. And yet he would climb up on Dunbar!

"Come on—let's rope 'im!" urged Hardy Atkins, but he did not move out

of his tracks. "No, the boss is comin' back," he said. "Let's wait till we're hyer by ourse'ves. All right, Mr. Broncho-bustin' Bowles, we'll fix you good and plenty—the first time the folks leave the house. And meantime if you value yore health you better stay down on low ground."

"I will go wherever I please," answered Alias Bowles, but he stayed down on the low ground.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE HORSE THAT KILLED DUNBAR.

In the Homeric simplicity of the cow camps, where the primitive emotions still rule, any soul-stirring which cannot find its expression in curses is pretty sure to seek the level of laughter. The boys were profoundly moved by Bowles' declaration of intention; but, after gazing upon him for a spell in mingled incredulity and awe, their lips began to curl.

"Aw—*him!*" they said. "Him ride Dunbar? Umph-umm! We'll wake up some mornin' and find 'im gone!"

Then, as a morning or two passed, and Bowles was still in his place, they began to lapse into jest.

"Old Henry will shore be s'prised when he comes back from town," observed blithesome Red John. "He'll find Bowles ridin' Dunbar with a hackamore, and feedin' him sugar from his hand. Big doin's soon to come, boys—boss and family goin' down to Chula Vista to-morrer."

"Well, we better hog tie Hinglish then," grumbled Buck Buchanan; "he'll never last till mornin'. Gittin' right close on to that time!"

"Never you mind about Hinglish," retorted Brigham Clark, whose loyalty had been fanned to a flame. "If it was you, Buck Buchanan, we couldn't see you for dust right now. They ain't a man of ye dares to *say* he'd ride Dunbar, let alone the doin' of it. Will you ride him second if he throws Bowles off? Well, keep yore face shut, then! The whole bunch of ye ought to be canned fer tryin' to git 'im killed!"

"Well, let 'im go on away then!" burst out Hardy Atkins. "We never told 'im to ride Dunbar—we told 'im to quit his four-flushin' and either make good or git. There's the road down there, let 'im take to it!"

He jerked an imperious hand at Alias Bowles, who answered him with a scowl.

"If you will kindly mind your own business, Mr. Atkins," he purred, "I shall certainly be greatly obliged."

He gave each word the Harvard accent, and tipped it off with venom, for Bowles was losing his repose. In fact, he was mad, mad all over, and at every remark he bristled like a dog. A concatenation of circumstances had thrown him into the company of these Texas brawlers, but he aimed to show by every means in his power his absolute contempt for their trickery, and his determination to stand on his rights. He had said he would ride Dunbar, and that was enough—he had given his word as a gentleman. Therefore, he resented their insinuations and desired only to be left alone. Certainly he had enough on his mind to keep him occupied without responding to ill-natured remarks.

Fate was piling things up on poor Alias Bowles, and he earnestly longed for the end. There is a cynic's saying that every time a man gets into trouble his girl goes back on him, just to carry out the run of luck; and while, of course, it isn't true, it seemed that way to Bowles. Perhaps his own manner had had something to do with it, but, the morning after his rebuff, Dixie greeted him almost as a stranger, and, falling back shortly afterward into her old carefree way of talking, she began to josh with the boys. Then she took a long ride with Brigham, a ride that left him all lit up with enthusiasm and made him want to talk about love. As a matter of fact, Dixie had sensed something big in the air, and was anxiously ferreting it out, but Bowles did not know about that. All he knew was that he disapproved of her conduct, and wondered vaguely what her mother would say. Not that it was any of his

business, but he wondered all the same; and wondering, shook his head and sighed.

But three days of flirting and sleuthing brought nothing to Dixie's net. From the cook down, the outfit was a solid phalanx against her—they would talk and smile, but they never showed their hand. One clew, and only one, she had—there seemed to be an unusual interest in when she was going to town. First on one pretext, and then on another, they inquired casually about the date, and if her folks were going along, too. So, whatever the devilry was, it was something that called for secrecy—and it was due on the day they left home. She looked them over as they gathered about the evening fire, and smoothed her hair down thoughtfully—and the next morning she started for town.

The sale of his steers was making Henry Lee a lot of trouble—and the holding of them as well. Not being able to find a buyer at his price, he set the cowboys to fence mending—lest the outlaws should breach the wires—and went back and forth to town. And this morning his wife went with him, sitting close behind the grays, with Dixie riding fast behind. Their dust changed to haze on the horizon before any one moved a hand, and then Hardy Atkins turned on Bowles.

"All right, Mr. Bowles," he said. "Here's where we see yore hand. I'll saddle that hawse if you'll ride 'im, but don't make me that trouble fer nothin', because if you *do*——"

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Bowles, whose nerves were worn to a frazzle. "What's the use of talking about it? Put the saddle on him!"

"Wow-wee!" whistled Atkins. "Listen to the boy talk, will you? Must have somethin' on his mind—what?"

"Well, quit yore foolin'!" put in Brigham abruptly. "We'll all git fired fer this, and him liable to git killed to boot, so hurry up and let's have it over with."

"I'll go ye!" laughed the ex-twister, skipping off with a sprightly step.

"Come on, boys; it'll take the bunch of us, but I'll saddle old Dunbar or die.

"O-oh, hit's not the 'unting that 'urts the 'orse's 'oofs,
Hit's the 'ammer, 'ammer, 'ammer on the 'ard 'ighway!"

He laughed and cut another caper as he ended this bald refrain, and Brigham glowered at him balefully.

"'Hit's!' " he quoted. "'Hit's! Listen to the ignorant cracker! I never seen a Texican yet that could talk the straight U. S. But go on now, you low-flung cotton pickers, and I'll fix Bowles fer his ridin'!"

They hustled away as he spoke, the best of them to wrangle Dunbar, and the rest to admire the sight. Here was an event that would go down in Money Bug history, and only the cook stayed away. Life had been stale, flat, and unprofitable to Gloomy Gus since he delivered the oration over Red John, and the very care with which all hands refrained from speaking of it showed how poignant the joke had been. Faces which had looked pleasant to him before were repulsive now, and in this last attempt on Alias Bowles he saw but a recrudescence of the horseplay which had worked such havoc with his own pride. Therefore, he was morose and sullen, and stayed with his pots and pans.

"I want to warn you, Mr. Bowles," he called, as Bowles came, full-rigged, from the bunk house. "I want to give you warnin'—thet hawse is dangerous!"

"All right, Mr. Mosby," answered Alias Bowles absently, as he started for the round corral.

"He done killed a man!" croaked Gloomy Gus. "A right good cow-puncher, too—I knowed him well. Jim Dunbar—the top rider of the outfit. Don't say I never warned you now—keep off that hawse!"

"All right, Mr. Mosby," responded Bowles, but he never missed a stride.

"You want to set him limber," reiterated Brigham, in his ear. "Ride 'im like a drunk man, and whip 'im at every jump—it gives you somethin' to do. Grab 'im with yore spurs every

time he lights, and look out he don't bite yore legs. Here, take my quirt—it's heavier—and if he starts to go over backward, hit 'im hard between the ears. You kin ride 'im, pardner, I know it! Jest keep cool, and don't get stiff!"

"All right, Brig," muttered Bowles; "all right!" But his eyes were on the corral.

A cloud of dust rose up on the still morning air like smoke from some red-burning fire, and through the poles of the fence he could see horses running like mad and men with trailing ropes. Then, as the stampede rose to a thunder of feet, he heard a shrill yell of triumph, and scrambling men jerked the bars from the gate. The current of galloping slackened, it paused, and the leaders shot out the gap with a sea of high-flung heads behind. When the dust of their outrush had settled, there was only one horse left inside—the horse that killed Dunbar—and he lay grunting in the dirt.

"Fetch me that hackamore!" yelled Hardy Atkins, from where he knelt on the brute's straining neck. "Now bring me that well rope—we'll tie up his dad-burned leg!"

They gave him the ropes as he called for them, and he rigged them with masterful hands—first the rough-twisted hackamore, to go over his head, and cut off his breath; then the two-inch well rope, to hang from his neck and serve later to noose his hind foot. Then all hands tailed on to the throw rope; they swayed back as he rose to his feet; and when Dunbar went to the end of it, the heave they gave threw him flat. He leaped up and flew back on his haunches, and the rope halter cut off his breath. His sides heaved as he struggled against it; his eyes bulged big, and he shook his head; then, with a final paroxysm, he sank to his knees, and they slackened away on the rope. A single mighty breath, and he was up on his feet and fighting, and they choked him down again. Then Hardy Atkins stepped in behind and picked up the end of the shoulder rope, where it dragged between his legs, and drew the

loop up to his hocks. A jerk—a kick at the burn—and Dunbar was put on three legs. He fought, because that was his nature, but it was in vain; they trussed his foot up high, tied the rope's end to the neck loop, and clapped a broad blind over his eyes. So Dunbar was conquered, and while he squealed and cow-kicked, they lashed Bowles' saddle on his bowed-up back, and slipped the bit between his teeth.

There he stood at last, old Dunbar a man-killer, sweating, and trembling, and cringing his head to the blind, and Bowles jumped down off the fence.

"All right," he said, "you can let down his foot. I'll pull up the blinder myself."

"Say yore prayers first, Mr. Man," gritted Atkins, lolling and mopping his face. "If he's half as good as his promise, you'll never git off alive!"

"Very likely," observed Alias Bowles grimly. "You can let his foot down now."

"Hey! Git a move on!" yelled a cow-puncher up on the fence. "They's somebody comin' up the road!"

"Aw, let 'em come," drawled Atkins carelessly. "They're hurryin' up to see the show. Step up and look 'im over!" he grinned at Alias Bowles. "No rush—you got lots of time!"

"Let his foot down!" snarled Alias Bowles, his nerves giving way to anger. "I'm not——"

"It's Dix!" clamored the cow-puncher on the fence top. "Aw, rats! It's Dix!"

There was a rush for the fence to make certain, and, as Dixie Lee dashed in through the horse lot, Hardy Atkins threw down his hat and cursed. Then he stood irresolute, gazing first at Bowles and then at the fence, until suddenly she slipped through the bars and came striding across the corral.

"Oho, Hardy Atkins," she panted, as she tapped at her boot with a quirt. "So this is what you was up to—riding horses while dad went to town! Didn't he tell you to keep off that Dunbar horse? Well, then, you just——"

She paused as she sensed the tense

silence, and then she saw Bowles, walking resolutely up to the horse. In a flash it all came clear to her—the feud, the fights, and now this compact to ride.

"Mr. Bowles!" she cried, raising her voice in a sudden command—but before she could get out the words Hardy Atkins laid his hand on her arm.

"You go on back to the house!" he said, fixing her with his horse-taming eyes. "You go back where you belong! I'm doin' this!"

"You let go of me!" stormed Dixie Lee, making a savage pass at him with her quirt—and then a great shout drowned their quarrel and made them forget everything but Bowles.

The obsession of days of brooding had laid hold upon him, and left him with a single, fixed idea—to ride Dunbar or die. And to him, no less than to Hardy Atkins, the coming of Dixie Lee was a disappointment. For a minute, he, too, had stood irresolute; then, with the simplicity of madness, he went straight to the blindfolded horse, and began to lower his foot. As the quarrel sprang up, he gathered his reins; without looking back, he hooked his stirrup; and then very gently he rose to the saddle. The shout rang out, and he reached down and twitched up the blind.

Gazing out from beneath the band which had held him in utter darkness, the deep-set, rattlesnake eye of Dunbar rolled hatefully at the man on his back. He crooked his neck and twisted his malformed head, and Bowles felt him swelling like a lizard between his knees—then, with a squeal, he bared his teeth and snapped at his leg like a dog. The next moment his head went down, and he rose in a series of buck jumps, whirling sideways, turning halfway around, and landing with a jolt. And at every jolt Alias Bowles' head snapped back, and his muscles grew stiff at the jar. But just as the world began to grow black, and he felt himself shaken in his seat, the trailing neck rope lapped Dunbar about the hind legs, and he paused to kick himself free.

It was only a moment's respite, but it heartened the rider mightily. He caught

the stirrup that he had lost, wiped the mist from his eyes, and settled himself deep in the saddle.

"Good boy! Stay with 'im!" yelled the maniacs on the fence posts, and then old Dunbar broke loose. The man never lived that could ride him—Bowles realized that as he clutched for the horn—and then his pride rose up in him, and he sat limber and swung the quirt. One, two, three times, he felt himself jarred to the center, and the blood burst suddenly from his mouth and nose. He had no knowledge of what was happening now, for he could not see, and then, with a heartbreaking wrench, he felt himself hurled from the saddle and sent tumbling heels over head. He struck, and the corral dirt rose in his face; there was a cloud before him, a mist, and then, as the dizziness vanished, he beheld the man-killer charging at him through the dust, with all his teeth agleam.

"Look out!" yelled the crowd on the fence top. "Look out!" And Bowles scrambled up and fell over to one side. His knees were weak; they would not bear him; and through the dust cloud he saw Dunbar slide and turn again. Then of a sudden he was in a tangle of legs, and stirrups, and striking feet, and somebody grabbed him by the arm. Three pistol shots rang out above him—he was snaked violently aside—and old Dunbar went down like a log. Somebody had killed him, that was certain, but it was not Brigham, for he could tell by the characteristic cussing that it was his partner who had pulled him out and was dragging him across the corral. He blinked and opened his eyes as he fetched up against the fence, and there was Dixie Lee, with a big, smoking pistol in her hand, striding after him out of the dust.

She looked down at him, her eyes blazing with anger; and then, snapping the empty cartridges out of the Colt's, she handed it back to a puncher.

"Well!" she said. "I hope you boys are satisfied now!" And without a second look at Brigham, Bowles, Hardy Atkins, or the remains of Dunbar, she turned and strode back to the house.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CUSTOM OF THE COUNTRY.

When Alias Bowles rose up out of the dirt he was shaken in body and spirit. His corporeal frame felt as if it had been passed through a carpet beater, and he had lost some of his most precious illusions. Certainly, if there was any way by which a tender-foot might hope to achieve a little hard-earned fame in the Far West, it was not by riding bronks; and now, before he could wipe the blood from his nose, they were blaming him for all their troubles.

"The blank-blanked greenhorn!" cursed Hardy Atkins, pacing to and fro, and gazing at the hulk of Dunbar. "I tol' 'im to keep off that hawse! Never would've let 'im rode 'im—not fer a thousand dollars! And then, the minute my back's turned—and Dix right there to copper the play—he goes and pulls off *this!* But I don't care—I never done nothin'! You boys seen' im—he done it himse'f!"

And then, all the anger and blood lust that had been in Bowles' heart for days went suddenly to his right hand, and, putting his shoulder behind it, he smote the ex-twister on the jaw. It was a wicked blow, very much like the one he had received himself, and it laid the false cow-puncher low. He came up, reaching for his gun, and Bowles knocked him down again and took the gun away. Then he passed it on to Brigham, and offered to fight him some more—or anybody! A raging devil of combat seemed to possess him, and he shouted for war, and more war. The cowboys drew away from him as from a man who has lost his right mind, and it was not until Brigham had cajoled him into dipping his hot head in the horse trough that Bowles left off his raving. A drink of Mr. Mosby's strong coffee, and a rest on his bed by the sheds, and his sanity was completely restored—but his illusions were lost forever!

Never again would Alias Bowles try to beat the cow-puncher at his own game; never would he mount a wild

horse; and never would he put faith in womankind. Not out West, anyway. To be sure, Dixie Lee had saved him from the man-killer, but she had done it in such a way as to injure his pride irreparably.

"Brig," he said, "I'm going to quit this accursed ranch—would you mind catching my private horse?"

"No, ner mine neither!" fulminated Brig. "I jest been waitin' fer ye to say the word—been ready myse'f fer a week."

He hopped on his horse as he spoke, and rode out into the pasture, and, as he returned with their private mounts, Gloomy Gus came over from the fire.

"What ye goin' to do, Brig?" he inquired. "Quit?"

"Yep," answered Brig, as he lashed their beds on his spare horse, "gittin' too bad fer me. Next thing you know somebody'd git killed."

"That's right," agreed Gus gloomily, "gittin' pretty bad around hyer. Cow-punchin' ain't what it used to be. Well, I'm sorry to see you go."

He put them up a lunch and watched them off, and then turned back to his pots and kettles, grumbling and shaking his head.

That was their only farewell, but as they rode out the gate, Dixie Lee appeared at the big house door, and looked after them as they passed. Their mounts alone told the story of their departure, and their beds on the horse behind; but though she knew they were quitting, she stood silent and made no sign.

"Want to say good-by?" asked Brig, glancing up at her from under his hat, but Bowles did not reply. A deadly apathy had succeeded his passion, and he was sullen and incapable of higher thoughts. All he wanted now was to get away—after that he could think what to do.

They turned their horses' heads toward Chula Vista, where they must go to draw their time, and, after they had ridden a mile, Bowles suddenly turned in his saddle—but Dixie had passed inside. A deep and melancholy sadness came over him now, and he

sighed as he slumped down in his seat, but Brigham did not notice his silence. At noon they ate as they rode, getting a drink at a nester's windmill, and at night they camped by a well. Then it was that Bowles woke up from his brooding and saw that he was not alone in his mood—Brigham, too, was down-cast, and wrapped up in his thoughts. His mind ran quickly back to ascertain the cause, and he remembered the cherished job.

"Brig," he said, as they sat close to their tiny fire, "I'm sorry you had to quit. If it hadn't been for me and Hardy Atkins, you'd be back there now, on your job. It might have led to something better, too. Mr. Lee often said that——"

"Aw, fergit it," grumbled Brig morosely. "I didn't want the job. What's the use of bein' a puncher, anyway? They's nothin' in it but hard work. I've got a good mind to hike back to the Gila and go to pitchin' hay."

"Well, if I'm in your way at all," urged Bowles, "don't hesitate to say so. I only proposed this White Mountain trip——"

"Oh, that's all right," broke in Brig. "I'll be glad to git away from it all—git where they ain't no girls, nor mail, nor nothin'. Up there in them big pine trees, where a man can fergit his troubles. But I want to go back past the Money Bug. I told Dix all about it last week, and I shore want to bid her good-by. There's a good girl—Dix—but she can't understand. She says if I had any nerve I'd go and take a chance—marry the girl, and wait and see what happened to me—my girl down on the river, you know."

Alias Bowles nodded gravely, and waited for him to go on. It was a month since Brigham had spoken of his girl, and he had never discussed the affair since that first rush of confidences, until now, suddenly, he dove into the midst of it.

"No," continued Brig, gazing mournfully at his dead cigarette, "Dix is all right, but she don't know them Mormons like I do. She don't know what they're liable to do. This feller that's

tryin' to marry my girl is the bishop's own son—he's that feller I beat up so bad when I took to the hills a while back—and he's bound to do me dirt. My girl won't marry me nohow—not lessen I become a Mormon—and shore as you're settin' there, boy, if I take that gal from the bishop's son I'm elected to go on a mission!

"I know it! Hain't the old man got it in fer me? And then, what's to become of my wife? Am I goin' to leave her fer two years, and that dastard a-hangin' around? Not on yore life—if they summoned me fer a mission I'd either take my wife along, or I'd kill that bishop's son—one or the other. But that's the worst of it—the bishop's kid is on the spot, and I'm hidin' out like a coyote. My girl keeps a-writin' like she never got no letters, and beggin' me to come back and be good! But I can't do it—that's all—I been a renegade too long."

It was a hard and tragic problem, and long after the fatalistic Brig had gone to sleep, Alias Bowles lay awake and tried to find a way out. His own petty griefs seemed sordid by the side of it, and all the way to town he turned it over in his mind. But now that he had dismissed it forever, Brigham Clark became his old carefree self again.

When Brigham came back from his interview with Henry Lee, Bowles could see that his enthusiasm had been shaken.

"Say," he said, as he beckoned Bowles to a corner of the corral, "what d'ye think Mrs. Lee sprung on me when I went around fer my pay? And, by the way, they was a deputy sheriff inquirin' fer you when I come out by the desk, so come away from that gate—but what d'ye think she said?"

"Why, I'm sure I can't imagine," answered Bowles, with his old-time calm. "What was it?"

"Well, she had a big, yeller telegraph in her hand that she was kinder wavin' around—I never did find out what it was all about—but when I come in to the hotel she flew at me like and says:

"Mr. Clark, do you know who that young man is you're travelin' with?"

"Well, sir; the way she said it made me mad clean through, and I says to her:

"No, Mrs. Lee, I don't—and what's more, I don't care! He's a good pardner, that's all I know—and that's all I want to know."

"And then I turned around and walked out. I don't know what them Lees have got to be so proud about, the way old Henry used to cave around, but I showed her, by grab, they was one puncher she couldn't run it over! She always did make me mad," observed Brig, as he stole quiet glances at his friend, "but I knowed good an' well you wasn't no *crook*, and—and I don't care *what* you done!"

"Well, thank you just as much, I haven't done anything, Brig," answered Alias Bowles with a reassuring smile. "But," he added, "that's no reason for not getting out of town."

They packed their horse hurriedly, and Bowles rode on ahead, but once on the open prairie he gave way to a hearty laugh.

"Brig," he said, "what in the world do you think I've done?"

"Well, I dunno," mumbled Brig, looking him over shrewdly. "Of course I knowed all along they was nothin' to that Christabel talk you was givin' me—stands to reason a man wouldn't leave home fer a little thing like that. About that aunt, now, that sounds a little more likely—but I've knowed fellers that come out here jest fer fun."

"Yes, but this deputy sheriff—and all that!"

"We-ell," drawled Brigham, with a sly twinkle in his eye, "I heered a little more from him than what I told you at the first!"

"Oh, indeed! And what else did you hear?"

"Well——" Brig stopped and stuck his tongue in his cheek roguishly. "He said it was a woman that wanted you!"

"My aunt!" exclaimed Bowles, striking his leg; but Brig only spat and grinned.

"Sure!" he said, and grinned again.

"I have it!" cried Bowles. "Mrs. Lee wrote back and told her sister I

was here—and then my aunt began telegraphing! That telegram Mrs. Lee had was from her!”

“Sure thing,” agreed Brig, and Bowles looked up to find him smirking.

“You’re pretty smart, aren’t you, Brig?” he observed, with well-simulated admiration. “They don’t put one over on you very often, do they?”

“No, indeedy!” swaggered Brigham, and then they both laughed—to themselves. But the jest put an effectual end to the discussion, since Brigham did not know what it was he was supposed to have discovered, and Bowles took no pains to enlighten him. It was enough that Brig considered him a very gay dog, indeed, and he did not deny the soft impeachment. So, each with his satisfied smile, they jogged along across the plains, dragging their pack animals behind them, and heading for the Money Bug.

All that day they rode on through the mellow sunshine, and the next morning found them still on their way; but just as the well-remembered ranch came into view there was a rattle of wheels from behind, and they swung out to give Henry Lee the road. He was driving the fiery grays, and they fought gamely against the delay, but he pulled them down to a walk while he handed Bowles a note.

“Telegram for you, Mr. Bowles,” he said. “Brig, stop at the ranch when you go by—I want to talk with you.”

There was much more that might have been said, and Mrs. Lee smiled approvingly at Alias Bowles, but the grays were within sight of the haystack, and they cut the talk short with a bolt. Then Bowles glanced through the telegram, and thrust it into his shirt.

“My aunt——” he began, and, as the grin on Brig’s face widened, he stopped short and fell into a sulk. “No use telling you anything, Brig,” he said at last; “you can guess by the color of my eye.”

“Sure,” said Brig, after a moment of balked silence; “yore aunt seems to think a whole lot of you. And, speakin’ about womenfolks, what’s this comin’ down off the hill?”

He nodded at the foothills to the west, and, as Bowles gazed, he saw Dixie Lee coming down the broad slope like an arrow. She was riding Wa-ha-lote, too, and at sight of that noble charger the heart of Alias Bowles became sad—or, perhaps, it was at sight of Dixie Lee. However that may be, he continued on his way with melancholy resignation; while Brig seemed to view her coming with alarm.

“Here’s where I ketch hell fer some-thin’,” he muttered, as she sighted him from afar; and when she rode up and faced him, he hung his head like a truant.

“You, Brig,” she said at last, whipping the hair from her eyes with one hand, “you haven’t got git-up enough in you to win an Indian squaw. You’ll make a lovely husband for somebody, and that’s a fact—the way you do your courting. Who do you think is up to the big house waiting for you?”

“Huh?” demanded Brig, now suddenly all attention.

“Well, she’s been there for more than a day—while you were out shooting prairie dogs. What she sees in you is more than I can say, but——”

“Who are ye talkin’ about?” barked Brigham, throwing loose his leading rope.

“I’m talking about your girl,” answered Dixie, with Spartan directness. “Here, I’ll lead your pack—go ahead and show her your dust.”

“I’ll do that,” said Brig, leaning forward as she spoke; and, passing over the rope, he went spurring up the road.

Dixie Lee gave Bowles a level look from beneath her tumbled hair, and touched Wa-ha-lote with the spur. Her manner seemed to be a disclaimer of any responsibility for their being left together, and yet somehow it was very obvious that the stage had been set for an interview. But if Dixie had any intentions she concealed them effectually, and her manner was one of good-natured tolerance.

“Well, look at that crazy fool ride,” she observed, as Brig disappeared in his own dust. “You’d think from the way he travels he was the keenest lover in

the world." She paused here and laughed to herself.

"Yes, indeed!" responded Bowles, with a certain brotherly pride; "old Brig thinks a lot of that girl."

"Well, maybe he does," conceded Dixie, "but he certainly makes me provoked. I declare, the way some of these men——" She paused again and bit her lip. Mr. Bowles was one of those men, too. "I reckon it's all right," she continued resignedly, "but when a woman has to ride clear over to the Gila, and propose for a man, and steal his girl for him, and then round him up and send him in, I guess she has some excuse to speak her mind. Don't you think so, Mr. Bowles? Well, then, if your friend Brigham had had his way he would have hit for the summit of the White Mountains, and his girl would have been married to a Mormon! It makes me mad, Mr. Bowles. I declare it does! The idea of leaving that poor little girl over there, and never going near her when all the time she was begging him to come back, and her folks were reading her letters. She couldn't *write* it to him—she had to *tell* him—and he never showed up at all. Please don't apologize for him, Mr. Bowles; I'm sure there's not a word to be said."

Mr. Bowles bowed his head and felt very humble, indeed, as if he, too, in some inexplicable way, had erred, and been rebuked.

"And now," said Dixie, at last, "father'll make Mr. Brig his wagon boss, and they'll get married and live at the ranch. Simple, isn't it?"

"Why, it seems so," admitted Bowles, "but how do you know he will?"

"How do I know?" repeated Dixie, rolling her eyes on him. "Why, Mr. Bowles, have you been around the Money Bug for two months, and failed to note who was boss? Right after you and Brigham Clark left I went down and *fred* that Hardy Atkins—so you don't need to be bashful about coming back."

Her voice trailed off a little as she ended, and Bowles started and looked at the ground. New worlds and vistas appeared before him, and visions and

sudden dreams—and then he was back by her side, and the road was passing by.

"I'm sorry," he said at last. "It's my own fault—I should have explained at the beginning. But now your mother has written to her sister, and she has told my aunt, and so I've got to move on. She's telegraphing already." He showed her the yellow message, and slipped it back into his pocket. "And there was a deputy sheriff inquiring for me," he added bitterly.

"Oh, dear!" pouted Dixie, yanking at the reluctant pack horse. "I just knew she'd do it. Mother means well, but she's a New Yorker, and—well, I hope she's satisfied!"

"Yes, I hope so, too," added Bowles. "I never did have anything to be ashamed of, but—do you know who I am?"

"No, I don't," answered Dixie May. "And I don't care, either," she added, glancing across at him with clear-seeing eyes. "I always knew you were a gentleman, and—say, what's the matter with that pack?"

She dismounted quickly as she spoke, and Bowles dropped off to help; then, after the ropes had been tightened, they stood silent within the circle of their horses.

"Mr. Bowles," began Dixie, leaning one arm on the pack, and looking thoughtfully away, "being the man you are, you—you wouldn't compel a lady to apologize to you, would you?"

"Why, no, no—certainly not!" gasped Bowles, alarmed by a mistiness in her eyes.

"Because, if that's what you're going away for——"

"Oh, my dear Miss Lee!" protested Bowles, now suddenly stirred to the depths. "Don't think of it—not for a moment! No, indeed! I will confess that I was a little hurt by your—but that's all right! That's all right! You don't know my aunt, do you, Miss Lee? I can't explain it to you, but—well, she's a very determined woman, in her way, and—well, she wants me to come home."

"Yes?"

"Yes, and so I'd better move on. I'm sorry that Brig can't go along with me, but—well, I can go alone. Do you remember one time, when we were coming west, I spoke about the spirit of the country—the spirit of the West? Well, I have found it—it is to move on!"

"And never come back?" inquired Dixie quickly.

"Well, something like that," admitted Bowles.

"Yes, I do remember that," responded Dixie, with a reminiscent smile. "I remember it well. We were alone on the train, and we said all kinds of things—I didn't know you very well then. I remember you told me once, if I'd help you find the Far West, you'd be my faithful knight—and all that. And I helped you, too, didn't I?"

"Why, yes!" said Alias Bowles, puzzled by her air.

"Well, what about being my knight?" demanded Dixie, with sudden frankness. "You've done well out here, Mr. Bowles, but there's one thing I'm disappointed in—you don't keep the customs of the country!"

"Why, what do you mean, Miss Lee?" inquired Bowles.

A sudden smile illuminated Dixie's face—the same smile that had taken possession of him when he had forgotten and stolen a kiss—and then she turned away and blushed.

"Well," she said, "you're the first Money Bug man that has gone away without—without proposing to me!"

She glanced at him defiantly and folded her arms—and Bowles felt his reason eclipsed, and the world go dark before him. A thousand riotous thoughts clamored suddenly for recognition, and his brain reeled at the shock. Then he opened his eyes, and she was still smiling at him, but the smile had a

twinkle of mischief in it. The memory of her legion of suitors came over him now, and her carefree, jesting ways, and he became of a sudden calm. They had all proposed, and she had led them on, and then she had told them No. But she should never deal that ignominy to him. If she scorned his humble suit and desired only to add his scalp to the rest, he would escape at least with his pride—he would never let her say he had proposed.

"Ah, you must excuse me, Miss Lee," he said, speaking with a formal restraint. "Much as I value your happiness I—I cannot observe this—custom of the country!"

He spat the words out bitterly, and closed his lips—as if there was more he might say. But Dixie did not lose her smile.

"Maybe I'd accept you," she suggested, with a roguish twinkle, and once more he gazed into her eyes to read there if she was his friend. But a woman's eyes are deceptive, and hers spoke of many things—she smiled, the old dazzling smile, but there was mischief in the depths. He sighed and drew away.

"Ah, no," he said, "you cannot understand." Then, as she waited, his heart turned to bitterness, and he spoke on as the thoughts came: "Really, Miss Lee, it pains me—I cannot believe it. What is one man, more or less, that you should hurt me like this? Dixie"—he raised his downcast eyes and regarded her reproachfully—"I have dreamed about you. I have worshiped you from afar—I have fought my way to be near you. You don't know how it would pain me—after all I have hoped—to have you——"

"Aw, Bowles," chided Dixie, reaching out her hand, "can't you see that I want you?"

And then Bowles' dream came true.

THE END.

In next issue you will get the opening chapters of a mystery serial, "The Murder of Jack Robinson," by Howard Fielding, who wrote "Larry, the Listener," and "Bill Harris—His Line."

The Law of the Machine

By Robert J. Pearsall

Author of "Comrades in Hate," Etc.

The strange case of a young navalman who unwittingly pursued a court martial half way around the world. A tale of naval discipline which regards a man but a cog in a great machine

MOST men wearing bluejacket's uniform will tell you the essentials of the case against Andrew Hemphill. Sometimes their accounts may be a bit garbled, especially if you have been indiscreet in offering overmuch liquid persuasion, but in main the facts remain the same.

Hemphill enlisted in St. Louis early in the year 1908. Originally he had come from a country town. The spirit of adventure had driven him to the city, and thence into the service, and the same red-blooded virtue, or vice, whichever you please, drove him out of it.

For he found that the life of an apprentice seaman, so far from being adventurous, was really very tame and very monotonous. Scrubbing down decks, although undoubtedly essential to the well-being of a ship and of a ship's crew, was not exactly a romantic occupation. And between peeling potatoes in the galley and hoeing potatoes in his father's garden he infinitely preferred the latter, or would have preferred it had circumstances given him a choice. The setting-up exercises and manual of arms grew tiresome, too, and double-timing around the ship's deck, although certainly a healthful exercise, had very little of the element of excitement. So, when he got his first pay day, some six weeks after he had enlisted, he went ashore determined to forget, for twenty-four hours, at least, that such a thing as the United States navy existed.

Andrew hit the beach with a crowd, most of them old-timers. Most of

them, too, had the same object in view as himself. And, of course, to men that desire forgetfulness, there is but one goal. The drinking places of Brooklyn swallowed them up, and disgorged them next day, repentant and headachy, and glad to get back to their hammocks and sea mattresses.

That is, all but Andrew. It was a good many days later, and a good many thousand miles away that he rejoined his ship.

He got into a poker game early in the evening, and, with the combined luck of a beginner and a drunk, made a winning. What happened after that was mightily confused. He woke in a hotel in Chicago. Just how and why he had come there he never knew. It didn't matter much. He was there, and well-nigh broke, and the flaring headlines of the first newspaper he saw informed him that the fleet of which his ship was a part had sailed that morning on the first leg of the long-heralded trip around the world.

Now, Andrew didn't like the service overmuch, but in his sober senses he had no intention of deserting. His father was a Civil War veteran, and regarded deserters and traitors as in the same category. And there was his own reputation to consider. He must go back. But how?

He might have surrendered to the Chicago recruiting depot. But to do that would put the government to the expense of transporting him to a new station, and would consequently increase his punishment, or so he argued.

No, the proper thing to do was to re-join his ship. And the first home port at which the fleet would touch was San Francisco. He must work his way west to the coast.

He started on his journey with one dollar and twenty cents in his pocket. Twice on the way across he was arrested and confined for vagrancy. When he finally reached San Francisco the fleet had already arrived, been entertained, and left for the Philippines, via Australia.

Hemphill at that time had something of the quality of a bulldog. He had started out to join his ship, and he would do it. The transport *Logan* was on the point of sailing to the islands with a human cargo of marines from Mare Island and soldiers from the Presidio. Andrew insinuated himself into the good graces of the former, and also, during the process of embarkation, into their ranks. When the transport sailed he went along with it. After they had passed the Golden Gate he confessed his presence, but not his purpose, and was permitted to work his way across. The plan had the sole demerit of being too expeditious, for when he reached Manila the fleet was still hobnobbing with its newly made friends in Australia.

Now, a ten-thousand-mile journey under such circumstances as these is, to say the least, somewhat exhausting. And the Philippine Islands isn't the easiest place in the world for a stray white man to make a living. So, inside of a week after his arrival, he was picked up by the secret-service men as a suspicious character, being without visible means of support. Seeing no other way out of it, he told them his story, whereupon they turned him over to the naval authorities. He spent the next ten days in the naval prison at Cavite, and at the end of that time, the fleet having arrived, was taken to his ship and delivered to his captain.

In the military service, black is considered black and desertion desertion, and there's an end of it. Andrew found that he had unwittingly pursued a general court-martial halfway around the

world. Still, until the actual trial, he did not worry much. The fact that he *had* pursued it would, he believed, extenuate him. He looked for a light sentence, perhaps for an acquittal.

But the ranking officer of the court-martial was a man who believed in the strict enforcement of the regulations. And the others, perforce, agreed with him. They gave Andrew three years at hard labor. Then the court adjourned to tiffin, and Andrew was led back to the brig. Later he was transferred from the brig to Cavite, and from Cavite to a transport, and finally he landed at Mare Island, was hurried through the gates of the naval prison, spread-eagled and searched, clothed in a felon's uniform, assigned to a cell, and forgotten.

But Andrew himself did not forget.

II.

Three years later Andrew Hemphill stood waiting for his release, his right hand on the outer bar of his cell door. As the iron clutch that secured the door slid slowly back he braced himself, as he had done a thousand times before, for a quick spring into the corridor. His name, shouted harshly by the marine sergeant in charge, rang through the prison. He flung the door open, leaped outside, closed it again, and trotted slowly, in regulation double time, which was the only kind of movement permitted in the prison, toward the entrance, stopping before the sergeant's desk.

The sergeant pointed at a small heap of clothes that lay on the stone floor, the cast-off uniform of a seaman.

"Get into them," he said brusquely. "And remember this—don't hang around Vallejo. You can't do no good there. Get the first boat out. Come, shake a leg, now. We ain't got all morning to waste on you."

Andrew himself had no desire to loiter. In a few moments the change was made. He took the yellow paper, his dishonorable discharge from the navy, from the hand of the sergeant, and thrust it into his pocket without glanc-

ing at it. The money, twenty dollars in all, he paid little more attention to, although it was the first he had handled in years. He signed a paper without reading it, stepped to the door, it opened before him, and he passed out, still on the double time. Outside, he halted; a corporal fell in behind him; the command "Forward, march!" was given, and he passed through the arcade and down the stone walk that led to the navy-yard gate.

Five minutes later he had boarded the ferry that led to Vallejo. The corporal remained behind. Four bells went, the whistle sounded, the chains that supported the gangplank rattled, the ferry cast off her moorings, and moved out into the stream. Andrew Hemphill, sitting on the upper deck, watched clear space open between himself and the navy yard, and knew that he was free.

That is, free in a sense. In a sense, too, the shackles of the prison were still on him. His head still drooped forward, so that he would have to glance upward when he wished to meet another person's eyes, which, truth to tell, was not likely to occur often. His voice had degenerated into a whine. His body was soft and flaccid, his mind also. He was a wreck, and he knew it.

Nevertheless, he exulted. It would not take a strong man to do what he had planned. Really, it was a job for just such a man as he, one who, knowing himself ruined, can see no further hazard. When a man has lost all, and knows it, he has nothing left to fear.

Late that night he boarded the navy-yard launch and came back to Mare Island.

He had discarded his uniform, and was dressed now in a cheap civilian suit, so he won his way in without recognition. He walked boldly past the guardhouse and up the walk toward the commandant's house. Just before reaching it, however, he turned aside into Lincoln Park. There he concealed himself behind a convenient shrub and waited.

Just in front of the commandant's house stood a sentry box. In that box,

night and day, a marine orderly was stationed, partly to protect the house, mainly to run errands for the commandant. It was Andrew's problem to get past that orderly into the house. And, owing to the fact that he had spent the last two months in the same cell with a man who had himself recently been orderly to the commandant, he had a pretty definite idea of how to accomplish it.

He waited patiently until twelve o'clock. At that hour the orderlies changed watches. He watched the man relieved walk briskly back toward the barracks, while the other settled himself for his four-hour watch.

Half an hour later Andrew saw the light of a match flare up for an instant inside the sentry box. That meant that the man was indulging in a forbidden smoke. It also meant that for at least ten minutes he would stay inside the sentry box, with his face turned toward the guardhouse, watching for the possible approach of the officer of the day, and consequently that any one passing the box in the rear would be safe from observation.

Andrew sprang quickly up, and, still keeping to the park, made a wide detour, so that he came out on the street about a hundred yards from the front gate of the commandant. As noiselessly as possible, but with no other attempt at concealment, he moved briskly up the walk, turned in through the open gate, and climbed the steps of the house.

The door was, as he had expected, unlocked. He turned the knob and pushed it open, with a single, swift, noiseless movement. Then he closed it behind him, and stood for a moment in the darkness, listening.

Presently he felt his way forward for a few steps, until he came to the foot of the winding stairs. These he climbed, the soft carpet muffling his footsteps. Reaching the top, he turned down the hall, and paused before a door, the door which he had been told opened into the sleeping room of the commandant. He listened intently, and was rewarded by hearing the sound of heavy, regular breathing. He trembled a little, but it

was with exultation. He had been right in his calculations; his enemy lay just beyond that door, sleeping and helpless.

He withdrew a revolver from his pocket, and, holding it in his right hand, opened the door with his left. But his caution was unnecessary, the room was dark, and the deep breathing of the sleeper continued. After a momentary pause he felt along the wall until his fingers encountered a button. He pressed upon it, and the room sprang into light.

In the farther corner of the room stood a bed. Upon it lay the form of the commandant.

For a moment he slept on, while Andrew gloated over his helplessness. Then the unaccustomed light aroused him. His eyes opened, blinking uncertainly. Andrew made a little movement toward him, pistol half raised. The commandant saw him, and sat suddenly upright, his pajama-clad figure sliding to the edge of the bed. Then he stopped, with a trapped, frightened look in his eyes, for Andrew's pistol was trained full upon him.

"Wha—what do you want?" he quavered.

At that moment, stripped as he was of his gold-braided authority, shivering under the threat and fear of death like any other mortal, there was something so intensely human about the admiral that, for a moment, Andrew almost repented his design. Then he remembered his wrongs, and strengthened his resolution.

"Stay where you are," he said warningly. Then: "I have come to kill you, admiral."

In spite of himself, and hating himself for it, he spoke respectfully, even servilely, with the servility of years of enforced habit. The admiral caught the note, and knew with whom he had to deal. He stiffened himself, and his voice took on a tone of arrogance, although he still trembled.

"You are an enlisted man, or an ex-enlisted man," he said. "Are you mad? Put down that gun!"

"I am an ex-enlisted man," said Andrew. "I was discharged from the

naval prison to-day. Don't you remember me?"

"I do not," said the admiral, and in a moment he had regained his old, hateful air of contemptuous superiority. "But I do know this—that you will be back in the naval prison to-morrow. You must——"

"But you," interrupted Andrew, "you will be in your coffin."

His extended hand became rigid, his forefinger squeezing the trigger. But the admiral broke in with a sneer.

"You are a brave man," he said. "If I *have* wronged you in the past, you are taking a noble revenge. To shoot me down in cold blood, without giving me a chance!"

Andrew's hand wavered, sank to his side. "A chance!" he cried. "What chance am I giving myself? The shot will arouse the servants and the sentries. I have no way of getting off the island. I have laid no plans of escape; I don't intend to try to escape. This means death to me; I know it, and you know it. I'm no coward. Besides, what chance did you give me?"

"You?" retorted the admiral, quickly enough to arrest Andrew's rising hand. "What have I to do with you? I do not even know you."

"I suppose not," said Andrew, after a little pause. "I'd forgotten that. I was nothing to you, of course. You lifted your hand and crushed me as you might have crushed a fly——"

"Crushed you? How did I crush you? Who are you?"

"It doesn't matter. There have been many flies. I might be any one of them. But—well, yes, I'll tell you. I'm Andrew Hemphill."

"I don't remember——"

"Not even yet? I'll remind you, then. Do you remember the apprentice seaman over whom you sat in judgment on board the U. S. S. —, in Manila harbor, the man who, missing his ship in New York, had beaten his way to the other side of the earth to join it? I see you do. Do you remember the fine speech you made urging the usual punishment, arguing that to let him off would injure the service,

would destroy discipline? Do you remember how, knowing your influence over the other members of the court, you deliberately set yourself against him, and condemned him to three years of living death? Well, that man was myself. Now do you understand?"

The admiral shifted himself to a more comfortable position. "Well hardly," he said easily, in the manner of one who invites an argument. "I merely insisted that the court do its duty. Surely you can't blame me for that."

"Blame you!" cried Andrew. "Good heavens! Blame you!" The memories of long, solitary days and sleepless nights, of back-breaking, heart-breaking drudgery, of torturing loneliness, of abject humiliation, of unprovoked abuse and curses, and even senseless blows struck in secret by brutal guards, came to him, and he almost laughed. "Blame you for that! I could tear your heart out."

"But why?" asked the admiral. "You were nothing to me personally. You were condemned by the regulations, not by me. Do you suppose I make my own rules? I carried out my orders, did my duty, that's all." He was speaking as coolly now as though he were sitting in his office, with all the instruments of his authority around him.

"Your duty! Was it your duty to destroy me? For that's what you have done."

"I! You! What am I? What are you? Hemphill, you and I simply didn't exist, in the sense you mean. I wronged you, you say. I reply—and this isn't a plea for mercy—that you personally meant nothing to me. I never gave you a thought. How could I? You were only one in a thousand. You——"

"That's it!" cried Andrew. "That's one of the things I've been thinking about. There *are* thousands of others. Lying in that prison to-night, and in other prisons, there are thousands of men that are just as innocent of any moral wrong as I was. Desertion, insolence, fighting, neglect of duty, drunkenness, those are the kind of offenses men are confined for in the service. Of-

fenses that would hardly be considered misdemeanors in civil life.

"And then outside the prisons there are a hundred thousand more that are caught in the military trap, and are being ruined, too, only a little less swiftly. Huddled together in crowded barrack rooms and worse-crowded ships, cut off from intercourse with their fellows, deprived of all liberty of action, forced to wake and sleep and eat and drink and walk and talk by rote and rule, performing no useful work, learning no useful lesson, they are slowly rotting away, body and mind and soul. You know this is true. You are not responsible for it, you say? Well, say you are right. It's the system, then, that's to blame. I thank God that I'm able to strike a blow at it, through you, who stand——"

"You strike a blow at it. Hemphill, that system has been running on for good or evil for ten thousand years. It is the oldest of institutions. And you think that by killing me you will change it?"

"It will help." But there was a note of doubt in Andrew's voice.

"It can't. I'm of no importance personally. Shoot me, if you like. Afterward I would advise you to shoot yourself. But it will make no difference. I am merely a driving shaft, as you were a cog in the wheel. A part of the machine, that's all."

Andrew was trembling now. The admiral went on:

"Individually, no man in the service is important. But collectively we are the force that has made, and that still makes, civilized society possible. In the final analysis, we are the keeper of order and the enforcer of laws and the safeguard of civilization. Without us, the wisest rules of society would be but jests for the lips of fools. When we think of this does it matter that all of us are bent and molded and distorted—as we are—and some of us even crushed, in order that we may fill our particular place, perform our particular function?"

"You violated the law of the machine. You were punished and cast

out. From your individual standpoint, you were punished too severely. From the same standpoint, practically all military prisoners are punished too severely, and practically all enlisted men are wronged, in one way or another. We all admit that. But we are bound by our oaths not to think of you as individuals or of ourselves as individuals, but of the service as a unit. And it is all for the good of the service.

"The service is like no other man-made institution. It is founded in authority, absolute, unquestioned, unwavering authority. And in the exercise of this authority there must be no quibbling, no hesitancy. You were a deserter, in fact, if not in intention. I insisted that you be tried and sentenced as a deserter. If I had done otherwise, if you had gone unpunished, others would have used your case as a precedent and an excuse. It was the only way."

He paused a moment. A close observer would have said that he was listening. But Andrew, standing with unsteady eyes downcast, gave no heed.

"But you," resumed the admiral, "saw nothing of this. You brooded in your cell over your wrongs night after night, for years. You persuaded yourself that I was responsible, and you planned revenge. And you came here to-night, your first night of freedom, to kill me. You fool!"

The admiral leaned forward and raised his hand in a gesture of authority habitual to him. It was as if he were again the judge and Andrew the prisoner.

"You fool!" he repeated. "You had your chance, your chance of freedom and a happy life, and you threw it away. You whined to yourself that you were ruined—ruined in your early twenties! Why, Hemphill, men have served ten times your prison term, and come out middle-aged, and still lived on, and played the game, and won it. But they were brave men. You are a coward, the lowest kind of a coward. You are afraid to live, and you are afraid to admit your fear, even to your-

self. And so you come here, intending to kill me, knowing that the penalty will be death, avowedly for the purpose of obtaining revenge, but really with the object of shuffling off your worthless life in a blaze of mock heroics."

Andrew stood still, with bowed, shamed head, and dulled eyes. He hardly seemed to hear the admiral's last words. "Maybe I'm wrong," he said slowly, as if speaking to himself. "Maybe it's all necessary. But it is a great price——"

"Well, why don't you shoot?" asked the admiral, with a sneer.

Andrew's head suddenly came up, and his eyes, for one tense moment, met the admiral's. "And do you think I might make good yet?" he cried beseechingly. "Do you think I still have a chance?"

"'Had' is the proper word," said the admiral. "You are still amenable to military discipline, you know. Your discharge doesn't take effect until twenty-four hours after it's issued, you know. And—*listen*."

Some one was running rapidly up the stairs. Andrew whirled toward the sound, caught himself, choked down a cry, and stood waiting. The admiral smiled.

"It is the sergeant of the guard," said he. "I rang for him; perhaps you didn't notice this button on the side of the bed. But you still have time to kill me."

Andrew said nothing, and made no move.

"*Put away that gun!*" said the admiral sharply.

Andrew hesitated for one bewildered instant, and then shoved the revolver in his hip pocket. At the same moment the sergeant of the guard rushed into the room.

He glanced at Andrew in surprised suspicion, and then saluted the pajama-clad figure on the bed.

"You rang for me, sir?" he said.

"Yes. Give this—gentleman safe conduct off the island. Then to Andrew, in an undertone: "Play the game. Good-by."

Finger Prints

By Charles R. Barnes

Author of "The Self-Starter," "The Sweeny Stories," Etc.

Everybody knows that finger prints don't lie; but it looked as if they did when the police tried to fasten an automobile robbery on an ingenious crook whose finger prints were on record at Headquarters

ACROSS the street from the Howell garage two men stood near the curb, engaged in earnest converse. Both were young, their ages ranging between twenty-two and twenty-six. The one who was doing most of the talking had a face full of the lines which told of world wisdom. It was a thin, keen face; and the eyes, small and deep-set, were eloquent with cunning. The young fellow was under medium height, and spare of body. But his quick, vehement gestures bespoke a wirelike muscular equipment.

His companion was of a decidedly different type, being several inches taller and many pounds heavier, and having features which in their coarseness suggested animalism. This man had little to say. He listened. And as the conversation progressed his face gradually lost an expression of density, and became alive with interest. Every few minutes he followed the thin-featured man's furtive glance as it swept across the street and took in the already very familiar situation.

The Howell residence was a typical New York corner house. All windows near the ground were protected with iron bars; the street doors were equipped with gratings. The place presented a stony, inhospitable exterior, the drawn blinds giving no hint at the cheer that might abide within.

In the rear of it, facing the side

street, was a garage which once had been a stable. A high brick wall ran from it to the house. There was, of course, a motor-car entrance to the garage from the street. Also, there was a smaller door, of ordinary size, to the right of the larger one.

The thin-faced man jerked a thumb toward this door, and talked on eagerly but patiently, with the air of one who tells a story over and over again that no part of it be missed:

"You see, Eddie, as I was saying, I made up my mind a long time ago that there wasn't any big money in driving cars for folks. You know yourself that I'm right. You've driven long enough to know it."

The other slowly nodded assent.

"Well, then," proceeded the speaker, "I figured and figured, like I told you I did. 'Pete Riley,' I says to myself, 'if you're ever going to know what it feels like to hit the high spots of life, you've got to get in some line that makes a bank roll swell faster than being a chauffeur does.' That's the way I talked to myself, Eddie. And then all at once it came to me that automobiles are worth a few thousand dollars apiece—or a few hundred, according to the car—and it looked to me as if they were standing round just sort of whimpering to be taken away. You understand—taken away, and sold."

Again the other man nodded.

He of the thin face fastened his eyes

on the coarse features opposite him, noted the growing interest and avarice there, and went on:

"I've gone over that part about how I inquired till I found out who was buying the stolen machines. The boys in the lifting business here run 'em over to Philadelphia, and that's the last anybody ever sees of 'em. I got that part of it learned, all right; then I went into action. It was easy for a while, Eddie, and I made money. Then they caught me—or thought they did. That's how my finger prints happen to be on file at police headquarters. And, Eddie, those finger prints are going to make you and me a barrel of money. As soon as I got the idea I made a list of every driver I knew, and finally, after I'd studied it a whole lot, I says to myself: 'Pete.' I says, 'Eddie Cooke is the lad for you. He's a square guy,' I told myself, 'and he's a fine driver and a good mechanic. He's the party you're looking for.'

"That's the way I figured it out, Eddie. And I'm glad to see that I wasn't mistaken in the way I felt. I knew you were wise enough to go in with me and help me clean up. There isn't a chance of you getting blamed. I'm the guy to take all that. Now, let's take a walk till six o'clock—it's half past five, anyway, this minute—and then we'll come back here, and I'll show you how everything's going to work out. We can slip in the garage while Tony, the dago driver, is getting his supper, and you'll get a look at the inside workings. Come on!"

He slipped a hand to Cooke's arm, and the two were soon hurrying westward from the spot, Riley still talking volubly. He stepped along with a quick, snappy tap of feet against the sidewalk, his body erect and full of nervous energy. The other man—Cooke—clumped heavily beside him, a solid, hulking specimen of humanity.

Now that the Howell place was behind him, Cooke no longer could visualize it, together with the costly motor cars in the garage. The light went out of his countenance. He was of that mental caliber which can appreciate a

five-dollar note tightly clutched in hand, but cannot bring the picture of one out of mere words.

For a half hour the two walked the streets, bringing up at six o'clock near the Howell garage.

"I've been watching this place for nearly a week," explained Riley, "and I know every little thing about it. That's the way to handle a deal of this sort—what?"

"I guess you're right," assented Cooke. "We ought to know what we're doing."

"That's wise talk," complimented Riley. "You've got the idea, all right. Now, listen—at six o'clock Tony, the driver who's working for Howell, switches out the lights downstairs in the garage, and goes to his room upstairs. He stays there about five minutes, combing his hair and getting ready for his supper. They feed him that in the servants' dining room. It's on the basement floor. You can count on him being there for about half an hour—some nights, when the blinds aren't closed real tight, you can get a squint at him forcing solid food into himself and looking satisfied. There, Eddie—look! He's put out the lights downstairs. In a minute he'll be up in his room. See, there's his light now."

Cooke gazed at the illuminated upper story of the garage. Then he turned to Riley.

"Gee!" he exclaimed. "I guess you haven't got the number of that place, nor nothin'!"

The thin-faced man laughed in a satisfied manner.

"It's part of the job," he said. "I take all these precautions so I won't get caught. There are two cars in that shed worth getting hold of, Eddie. As I was telling you, one is the limousine they're using since old man Howell went South. I got wise to his trip in the newspapers. That car is worth eight thousand if it's worth a cent. The other is young Howell's hundred-and-twenty-horse-power racer. It has a roadster body on it now. The old man used it to go downtown in—he used it every day. We might get it, but we

don't want it. What we want is that limousine. Gee, it's some car, Eddie—some car!"

Riley suddenly ceased speaking, and caught Cooke by the arm. The light in the upper story of the garage had gone out.

"We'll give Tony ten minutes to get interested in his ham-and, or whatever the chef's going to hand him," Riley went on. "Then we'll go across the street and start a thing or two. That little door isn't locked while Tony is round. He locks it when he leaves on a trip, but he never thinks it's worth while to do it just during supper time. So there's where we get in, Eddie."

Young Mr. Cooke regarded his companion with rapt admiration.

"Some system you got, kid!" he enthusiastically commented. "You must 'a' been on fixed post here for a month."

Riley grinned. "All successful businesses run on a system," he said. "My business is only an idea with a system to back it, but you can make up your mind that the system is all right. You got me when I explained it before?"

"About the finger prints?"

"Yes. You see, they took mine at headquarters when they tried to hang the Tilbury car theft on me. They almost got me. They'd have done it if their evidence had been stronger. I'm loose now because it wasn't air-tight. But a man doesn't like the idea of his finger prints being on file with the police." Riley's crafty eyes seemed to sink farther back into his head as the lids drooped quickly over them. "I want to make those finger prints a joke," he vehemently finished.

"How're you goin' to do it?"

"You'll see in about three minutes," came the confident reply. "I guess we better be getting across the street. Don't be scared, Eddie. Tony likes his eats too much to quit in a hurry. He'll stay on that job till the last wheat cake is a ruin. Come on!"

Both men made a rapid crossing. Riley walked along the side of the house until he came to a basement window, around the edges of which shone

a narrow ribbon of light. He beckoned to Cooke, who silently came up.

"There!" explained Riley, pointing. "You can just see Tony's back through that crack. See him sick himself forward at his supper, and then teeter backward with a face full? Can't you just picture him making a wreck of a beautiful appetite? I can."

"I can see somethin' movin'," admitted Cooke.

"That's Tony," Riley assured him. "Now, hurry along. We'll do a little planting for to-morrow night. With me?"

"Sure!"

Riley led the way to the little garage door, turned the knob, and entered the place. Cooke followed cautiously. When they were inside, Riley carefully closed the door, and produced a pocket electric flash light. This he turned for an instant over the interior of the garage. A big, costly limousine car was shown on the floor, facing the automobile entrance. It appeared ready for instant use.

"That's the car we want, Eddie," whispered Riley. "Remember where it is so you can get to it without using a light. All you got to do is to get in, set the self-starter going, and run her out as soon as your gasoline power takes hold. Be quiet and slick about it, and you can be halfway to Philadelphia before Tony finds out that he's missing something. Now, come over here." He grasped a sleeve of his partner's coat, and led the way, guided by occasional winks of the flash light, to where a low, racy-lined motor car stood. "I get my fine work in right here and now," he remarked. The lamp went back into his pocket, and he approached closer to the racer. During the next minute he moved busily about, evidently hard at work, but making scarcely any noise.

"What you doin'?" hoarsely questioned Cooke.

"Sh-h-h-h-h!" whispered the worker. "Wait till we get out."

For perhaps a half minute longer he lingered. Then the flash light winked again, showing the way to the door.

Both men passed hastily over the intervening space, and soon were out of the garage and leisurely walking away.

"What did you do in there?" asked Cooke.

"Just what I told you I meant to do," was the reply. "I left my finger prints all over young Howell's racing car. There's nothing like a hard, polished surface for leaving finger prints on. Try it yourself some time, Eddie, on glass."

"But I don't quite get you," the other said. "I guess you talked too fast for me when you was handing me the dope before. How is this thing going to work out?"

"Oh, gosh!" breathed the thin-faced man under his breath. Then he went slowly and carefully into an elaboration of his former explanation.

"The racing car is all washed and polished, ready to use," he said. "No one uses it but the old man, and he's at Palm Beach with Mr. Frick and the rest of the nobility. So the car won't be used to-morrow. Get that?"

"Yes."

"All right. The family will ride in the limousine. The racing car stays where it is. I've left my finger marks all over it, Eddie. I've made some of 'em a sort of slide, as if I had been trying to move the car into position for running it out. There's sure to be just a slight coating of dust on the polish—enough to make those finger marks show up plain to the detective who's sent out on the job. He'll get the finger-print expert to come out and photograph those marks. I'll be arrested because the prints will be the same as the ones they have on file down at headquarters—the ones they have of me. See?"

"It seems plain enough," admitted Eddie.

"The police," continued Riley, "will work it out that I went into the garage to steal the racer. I tried to work it into position to get it out, but got scared at something. Then, rather than go away without anything, I took the limousine. The racer's a more expensive piece of machinery, so that explanation

stacks up well. Say, my boy, I'll make such a joke out of that whole finger-print business that the system won't have any value."

Cooke's face spread in a slow grin.

"I see," he said. "Say, that's some idea, that is!"

"Sure it is!" agreed Riley modestly. "And the beauty of the whole scheme is that no one will be caught. You'll go into that garage to-morrow night while Tony is at supper, run the car out, and be clear away from the New York police before the alarm can be spread through the precincts. Meantime, I'm spending my time up in Harlem, playing pool with some friends. That's what you call an alibi, meaning that you couldn't have done what you did. Then next day I'll saunter down to the White Front Garage, where I'm known to hang out. A detective will get me before I've loafed there fifteen minutes. He'll take me down to the finger-print man, who will show me that I'm guilty of stealing old man Howell's swell limousine. Ha, ha!"

Young Cooke's dull eyes were wide with wondering approval.

"There's class to you, Pete!" he declared. "There's class to you!"

"I'll give the police the laugh," Pete resumed. "I'll have twenty men able to swear that I was playing pool when that car was stolen. And I guess that won't make the finger-print system look more useless than a blown-out casing! I'll show it up as unreliable. Then it won't make so much difference if my prints are on file. The only answer will be that some other party has finger tips just like mine. And they say that can't happen. Say, Eddie, just watch the papers, and see me make those police look like the original prize package of boobs!"

II.

Two of the best and most brutal of the "third-degree" experts in the New York police department were questioning Pete Riley. It was well along toward evening of the day after the evening during which the Howell limousine had been reported stolen. Riley had

been "picked up" at the White Front Garage, according to his plan. The finger-print authority at headquarters had fallen into the trap set for him. Krug and Fay, the "third-degree" men, were working over Riley for the second time that day.

"We just telephoned to that pool-room party in Harlem," lied Krug, "and he says you wasn't there when you said you was. You'd better come across with a right statement, Riley, and save yourself trouble."

"I wish I could accommodate you," smiled Riley; "but it's the truth that I didn't steal that machine. I was just where I said I was at the time you say it was missed. You're kidding about Mac saying I wasn't in his pool room. I was there, all right—and, more'n that, I paid him a two-case note I borrowed of him last week. Remind him of it, and he won't forget. Folks don't forget it when money they have let go of is paid back. It doesn't happen often." He continued to smile. The detectives regarded him sternly.

"What did you do with the machine?" questioned Fay. "We know you stole it."

"I don't know anything about it," Riley insisted. "You tell me that some finger prints were found that are the same as mine. I can't help that. I was up in Harlem, playing pool, when you claim the machine was stolen, and I can prove it. That's all I got to say." He relapsed into silence, his face bearing an injured expression. The detectives shot a few more questions at him, then left.

"We'll be back," they informed him, "and when we leave here again we'll have your confession. Think that over, kid. We'll have it, because we know you stole that car. Them finger prints never lied yet, and we don't believe they're goin' to begin for a cheap amateur crook like you." They stalked solemnly away, and brought up, much troubled in mind, before the finger-print expert.

"We don't like to knock your game," began Krug, "but it's lost out this time."

"That's the truth," affirmed Fay.

"We telephoned to that pool-room guy in Harlem," continued Krug, "and he says the young party was up there, playing pool from five o'clock to eight-thirty. He says the game the feller was in got so loaded down with money that nobody would quit to get supper."

"They sent out for sandwiches," explained Fay. "And that guy we got locked up wins near forty dollars. He must be a shark, I guess."

The finger-print expert looked puzzled.

"Nevertheless," he announced, "the man we caught is the thief. Finger prints don't lie. And those we found on the racing-car body were as distinct as any I ever saw."

"Well," said Krug, "you may be telling the truth when you say that the prints don't lie; but I guess to-day is an off day for them. That young feller has as clean an alibi as you'd want. We——"

"We didn't stop at the pool-room party," interposed Fay. "We got a Harlem man to question a lot of the lads that was hangin' out in that pool room. They knew Riley. And all of 'em say he was there from five to eight-thirty, mixed up in a game that was some game, accordin' to the way them kids looks at a game. The car was stole, as you remember, between six and six-forty-five. The driver says it was there when he went to supper, and was gone when he went back to the garage."

"And that," Krug reminded the finger-print expert, "lets Riley out. I've saw framed alibis, but this ain't one of 'em. Riley never stole that car, because he was somewhere else when it was stole. And what are you goin' to do about it?" Detective Krug leaned confidently on Reason, and confronted the expert with a smug grin.

"You're sure Riley was in Harlem?" came like a protest from the man who applied science to the catching of criminals.

"The Harlem cop is called a good one," Fay said. "His name is Rafferty, and he's said to be real thorough."

For a moment the genius of the finger prints considered. Then he asked: "What is the next move?"

"There's just one," Fay told him, "and Mr. Riley makes that. He moves out of here."

"But—but," stammered the scientific individual, "he's guilty. The prints don't lie."

"They did this time," Krug insisted. "Riley ain't guilty. He's got a couple dozen men to swear he ain't, and what you got? You got a wiggly picture of some thumb ends. That won't convince a jury against the word of a couple dozen real citizens that seen Riley playin' pool while that machine was bein' stole. We ain't knockin' your game, mister, though we never did think it was as good as the old methods. But we got to tell you that there's nothin' to do now but turn that lad loose—unless we can beat him up so's he'll make a fake confession. Come along, Fay, let's make a try." They turned, and were leaving when an officer with a message entered.

"You needn't bother any more about hangin' that auto business on Riley with the finger prints," he told the expert.

"Why?" came the quick question.

"Because he didn't take the car," was the reply. Detectives Krug and Fay cast joyous, though somewhat pitying, glances at the expert, whose face immediately became an illustration of the word gloom.

"We told you so——" began the sleuths.

"But——" expostulated the much harassed finger-tip man.

The officer with the message calmly went on.

"A party by the name of Eddie

Cooke stole that car," he explained. "He was out joy ridin' with a couple of Jersey City girls this afternoon, and *bing!* everything goes over an embankment, and the Cooke lad is cruel hurt. He's in the hospital, and he confessed to stealin' the car after a doctor had told him he was goin' to die. He won't be out for a couple of weeks, he's so bad hurt."

"But Riley——" stammered the expert. "He's guilty."

"You're speakin' the truth," said the officer. "The Jersey police got the doc to tell Cooke he was dyin' just as soon as they found out that the car was stolen. Then the lad was told he was under arrest. He gets mad, and accuses Riley of double crossin' him. Riley put him up to stealin' the car, and said nobody could get caught. This young Cooke says Riley made them finger marks on the racin' car the night before to draw attention to him. Then he fixed up a alibi. Cooke thinks Riley will get off after standin' for a pinch with a sure-thing alibi behind him for a chance at splittin' fifty-fifty with Cooke on the sale of the car. Cooke figgered he was made a goat of, and squealed. He was so sure he couldn't get caught, on account of Riley tellin' him so, that he stopped to take some lady fr'en's joy ridin' last night, and liked it so well he called round for 'em to-day. That's all there is to it. I guess you got Riley right with them finger prints. I guess you have!"

The expert's face grew thoughtful as he watched the man depart. Krug and Fay stared sheepishly at each other. Then the finger-print man's features became wreathed in a happy smile.

"They never lie!" he dreamily murmured. "They never lie!"



PLAIN AND PAINFUL TALK

DURING a senatorial investigation in the last session of Congress, Senator Clapp experienced great difficulty in getting some information from a nervous witness.

"Now," said the senator somewhat sharply, "out with it, my man! Out with it!"

"If the committee will excuse me," said the lawyer representing the witness, "I do not like the term 'Out with it!' This is not the office of a dentist."

A Chat With You

FROM time to time we receive letters from those who think they have a grievance. We are taken to task because a character in one story talks like an anarchist and tries to promote class hatred. Another complains because another character in another story smokes too many cigarettes, or speaks disparagingly of the Italian race. One undertaker wrote to us, being in a very bitter frame of mind, because a personage in one of our stories referred contemptuously to a member of his honorable craft.



WE can't answer anonymous letters, but we do answer every one who signs his name to his letter, and is good enough to give his address. The answer must be much the same in all such cases. We are *not* responsible for what the characters depicted in the stories in THE POPULAR say or do. The greatest, and indeed the only, qualification necessary to make a good character in fiction is that he or she must act and think and talk like a human being. And if you reflect for a few moments you will realize that no human being of your acquaintance is infallible, nor does wisdom continually flow from the lips of any one. We all are certain to talk a good deal of nonsense sooner or later. We are all likely to make statements that cannot be verified, to voice opinions that afterward seem ridiculous, to give expression to prejudices altogether unworthy of us. Probably most people in the world talk a little too much, and we hope that the imaginary folk you find between the covers of the magazine act like

the people you find in the world outside. If they are true to life that is the most you can ask from them, from the authors who write the stories, or from us. We are not responsible for their politics, their religion, their tastes, or habits any more than we are responsible for the personal appearance of the man next door.



THINK for a moment and you will recollect that there are villains who give bad counsel in the pages of the Bible. Was Shakespeare a poor dramatist because Iago recommended the use of strong drink when we all know that it is a very bad thing? Are you inclined to censure Dickens because Uriah Heep is a hypocrite and a rascal; and Squeers, the master of Dotheboys Hall, gives expression to the most improper and inhuman views as to the best method of bringing up young children? A story ought to express life itself in some fashion, and you must know that life is a somewhat confused and disorganized affair for most of us. If everybody agreed with everybody else in a story there wouldn't be much of a story to tell. So remember that while we are responsible and willing to stand behind everything we ourselves say editorially, we are not responsible for the opinions of the characters. Just remember that they are human and liable to error. Also remember that the only thing that makes a story bad from a moral point of view is untruth to the facts of life and insincerity on the part of the author. Even if the villain is *not* punished, or the hero is *not* rewarded, a story may neverthe-

less carry the message of high idealism and moral uplift.



YOU will be glad to hear, we hope, that the complete novel opening the next issue of the magazine is by Bertrand W. Sinclair, author of "North of 53." This new story is not a sequel to it. It is just as good a story in its own way. It is called "The Laying of the Ghost," and is the account of a man who had urgent need for fifty thousand dollars, and who was suspected of holding up a train to get the money. It is a Western story, and a mystery story as well. The combination of the breezy outdoor atmosphere with the qualities of suspense and bafflement is a good one. You knew long ago that Sinclair understood how to paint real, human, and lovable men. You have begun to learn recently that his women are, perhaps, even more engaging than his men. Certainly they have more than their share of feminine charm. We think you will find the heroine in "The Laying of the Ghost" one of the most alluring and attractive girls you have met in a long time. And in passing we want to announce to you the fact that Sinclair is now at work on a sequel to "North of 53," and that you will have it soon.



IN the next issue of THE POPULAR also are several short stories worthy of special mention and contrasting strongly in style and atmosphere. There is "Sauce for the Gander," by Henry C. Rowland. You have read many of his longer stories, but this is the first of his shorter tales we have ever printed. It is a comedy of New York life, the story of an elderly man who for a definite purpose of his own starts out to play the part of a rake. He has been most respectable, a pillar of society, the very

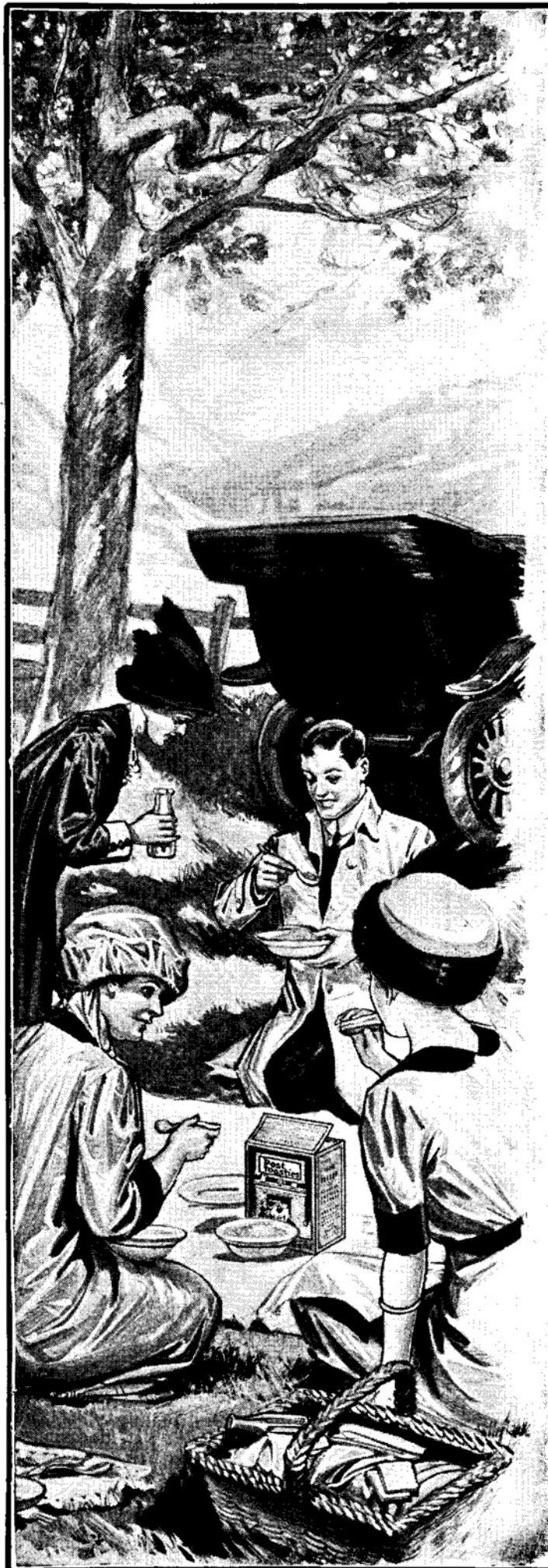
epitome of solid worth and wisdom. Suddenly he changes, he associates with chorus girls, he indulges in wine suppers and late hours. The effect on his daughter, who has a will of her own, is alarming. It is a charming, jolly sort of story. When you learn the reason for the old gentleman's excursion down the primrose path of dalliance, you like him all the better, but you would be sure to like him, anyway.



IN vivid relief to this story is James Hopper's tale of army life in the Philippines, in the same issue of the magazine. It is called "The Smoke," and is a grim, vigorous, almost brutal narrative, as powerful and vital in motive and telling as anything we remember. It was with stories of the Philippines that Hopper first won a deserved fame as a writer. We have no hesitation in saying that this new story is a little better, a little stronger, and more vivid than any of the earlier stories. We think you will agree with us when you come to read it.



THEN, once more in a lighter vein, although not without its strong element of suspense and excitement, is Courtney Ryley Cooper's story of a poker game, "The Burnt Card"; and as another example of thrilling and vigorous narrative, this time with its scene laid in the West, Dane Coolidge's wonderful story of a rattlesnake, "Elder Brother." And last, but not least, a story which has, perhaps, in a greater degree than any of them, the compelling power of a wholesome and hearty human interest, "Blacklisted," one of the best baseball stories yet by Charles E. Van Loan. And these, please to remember, are only a few of the things that go to make up a really notable issue of the magazine.



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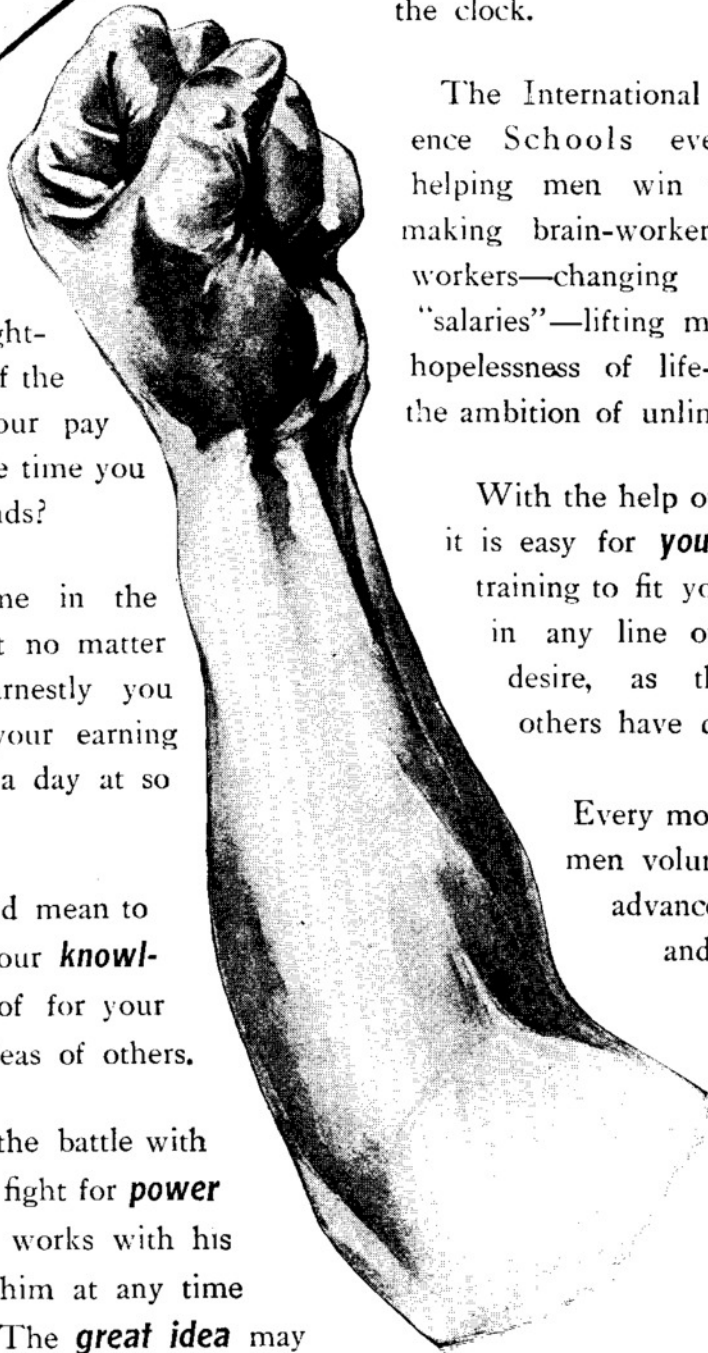
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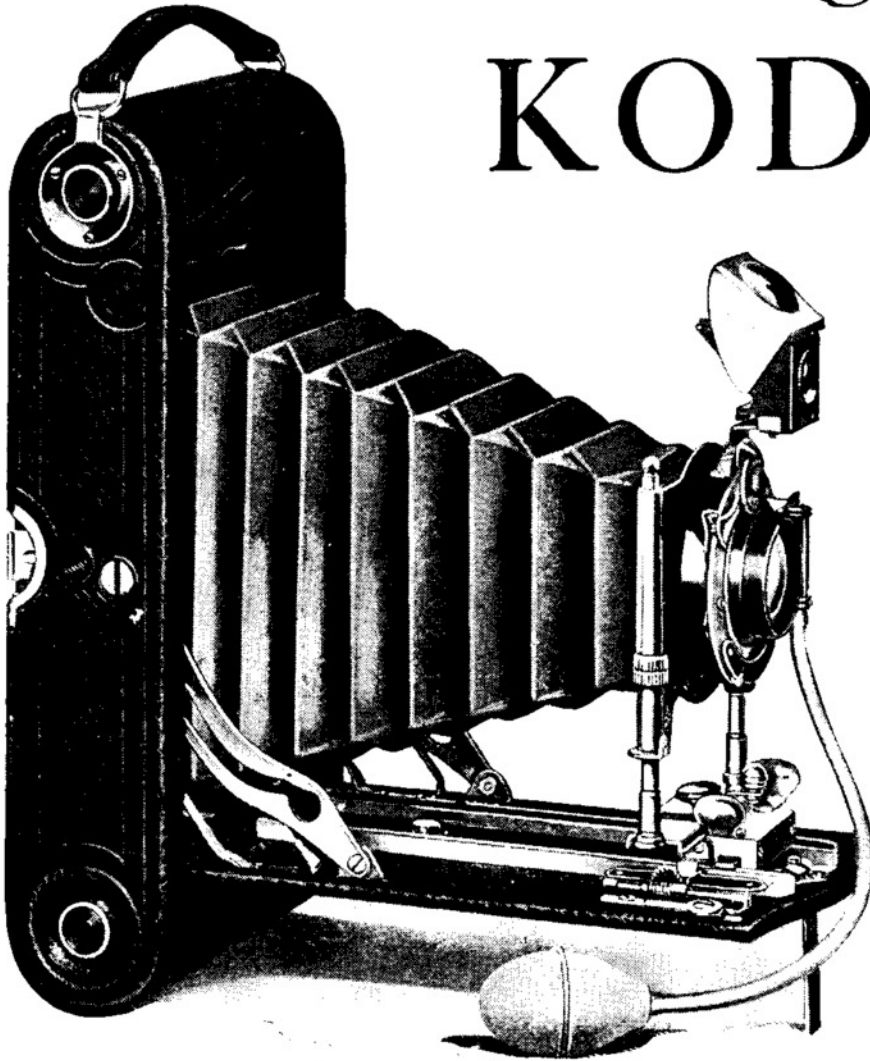
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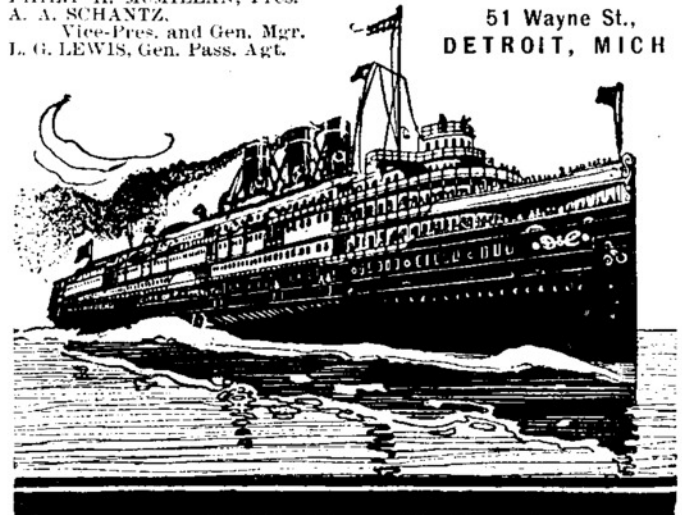
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Your Railroad Tickets Are Good on D. & C. steamers between Detroit and Buffalo, Detroit and Cleveland, either direction. Information regarding rates and time tables upon request. Prompt connections with railroads for all principal cities. For illustrated booklet and map of Great Lakes, write, including 2-cent stamp, to

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BARGAINS IN DAINTY SUMMER CLOTHING

2R46—This cool, easily slipped on becoming and comfortable **Waist** is designed in the new Balkan blouse effect and is made of fine quality durable washable white Galatea Cloth. The collar, tie and cuffs are of pretty navy blue and white striped Galatea. A feature of the model is the long waisted effect with a tailor stitched belt at the bottom extending below the waist line being worn over the skirt as pictured. Comes with short sleeves only. Fastens in front. Has breast pocket. Ladies' sizes 32 to 44 bust measure. Misses' sizes 10 to 20 years. **Price, Mail or Express Charges Prepaid \$1.00**

COOL, COMFORTABLE, BECOMING MODELS AT WONDERFULLY LOW PRICES

2R42—Chic Bulgarian Blouse of sheer washable Voile embroidered in two toned colors. Plain voile yoke outlined by veining. Short sleeves with embroidered cuffs, collar of white voile with embroidered border. Fastens in front with fancy buttons through a box-plait. Back embroidered just like front. The very newest thing in waists. Colors: white voile embroidered with Copenhagen blue and white or with Neillrose and white and colored voile tie to match embroidery. Sizes 32 to 44 bust measure. **Price, Postage Prepaid... \$1.00**

2R46
Balkan Middy
Waist \$1.00

6R44—New Poke Mushroom shape Hat of white Milan Straw trimmed across front with wide band of messaline ribbon, high trimming in back of June rosebuds, foliage and moss. Pretty bow in back. Colors: white, with pink ribbon and roses, white with black ribbon and red roses, white with Alice blue ribbon and tea roses. **Price, Mail or Express Charges Prepaid \$3.98**

22R102—Ladies' Real Milanese Silk Gloves, 23 inches long; fasten with two clasps, double tipped fingers. Backs finished with three rows of embroidery. A very special value. Colors: black, white, tan, brown, pongee, champagne, light gray, taupe, gray, navy blue, Copenhagen blue, sky blue or pink. Sizes 5½ to 8½. **Price, Postage Prepaid \$1.00**

6R44
Hat \$3.98

4R49—A Neat, practical, well-made Dress of most attractive style, made of high grade pure Linen, prettily embroidered in self color. The waist is cut slightly decollete at the neck and the collar, also the front of waist, and the cuffs which finish the short sleeves are daintily embroidered to match color of goods. The closing is concealed in the front and down entire front of waist and skirt model is finished with a pretty embroidered scalloped edge. Self covered buttons form a pretty trimming. The dress is plain in the back. A wonderful bargain at this low price. Comes in all white or natural tan linen color, embroidered to match. **Special Price, Mail or Express Charges Prepaid \$2.98**

22R102
Gloves \$1.00

2R42
Waist \$1.00

4R49
Dress \$2.98



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COMPOSERS! Song Poem Writers! Before submitting your melodies, send them to us to be properly arranged. We can make them very effective. Are you having your compositions returned? If so, they are not receiving the attention that our professional manuscripts receive. Benefit by our experience, save time and patience. If you can compose melodies on the piano but are unable to write them, we write them for you at small cost. We also set music to song poems. You might have a hit. Many popular hits have been "dug up" in this manner. We arrange for orchestras, bands, quartettes, Glee clubs, etc. Send for our exceptional price list for these arrangements. We arrange Operettas, Musical shows, Anthems of Societies, Club Marches, etc. Our letter will be very helpful to you. Write for it. Helm Arranging Bureau, 145 West 45th St., N. Y. City.

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MAKE MONEY WRITING SONG Poems. I'll write the music, copyright in your name, publish and pay you 50% of the profits. Success means thousands. Particulars free. Established 15 years. C. L. Pardee, 807 Astor Theatre Bldg., New York.

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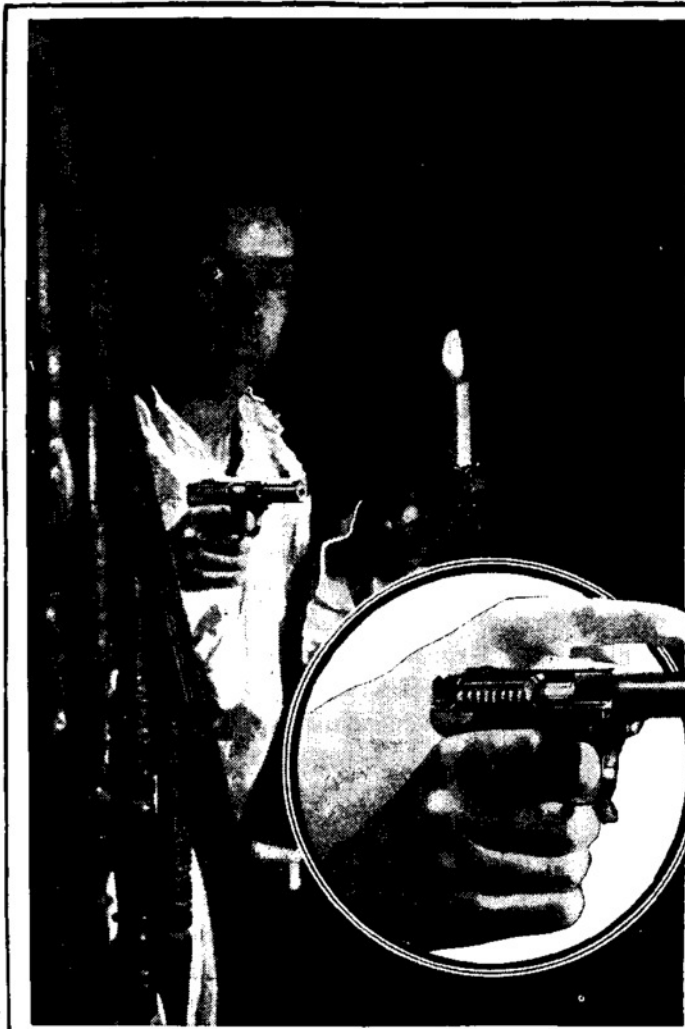
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THE Omnigraph Automatic Transmitter. Sends you telegraph messages. Teaches in the shortest time. 5 styles \$2 up. Circular free. Omnigraph Mfg. Co., 39 N Cortlandt St., N. Y.

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



Alone!

THE burglar has *no earthly show* against the Savage Automatic—even in the hands of a lone, frightened woman.

Why? Because this pistol—the only ten-shot .32 automatic—aims as easily as pointing your finger, and shoots straight instinctively—even in the dark—one shot to each trigger pull, as fast or slowly as you please. Because an automatic indicator shows positively at a glance or a touch whether it is loaded. You can't say you "didn't know the SAVAGE was loaded."

SAVAGE AUTOMATIC

Send six cents in stamps for advice from detective and police authorities on how to handle burglars with the Savage. **Savage Arms Co.**, makers of the famous Savage rifles, 947 Savage Ave., Utica, N. Y.




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Have imported roller chains, sprockets and pedals; New Departure Coaster-Brakes and Hubs; Puncture Proof Tires; highest grade equipment and many advanced features possessed by no other wheels. Guaranteed 5 yrs. **FACTORY PRICES** direct to you are less than others ask for cheap wheels. Other reliable models from \$12 up. A few good second-hand machines \$3 to \$8.

10 DAYS' FREE TRIAL We ship on approval, freight prepaid, anywhere in U.S., without a cent in advance. **DO NOT BUY** a bicycle or a pair of tires from anyone at any price until you get our big new catalog and special prices and a marvelous new offer. A postal brings everything. Write it now. **TIRES, Coaster-Brake Rear Wheels, lamps, parts, sundries, half usual prices.** Rider Agents everywhere are coining money selling our bicycles, tires and sundries. Write today. **MEAD CYCLE CO., Dept. A-110 CHICAGO**

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Every store throughout the country needs show cards. You can earn big money writing show cards for small stores.

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We guarantee the outfit to be perfect in every respect. Everything ready to use. Send in your order to-day.

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The Baldwin Camp Lamp

Gives white, penetrating light. 3 3/4 inches high, weighs (ready for use) 5 ounces. Burns acetylene gas. Can be fastened to cap or belt, carried in hand or stood upon table. Will not blow out—absolutely safe. No oil or grease. The Baldwin Camp Lamp makes nights in camp just as pleasant as during the day because it gives the best artificial light next to sunlight. Rowing or canoeing at night is made safe.

On "hikes" through the woods it is unequalled because it projects its light 150 feet and prevents stumbling and bad falls over obscure obstacles. It makes automobile repairing an easier, pleasanter task.

It is the official Boy's Scout Lamp for all round uses.

For sale by leading Hardware and Sporting Goods Dealers—sent prepaid on receipt of price. Brass, **\$1.00**; highly polished nickel with hinged handles, **\$1.50**.

Send for free illustrated Catalogue and instructive Booklet "Knots and How to Tie Them." Give name and address of your dealer.

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The Cool One Wears B. V. D. Do You?

It's no puzzle to find the B. V. D. Man. He's in the foreground of the picture and in the forefront of comfort. You can "spot" him at a glance—*cool and contented* despite summer heat and fag. Stop fanning and mopping—wear Loose Fitting, Light Woven B. V. D. Coat Cut Undershirts and Knee Length Drawers, or Union Suits and be *cool*.

To get *genuine* B. V. D. get a good look at the *label*. On every B. V. D. Undergarment is sewed

This Red Woven Label



(Trade Mark Reg. U. S. Pat. Off. and Foreign Countries.)

Insist that your dealer sells you only underwear with the B. V. D. label.

B. V. D. Coat Cut Undershirts and Knee Length Drawers, 50c., 75c., \$1.00 and \$1.50 the Garment.

B. V. D. Union Suits (Pat. U.S.A., 4-30-07.) \$1.00, \$1.50, \$2.00, \$3.00 and \$5.00 the Suit.

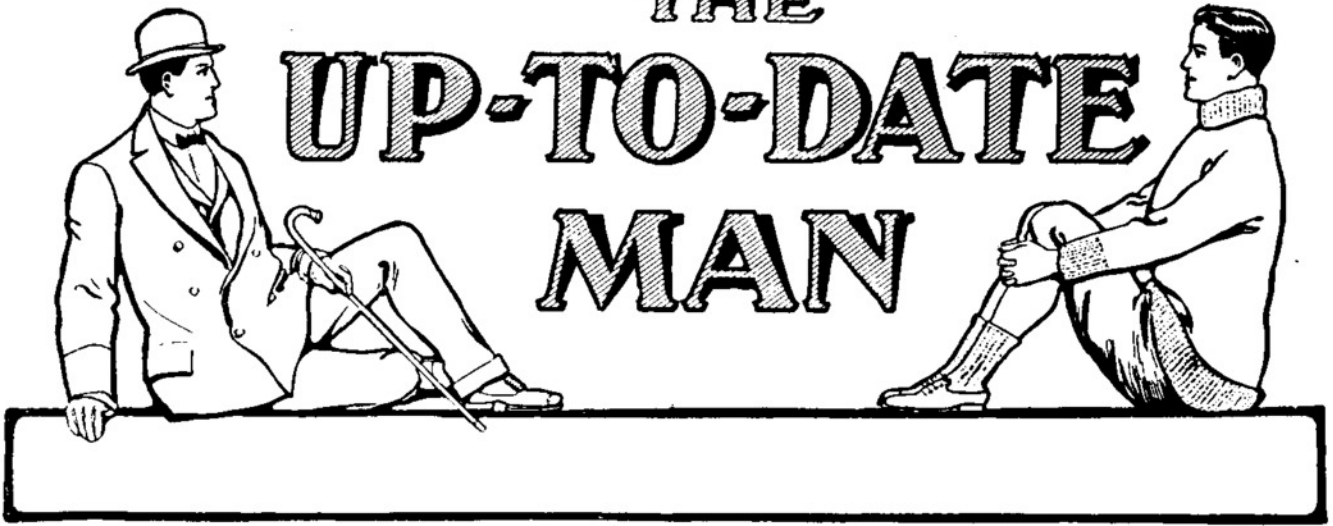
The B. V. D. Company,
New York.

London Selling Agency:
66 ALDERMANBURY, E. C.

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THE UP-TO-DATE MAN



The readers of the magazine may write to this department about any problem of dress. Every question will be promptly answered, provided that a stamped, self-addressed envelope is enclosed.

FASHION takes its ease in midsummer, relaxing the hard-and-fast rules that usually govern, and allowing us to wear pretty much what we please within the bounds of reason and season. The softness and naturalness which rule present-day dress are even more marked during the grilling days. Lounge coats are devoid of stiffening and lining; waistcoats are put aside; trousers swing clear of the instep; soft collars, soft shirts, and abbreviated undersuits are worn; scarfs are of filmy silks like foulard and crape; hats are of feather-light straw; hose are fine, sheer lisle; the circle of comfort is complete.

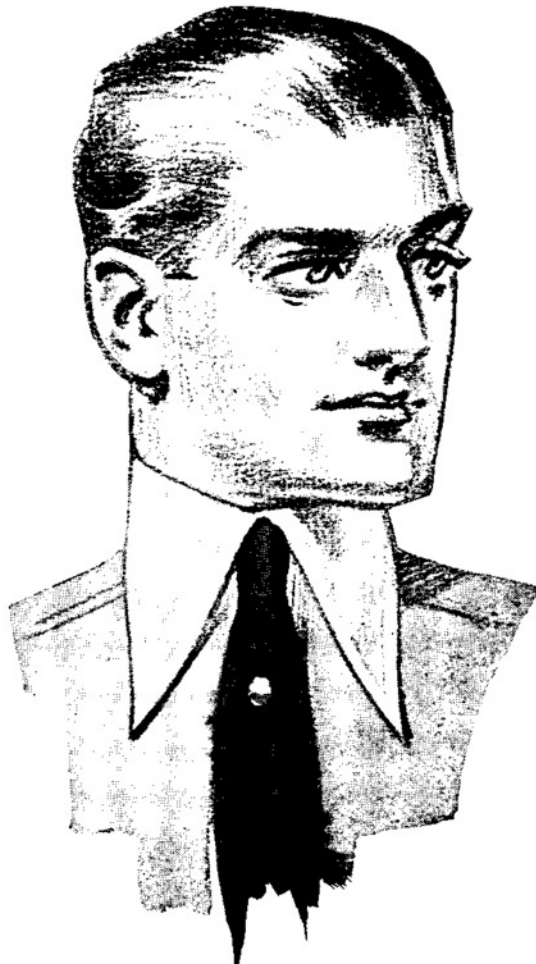
In hot-weather fabrics flannels are perhaps the most fashionable. These are cut with plain or patch pockets in the conventional "sack" or the newer Norfolk style. The Norfolk, while primarily meant for sports and the country, has become a sort of "all-round jacket," which is worn in town and out on account of its easy, breezy, "idle-hour" air, which is in tune with the current code of style.

Some Norfolks have

loose belts, and some have strapped. Others are cut with a conventional "sack" front and a Norfolk back. All Norfolks should have patch pockets to accentuate their confessedly "loungy" look.

A notable feature of this summer's styles in Norfolks, and in all coats, for that matter, is the placing of the waistline very high, so as to make the wearer seem tallish and long-limbed. Even the short man can thus be lengthened out to accord with the vogue for slim-and-trim figures, as distinguished from the old-fashioned "athletic" figure with its hulking shoulders and sailor-broad back.

Soft collars are another quirk of fashion. A much favored type is illustrated here. It is made of piqué, silk, or silk and cotton, with the deep, curling points to which young men are very indulgent just now. The four-inch hand, broader than hitherto, is loosely knotted, and drawn up between the tips. These deep-point collars are also made in flexible linen, and may be worn inside or outside the waistcoat. Indeed, this deep-point shape is the



Soft, Detachable, Summer Collar.

DRESS for COMFORT



For fourteen years we have been buying advertising to tell you about **Shirley President Suspenders**

The mere presence of our name in costly advertising pages should prove the merit of **Shirley Presidents**, for unless your first purchase led to such satisfaction that you continued to buy them, our business could not have endured the outlay.

The Sliding Back, a light simple device of shifting cord, gives comfort and freedom of motion.

A gentleman's suspender made in light and medium weights and attractive patterns of Shirley woven elastic webbing. Extra lengths for tall men. Satisfaction or money back.

PRICE 50 CENTS

From any dealer or from the factory

THE C. A. EDGARTON MFG. CO.

300 Main Street

SHIRLEY, MASS.

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FLASH LIKE DIAMONDS

A REAL GEM. Full of Fire and Brilliance. The most remarkable scientific discovery of the age: a dazzling, scintillating gem. Parisian Gems have the fiery beauty of genuine diamonds; will cut glass and retain their brilliancy; guaranteed for 20 years. Set only in genuine solid gold 14k. mountings. SENT ON APPROVAL; SEE THEM BEFORE PAYING. Write for illustrated price list.

PARISIAN GEM CO.,
Dept. 4, 621 Broadway, New York.

Be the Boss

Get Into the New Profession

Thousands of men needed. Meter Engineers in constant demand everywhere. Big money. Learned at home during your spare time.

A \$3,000 Job For You Electrical Meter Engineering is one of the best paying professions in the industry. Hundreds making \$3,000 and more. You can do the same. Write today.

Big Book FREE Just your name and address is enough. No obligations of any kind. Big book and details FREE—absolutely free. **WRITE TODAY.**

Fort Wayne Correspondence School, Department 114 Y, Fort Wayne, Ind.

Opportunities for Government Positions

The rapid growth of the Parcel Post promises to open many opportunities for good paying positions.

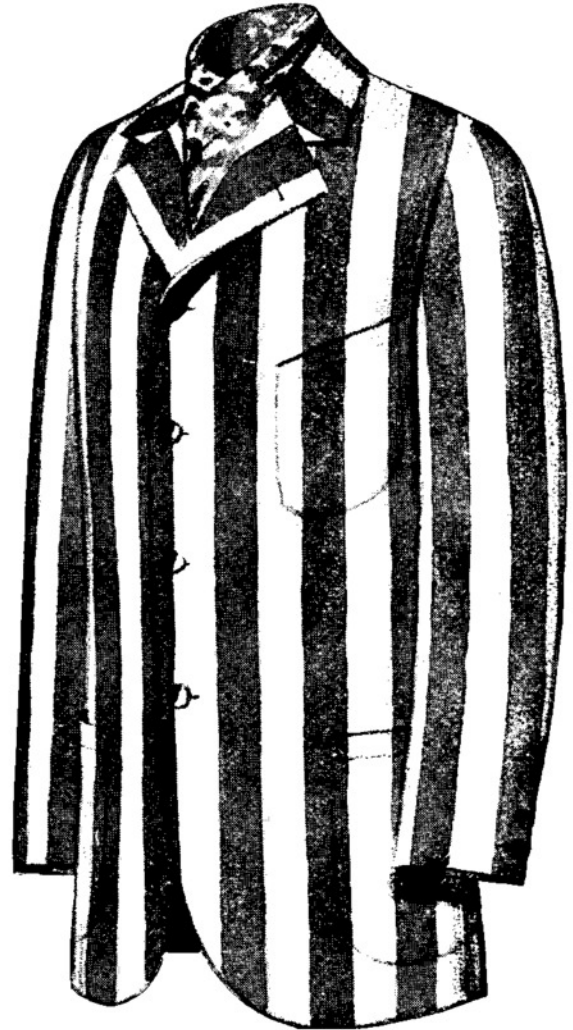
Over 700 persons secured Government positions through the training of the International Correspondence Schools. All Americans over 18 are eligible. Send for the Free Civil Service Book today and learn how the I. C. S. can prepare you to become a candidate for the Civil Service.



International Correspondence Schools
Box 855 B Scranton, Pa.

most novel whim of fashion, and gives the wearer an old-time air which is as becoming to some faces as it is unbecoming to others. You must judge for yourself.

The broad-striped "blazer" pictured in the accompanying sketch is a favorite among youngsters for tennis and boating, especially when striped in club and college colors. Often such a "blazer"



The Season's "Blazer."

is worn with a round-crown flannel hat and a four-in-hand in colors to match—a very picturesque sport "rig." While the "blazer" has been rendered a bit common by excessive use, it is still "smart" if worn at the nets and on the water, and thus held severely to its place.

As already foreshadowed last month, the modish "sailor" straw hat this summer has a high crown and a narrow-ish brim. The bow may be at the side or in the back. Some ribbons, to emphasize their softness, are loose, and have flowing ends that lie on the brim. Young men have always preferred the coarse-braid "sennit" straw to the fine-



You will find in our new Summer Models that indescribable smart atmosphere of the "thoroughbred" without danger of the extreme or the cheap radical attempts.

ADLER-ROCHESTER-CLOTHES

Write for our new Summer Style Book, giving the correct 1913 styles and dress suggestions

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\$200 A MONTH BE YOUR OWN BOSS

If you are making less than \$50 a week you should write us to-day. We can help you to wealth and independence by our plan. You can work when you please, where you please, always have money and the means of making barrels more of it.

HOW WOULD YOU LIKE to start out from home on a combined business and pleasure trip, stay at the best hotels, and live like a lord and clean up \$10 every day!

Work at amusement places, crowded street corners, manufacturing institutions, anywhere and everywhere, ten minutes' walk from home or on the other side of the globe. Just set a machine up any place you happen to select, and clean up \$10 above operating expenses each and every day.

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My proposition is the WONDERFUL NEW COMBINATION CAMERA, with which you can take and instantaneously develop eleven entirely different styles of pictures including Buttons, four styles and sizes of Paper Post Cards and six styles of Tintype Pictures. Every plate is developed without the use of films or negatives, and is ready to deliver to your customer in less than a minute after making the exposure. This REMARKABLE INVENTION takes 100 pictures an hour. Everybody wants pictures and each sale you make advertises your business and makes more sales for you.

NO EXPERIENCE NEEDED

Simple instructions accompany each outfit and you can begin to make money in fifteen minutes after the outfit reaches you.

A trifling investment will get this WONDERFUL OUTFIT for you and put you in a position to make \$2,000 a year. If you want to be independent, and absolutely your own boss, write me to-day and I will send you by return mail, full free information regarding this WONDERFUL PROPOSITION, including letters offering positive proofs from every part of the world. DON'T DELAY, ANSWER THIS ANNOUNCEMENT TO-DAY.

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Tobacco Habit Banished

In 48 to 72 Hours Yes, positively permanently banished almost before you know it. Pleasant, easy to take. Results quick, sure, lasting. No craving for tobacco in any form after first dose. Not a substitute. Harmless, no poisonous habit forming drugs. Satisfactory results guaranteed in every case or money refunded. *Tobacco Redeemer* is the only absolutely scientific and thoroughly dependable tobacco remedy ever discovered. Write for free booklet and positive proof.

Newell Pharmacal Co. Dept. 40. St. Louis, Mo.

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"I hear you. I can hear now as well as anybody. 'How?' Oh, something new — THE MORLEY PHONE. I've a pair in my ears now, but they are invisible. I would not know I had them in, myself, only that I hear all right."

"The Morley Phone for the

DEAF

is to the ears what glasses are to the eyes. Invisible, comfortable, weightless and harmless. Anyone can adjust

it." Over one hundred thousand sold. Write for booklet and testimonials

THE MORLEY CO.,

Dept. 758, Perry Bldg.,

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Marlin
.22 Repeater MODEL 1897

This is no ordinary .22 rifle:

Here's the only .22 repeater made with the dependable lever action—like a big game rifle. It has better weight, better balance, greater stability than any other .22. It's guaranteed in accuracy and reliability: handles rapidly, gives 25 shots at one loading. Shoots .22 short, .22 long and .22 long-rifle cartridges without adjustment.

For rabbits, squirrels, hawks, geese, foxes, for all small game and target work up to 200 yards, just get this *Marlin*.

It's a take-down rifle, convenient to carry and clean. Has tool steel working parts that cannot wear out. Beautiful case-hardened finish; superb build and balance. Ivory bead and Rocky Mountain sights; the best set furnished on any .22. The solid top and side ejection mean safety and rapid, accurate firing.

Ask your dealer—or send us 3 stamps postage for new big catalog of all *Marlin* repeating rifles and shotguns.

The Marlin Firearms Co.
9 Willow Street New Haven, Conn.



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IN PUBLIC

Give Grenville Kleiser, (formerly of Yale Faculty), fifteen minutes of your time daily at home and he will teach you how to make after-dinner speeches, propose toasts, tell stories, make political speeches, address board meetings. His Mail Course will help salesmen sell more goods, develop power and personality, improve memory, increase vocabulary, give poise and self-confidence; it will help a man earn more, achieve more. "Your course has been of great service to me in my business, and I commend it to others in the highest terms," says JOSEPH P. DAY, New York's foremost auctioneer.

If you'll write to-day, we'll tell you all about it by mail.
FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY, Dept. 785, New York

Amazing Bargains Diamonds

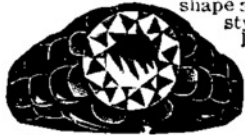
As Much and More Than **1/2 SAVED**
On Watches and Diamonds
Proved by Customers' Letters

Our free bargain book explains—gives unsolicited expressions of many shrewd and careful buyers—illustrates and describes hundreds of amazing bargains. It tells how, as "Headquarters for Loans" for over 60 years, a vast quantity of high grade diamond jewelry and watches is un-called for. The necessity for promptly disposing of unredeemed pledges—goods on which we have loaned but a fraction of their real value—is a REAL REASON for our astonishing savings. Send for your free copy. Everything shipped with privilege of examination.

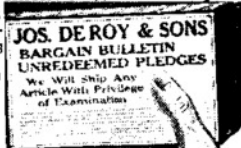
No. 346587—A 1/2-3/4, 1/64 kt. blue white solitaire diamond gem of utmost perfection in cutting, shape, proportion and most scintillating brilliancy, in ladies' ring. Guaranteed Loan \$40. Try to match it at \$90. Unredeemed price **\$46.85**



No. 265587—A 1 1/2-3/16, 1/32 kt. guaranteed weight diamond of the desirable fine blue white perfect cut quality. Unexcelled correct shape and brilliancy. This or remounted in plainer style. A guaranteed saving with guaranteed loan \$175. Try to match it at \$350. Our unredeemed price..... **\$200**



No. 264496—A 15-jeweled genuine Elgin high grade movement in genuine 20-year old, even though un-redeemed, in prime new condition. Jewelers ask \$15 to \$20. Try to match it. Our unredeemed price..... **\$6.75**



A Legal Binding Money Back Guarantee backed by our \$750,000 capital. Over 60 years at one location is proof of our absolute reliability. Big Bargain Book Free.

Jos. De Roy & Sons
 Smithfield St., 707 DeRoy Bldg., Pittsburgh, Pa.
 References: Farmers' Deposit National Bank,
 Marine National Bank, Dun's, Bradstreet's.

woven "split," because of its agreeable "rough-and-ready" look. Chinese, Swiss, Italian, and Belgian straws are much worn, and Panamas, Milans, and Bangkoks have not lost caste if you lean toward a pliable instead of a stiff straw.

Polo waistcoats are reversible. Polo belts are white, green, blue, red, or black. American players wear silk-covered caps; Englishmen wear pith helmets.

BEAUNASII.

SUCCEED IN LIFE



You cannot accomplish great things nor climb to the top of the ladder of success unless your muscular development is given proper attention, because that is the only way the arteries, the nerves and the vital organs can keep the machinery of your body in working harmony. Educate yourself in deep breathing and attain great strength and vitality by reading the wonderful book, "Intelligence in Physical Culture," written by Lionel Strongfort, the world's strongest and most perfect athlete. The Strongfort system of physical culture is a revelation in health culture and body building. The Secret of Success. My original methods are effective and when you write me you will always have my personal attention. Send for postage and secure this book; it will start you toward health and happiness today.

LIONEL STRONGFORT
 Suite 1308, 1133 Bdy., NEW YORK

These Girls Needed Help —and They Got It



They are JANE SHIELDS, daughter of Mrs. J. N. Shields, Broad Ford, Penn., and PINK VOSBURG, daughter of Mrs. Sula Vosburg, Bedford, Iowa. Both of these girls had Infantile Paralysis; could neither walk nor stand alone when brought to this Sanitarium. After being here 8 months, they can now walk everywhere without braces or crutches. These are not selected cases and neither are the results unusual.

Write their mothers; they will affirm the above. The



L. C. McLain Orthopedic Sanitarium

is a private institution, devoted exclusively to the treatment of crippled and deformed conditions, especially of children and young adults.

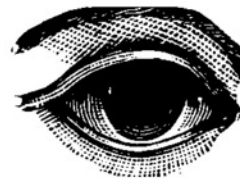
Write us freely regarding Club Feet, Spinal Disease or Deformities, Infantile Paralysis, Hip Disease, Bow Legs, Knock Knees, Wry Neck, etc., and we will send you descriptive literature and advise you fully. Ex-patients as references everywhere.

The L. C. McLain Sanitarium
 954 Aubert Ave, St. Louis, Mo.

EYEGASSES NOT NECESSARY

Eyesight Can Be Strengthened, and Most Forms of Diseased Eyes Successfully Treated Without Cutting or Drugging.

That the eyes can be strengthened so that eyeglasses can be dispensed with in many cases has been proven beyond a doubt by the testimony of hundreds of people who



publicly claim that their eyesight has been restored by that wonderful little instrument called "Actina." "Actina" also relieves Sore and Granulated Lids, Iritis, Cataracts, etc., without cutting or drugging. Over one hundred thousand "Actinas" have been sold; therefore the Actina treatment is not an experiment, but is reliable. The following

letters are but samples of hundreds we receive:—

Mr. David Suttle, 1002 W. 51st Street, Chicago, Ill., writes: "I sent for your 'Actina,' and when it came I told my wife I would throw my glasses away and give the 'Actina' a fair show. I did so, following directions, and soon felt my eyes were getting in normal condition again and now I can say my eyesight is as good as ever, and my headaches practically vanished."

Mr. Emery E. Deitrick, 7124 Idlewild Street, E. E., Pittsburgh, Pa., writes: "My eyes were very weak, and my vision was so bad that I could recognize people only at short distances. Since using 'Actina' I have discarded my glasses, my headaches are gone, and my vision, I believe, is as good as ever it was."

Mr. J. H. Frankenhield, 522 E. 20th Street, Cheyenne, Wyo., writes: "Regarding what the 'Actina' has done for me, I am proud to say that I am not wearing my glasses at all. As for my catarh, it is almost gone and I have been troubled with it for more than sixteen years."

"A great number of my railroad friends are buying 'Actinas,' as you know by the orders you have received."

"Actina" can be used with perfect safety by every member of the family for any affliction of the eye, ear, throat or head. A Free trial of the "Actina" is given in every case.

Send for our FREE TRIAL offer and valuable FREE BOOK. Address Actina Appliance Co., Dept. 96N, 811 Walnut St., Kansas City, Mo.



A French Chef Wants to Bake for You Fifty Meals This Summer

He will charge 10, 15 or 20 cents, according to the size of your family.

He has baked for the Hotel Ritz in Paris, for the Carlton guests in London.

Now all his remarkable skill is exhibited in this dish of Van Camp's Pork and Beans.

He uses none but white, plump beans, carefully picked out by hand.

The tomato sauce costs five times as much as common sauce is sold for. And he bakes it with the beans.

He uses modern steam ovens, so the beans are baked without crisping or bursting. They come to you nut-like, mellow, whole.

And they come to you, because of our process, with all the fresh oven flavor.

Try Him Once

You will not find Van Camp's any commonplace dish. We spend on our output \$800,000 yearly more than lesser grades would cost.

This dish is our pride, our one claim to supremacy. It has given to millions a new idea of baked beans.

Order a few meals. Let them tell their own story. You will then let this chef supply many a meal. You'll keep a dozen cans on hand.

But the only way to get beans of this grade is to specify Van Camp's. After that, you won't go back to ordinary beans.

*"The
National
Dish"*

Van Camp's
BAKED
WITH TOMATO
SAUCE
PORK AND BEANS

*"The
National
Dish"*

Three sizes:

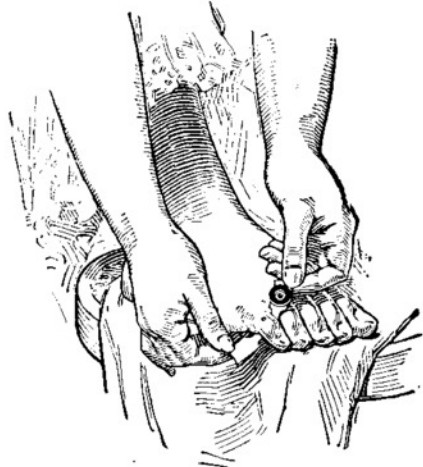
10, 15 and 20 cents per can.

Prepared by

Van Camp Packing Company, Indianapolis, Ind.

Established 1861

(263)



No Corns Next Week

Would you like to think that your oldest corns would be ended forever next week?

They can be ended in a simple way. A million corns monthly are ended in this way.

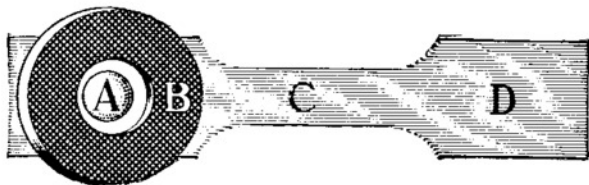
Apply a little Blue-jay plaster. That ends the pain, and from that time on you simply forget the corn.

In 48 hours take the plaster off. Then lift out the corn. There will be no pain or soreness.

The B & B wax gently loosens the corn so it comes out root and all.

And that corn won't come back. Another corn may come if you still pinch your feet, but the corn that comes out is ended.

Millions believe this because they have done it. Millions of others still putter with corns. Please, for your own sake, make a test of this scientist's invention.



- A in the picture is the soft B & B wax. It loosens the corn.
- B stops the pain and keeps the wax from spreading.
- C wraps around the toe. It is narrowed to be comfortable.
- D is rubber adhesive to fasten the plaster on.

Blue-jay Corn Plasters

Sold by Druggists—15c and 25c per package
Sample Mailed Free. Also Blue-jay Bunion Plasters

Bauer & Black, Chicago and New York
Makers of Surgical Dressings, etc.

For Fat Folks "FATOFF"

will allow you to use again the clothes laid away as far too small.

FAT POSITIVELY REDUCED

by the safe, sure, simple, external "FATOFF" home treatment.

It's a simple treatment, which may be used by yourself in your own home.

There is positively **NO EXERCISING, NO STARVING, NO MEDICINE.**

"FATOFF" makes fat fade away from all parts where it is applied. It reduces the waist line, double chin, fat hips and fat necks. It keeps the skin smooth and youthful, the flesh firm and healthy and you may always have a figure slender and graceful.

"FATOFF" is recommended by doctors, nurses, society leaders, actresses, actors and business men and women who have used it and *continue* to use it because it is the only product which gives relief from the burden of fat.

"FATOFF" is an all American product and complies with all government requirements, not here for a season but for all time.

"FATOFF" is sold by R. H. Macy & Co., Riker-Hegeman Stores, Gimbel's, Siegel-Cooper, Abraham & Straus, James McCreery's stores, H. P. Gulpin, The Liggett stores and leading dealers throughout the world, or

M. S. BORDEN CO. Mrs., 69 Warren St., New York

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Removes Hair or Fuzz from Face, Neck or Arms

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it will be found to be white, firm and hairless. Delatone is used by thousands of people and is highly recommended by Mrs. Mae Martin, the authority on "Beauty."

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If you don't want to keep it, send it back at our expense. You assume no risk whatever in dealing with us. You do not buy or pay a cent until we have placed the watch in your hands for your decision. We ask **NO SECURITY, NO INTEREST.** No red tape—just common honesty among men. If this offer appeals to you **WRITE TODAY** for

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Should shave with Cuticura Soap Shaving Stick. Makes shaving a pleasure instead of a torture. At stores or by mail, 25c.

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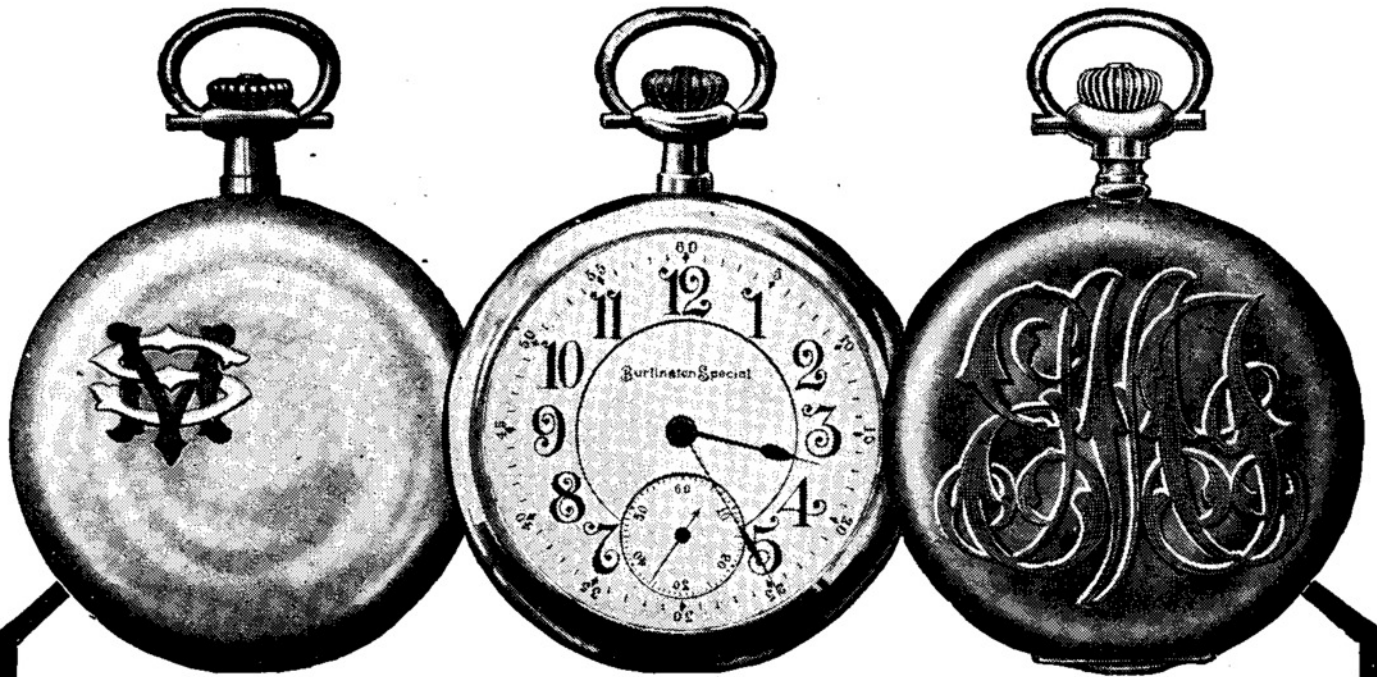
We pay hundreds of dollars a year to successful song writers. Have helped new writers all over world. Hundreds of genuine testimonials. Touhill writes: "Your treatment of me is highly satisfactory, particularly with my song 'Gethsemane,' which has become a source of good income to me." Send us YOUR work today with or without music. Acceptance guaranteed if available. Large book free.

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The superb 19-Jewel Burlington Special with the latest improvements in watch manufacture, perfect adjustment to position, the absolute adjustment to isochronism, besides temperature adjustment. Also the newest style Montgomery dial and the magnificent inlay enamel cases in many colors. A watch perfect in every detail and beautiful in design. Clip the coupon below and send for the superb Burlington watch book explaining a remarkable offer.

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A Half Year With The Popular

From January to June, inclusive, of the present year, the POPULAR MAGAZINE has presented a fine lot of fiction to its readers, as letters from them daily prove. When a reader in Alaska, or in China, or in Australia, or at any other remote place takes the trouble to send us a line about our authors and their stories, we feel that we are pleasing a pretty comprehensive public.

THE NOVELS

Let us see what wins such widespread approval. During the past six months we have given you a dozen complete novels, one in each issue, by writers who are on the high tide of public favor, among them Henry C. Rowland, Herman Whitaker, Holman Day, Bertrand W. Sinclair, A. M. Chisholm, Ralph D. Paine, Francis Lynde, and Fred R. Bechdolt.

THE SERIALS

There have been included a half dozen notable serials from the pens of such romancers as Burton E. Stevenson, Roy Norton, Zane Grey, and Dane Coolidge.

SHORT STORIES

The wealth and variety of the short stories have established a new record for us. Among a hundred in a half year we have printed four of the best written by Peter B. Kyne; six of Edwin Balmer's inimitable sea-battle tales; three of the most characteristic from Richard Washburn Child; six of the entertaining sort that Rupert Hughes does so well; eight of the breezy brand that only Charles E. Van Loan knows how to do; four from Emerson Hough; and three from Daniel Steele. And in addition to these were gems of fiction from James B. Connolly, B. M. Bower, Arthur B. Reeve, Robert Welles Ritchie, Morgan Robertson, Robert V. Carr, J. J. Bell, and John Fleming Wilson.

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Open a box of Mennen's Violet Talcum, and notice the exquisite perfume. To the regular infant toilet powder we have added a perfume so delicately sweet and flowery in character, that it rivals the violet itself.

Before dressing—particularly before indulging in outdoor sports, or doing anything to create perspiration—sprinkle the body thoroughly with Mennen's Violet Talcum. Be especially generous wherever the skin is subject to irritation or excessive perspiration.

It will impart a delightfully smooth feeling to the skin, allay any odor of perspiration, and prevent chafing.

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